THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Research Commons

Footprints:

Participant perspectives informing pedagogy

for asynchronous online discussion

in initial teacher education

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

at

The University of Waikato

by

DIANNE FORBES

THE UNIVERSITY OF

WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2012

Abstract

This study looks at how students and staff experience asynchronous online discussion (AOD) within initial teacher education. The aim is to explore participant perspectives, including expectations of fellow participants, with a view to informing pedagogy, defined as the relationship between teaching and learning (Loughran, 2006).

The underpinning argument is essentially that learning and teaching can be enhanced by awareness of how participants experience the situation. Understanding the complexities of AOD entails a better understanding of participants' tacit reasoning, expectations, misunderstandings, and responses to tasks and behaviours (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Loughran, 2006). It is the situation as it is *perceived* which is central to the quality of teaching and learning, and this puts participants and their experiences at the centre of efforts to improve pedagogy and to enhance deep learning.

This study is framed by sociocultural theory and phenomenography to explore AOD through the eyes of teacher educators and teacher education students in a specific teacher education context. Participants engaged in focus groups (face-to-face and online) and a series of semi-structured interviews, generating data about experiences and perspectives of AOD.

Key findings show the need for participants in AOD to: establish expectations for purposeful communication; to maintain a presence for learning premised on formative interaction; and to work together in ways conducive to community and student leadership in pursuit of deep learning.

This thesis adds to the limited research literature on teacher perceptions about online teaching (Spector, 2007), and makes a contribution to addressing the neglect of student approaches to study in higher education using eLearning technologies for discussion (Ellis et al, 2008; Jackson et al, 2010; Sharpe et al, 2010). The results contribute to knowledge in the field of online learning in initial teacher education by

giving rise to specific pedagogical strategies for teachers and students in given situations, and by providing conceptual tools for participants when thinking about teaching and learning through AOD.

Participant experiences function as footprints, picking out pathways as others make their way through AOD (Salmon, 2002).

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abbreviations

AOD – Asynchronous Online Discussion

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

ITE – Initial Teacher Education

LMS – Learning Management System (e.g., Moodle)

MMP – Mixed Media Programme

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

Introduction

A mainstay of online learning, Asynchronous Online Discussion (AOD) is used in teacher education distance programmes, as well as in online courses in a range of disciplines, across a range of contexts. In this thesis, participants are students and their tertiary teachers engaged in asynchronous online discussions for learning purposes. The relationship between teaching and learning mediated through discussion I will refer to as pedagogy.

Pedagogy is teaching as professional decision-making, complex and contextualized, and cognizant of the part played by students (Bell, 2003; 2011). In Loughran's (2006) terms:

> pedagogy is not merely the action of teaching (which itself can easily be misinterpreted as the transmission of information), more so, it is about the *relationship* between teaching and learning and how together they lead to growth in knowledge and understanding through *meaningful practice* (p. 2, my italics).

In Laurillard's (2002) terms, pedagogy is teaching as mediating learning, or making student learning possible. The key ideas here are that pedagogy reaches beyond imparting knowledge, transmission techniques, procedures and practices, to reasoning, relationships and acknowledging the affective dimensions of education (Leach & Moon, 1999). Accordingly, pedagogy can be viewed as a sociocultural practice encompassing mind, language, epistemologies, expectations, interactions, relationships, diversity, teachers and learners (Bell, 2003).

It is acknowledged (by Ramsden, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997; Weigel, 2002) that effective pedagogy has 'deep learning' as its goal, rather than 'surface learning'.

Surface learning is characterised by disconnection between bits of knowledge, memorising facts, and a lack of reflection and meaning-making (Entwistle, 2001; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Surface learning is "routine rehearsal" in Arend's (2007, p. 4) terms, or what I think of as 'going through the motions', to meet extrinsic assessment/requirements. In contrast, deep learning is often driven by intrinsic interest and curiosity; relating ideas to prior knowledge and experience; searching for patterns and principles; checking for evidence; critical thinking; and, of course, metacognition, where learners reflect on the learning process (Entwistle, 2001; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Deep learning entails actively constructing new meaning, discovery and discernment (Weigel, 2002), and leads to seeing something in a different way (Dall'Alba, 2000). Since it encompasses mind and action in context, deep learning can, as part of pedagogy, be viewed as a sociocultural practice.

My interest in asynchronous online discussion and pedagogy in pursuit of deep learning stems from my online teaching experiences dating back to February 2002. When I began teaching online in a teacher education context, I was immediately captivated by the potential of asynchronous online discussion (AOD). It seemed to me that this was where deep learning can occur in an online class. I discovered I was hooked on this concept when I found myself checking online discussions frequently, losing all sense of time as I engaged in reading and responding to students' postings. This led me to realise that:

- I enjoyed reading student responses and contributions online
- I enjoyed composing contributions and engaging in discussions
- I experienced high interest and engagement in discussion
- I found myself thinking about discussion when away from the computer.

I began to think of asynchronous online discussions as places and processes of deep learning and the heart of my classes. Purely subjectively, the online interaction with students was both supportive and challenging, as students expressed either their own breakthroughs in understanding, or their own struggles to understand. Within online classes I used discussion in flexible and innovative ways, designing it to be relevant to wider study contexts. For example, I included a range of prompts and discussion starters, and involved external guests with specialist educational expertise. I enjoyed learning through ICT in ways that were relatively low-tech and accessible. I noticed

quality learning-oriented feedback through online discussions when students reassured each other that they were 'on the right track', or challenged each other's views and assumptions, offering new perspectives, and registering when they had changed their minds or arrived at new understandings. For a new teacher in an online environment, such asynchronous online discussion seemed magical.

At its best then, magical online discussion occurred when discussions involved formative interaction, productive argumentation, higher order thinking, and deep learning. Participants actively created new knowledge, and shared meanings and understandings by interacting, collaborating, contributing to, learning from and influencing the learning of others. I relished these learning experiences, and delved into an analysis of deep learning (Forbes, 2005). At this early stage, it became apparent that formative interaction occurs in online discussion when students' ideas are scaffolded and their learning extended. Dialogue supports deep learning, I argued, when it is organised around principles of inquiry, collaboration and reflection (Forbes, 2004).

My fascination with the workings of asynchronous online discussion has grown, and I have experimented with various techniques to produce deep learning. For example, working alongside colleagues, I helped to extend flexible and innovative uses of AOD, incorporating strategies such as: online debates; role plays; student leadership and mediation of discussions; and developing students' sharing and critiquing of each others' work within discussions. We also used cartoon prompts or scenarios as starters for discussion, experimenting with various forms of assessment for these discussions, to guide students' participation, making the expectations transparent by changing assessment criteria. We also facilitated student self-evaluations of their contributions to asynchronous online discussions. We involved a wide variety of guests in these online discussions, including experts, practitioners, and children. To illustrate the value of these strategies and impact on learning, Forbes and Ipsen (2004) report on asynchronous online discussions between teacher education students and year 8 pupils (12 year olds), describing how "the student teachers and pupils collaborated online, exchanging ideas, debating and engaging in co-construction of understandings around the place of ICT in teaching and learning" (Forbes & Ipsen,

2004, p. 49). This illustrates how deep learning can be fostered through the magic of effectively facilitated AOD.

Not all discussions achieve deep learning, however. There were times when discussions were flat and uninspiring. On these occasions, participants seemed to be merely going through the motions. Some discussions 'work' and others do not. For example, involving school children in online discussions with teacher education students was attempted several more times in the following years, but the 'magic' in the original discussion with the children has never been recaptured. Subsequent discussions with children and other guests deteriorated into interrogations. The teacher education students fired a barrage of questions at guests, but made little attempt to engage with the guests' responses or even build on each other's ideas. The exciting elements of formative interaction, productive argumentation, higher order thinking, and deep learning were conspicuous by their absence. Probing this is central to the purpose of this research.

What constitutes a 'successful' asynchronous online discussion varies. For example, in one discussion involving guests, which I thought lacked depth, the student teachers were nevertheless enthusiastic. While I experienced frustration, the guests were politely detached. However, the assessment results showed that students met the assessment criteria assigned to discussions. That is, students on the whole engaged to some extent with each other's ideas, raised issues and ideas of their own, and made mention of literature and personal experience. However, deeper elements such as building on ideas, critique and debate, higher order thinking, and original insight were missing. In another discussion, students reported great revelations in their learning, and I was satisfied with the learning and progress made in accordance with the assessment criteria. However, the online guests expressed frustration with what they experienced as a repetitive waste of time. They felt they were continually called upon by the students to answer similar questions, suggesting that the students were seldom actually 'listening' to them, or fully reading posts and engaging in the discussion. The implication is that students were again 'going through the motions', as opposed to attaining deeper levels of learning and interaction. Reflections on these experiences and the differences in perceptions of various discussion participants

suggested a multiplicity of perspectives, experiences and purposes in relation to asynchronous online discussion.

In the interests of scholarship of teaching and learning, it is timely to take a closer look at asynchronous online discussion. In particular, there are grounds for a closer examination of whether and how deep learning occurs through online discussion, and how the practice of online discussions can be improved. The notion of "improving practice", as conceptualized by Leach and Scott (2003, p. 91), can involve suggesting specific pedagogical actions for teachers in given situations; providing conceptual tools for teachers to use when thinking about teaching; and generally enhancing students' learning.

My study has direct implications for my own online teaching practices, and may extend the theory and guidance available to others who aim for deep learning in their online discussions. As such, this research is compatible with McPherson and Nunes' (2004) view, who assert, "educational research must be seen as development research with the goal of solving real problems while at the same time constructing design principles that can inform practice" (p. 7). My research thus aims to both outline theoretical understandings based on practice, and inform pedagogy. Another aim is for collaborative reflection on practice by both students and staff, interweaving research, development, and practice.

My aims are therefore to:
- think differently about learning through asynchronous online discussion; to perceive differently from how I have been seeing (Ellsworth, 1997)
- enable my perspectives to interact with those of others
- derive new insights into participant experiences of asynchronous online discussion
- derive implications for improved practice in asynchronous online discussion

My study explores the experiences and expectations of other staff and students engaged in AOD, and considers how greater awareness of these participant perspectives can inform pedagogy (Ramsden, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997). Primarily, I am seeking to inform my own pedagogy by listening to experienced

online teachers in the hope of generating new ideas to invigorate my own AOD pedagogical practices (Spector, 2007). Similarly, by listening to students who are half way through their initial teacher education programme, I hope to gain insights into how they experience AOD, thus identifying misunderstandings (mine and theirs), and in turn develop a better understanding of students' needs and preferences (Ellis, Goodyear, Calvo & Prosser, 2008). In short, I hope this study will arm me with new approaches and access to wider perspectives other than my own, so that I can teach more effectively through AOD.

Whilst the motivation for this research is personal, as one of the leaders in elearning within my Faculty, I also hope to offer suggestions to colleagues. In effect, the results of this study can help me support fellow educators and students in our faculty, by helping them articulate and share their experiences of AOD. The goal is to develop a more thorough understanding of the complexities of AOD, through learning how others experience it. This goal is influenced by the work of Marton and Booth (1997), who explain that since everyone's experience is different and partial, we can come to understand a phenomenon more fully by becoming aware of how others experience it. These different experiences are like parts of a jigsaw puzzle. When we can fit them together, we can get a better view of the larger picture (Bell, 2011). Awareness of this variation in experience throws our own differential perspectives into relief and highlights new possibilities (Marton & Booth, 1997).

At the heart of this research is systematic exploration of the complexities of AOD, via ethno-phenomenographic study of participants' experiences and perspectives (see Chapter Four). The aim of the research is new knowledge creation for developmental purposes.

In order to set the scene, what follows is a description of wider contexts of relevance to the study.

Background

Online learning is widespread, particularly in higher education. As Ally (2008) notes, different terms have been used for online learning, which makes it difficult to develop a generic definition. Terms commonly used include elearning, Internet learning and web-based learning. Twentieth century commentators tended to regard presenting information via a computer (e.g., Carliner, 1999), or delivering instruction via the Web (e.g., Khan, 1997) as central to online learning. Increasingly, however, the interactive and interpersonal elements of learning online are emphasized over and above the delivery of content. For example, Ally (2008) defines online learning both in terms of learners interacting with content and with other learners, and a means of obtaining support as students construct meaning and engage in deep learning. The roots of this definition lie with constructivist perspectives of learning. This is an element of sociocultural theorising whereby learners interact to make meaning, within specific situations and contexts. This view of online learning is compatible with the aforementioned conceptions of pedagogy and deep learning as situated sociocultural practices.

The University of Waikato Faculty of Education's Mixed Media Programme (MMP) was among the first of its kind in New Zealand (Dewstow, 2006; Donaghy et al, 2003). Established in 1997, this initial teacher education degree course was designed for primary pre-service teachers. Traditionally, MMP has catered for student teachers living at a distance from the University, blending on-campus block time, primary school placements and online study (Campbell, 1997; Donaghy & McGee, 2003; Donaghy, McGee, Ussher & Yates, 2003). Later, the University of Waikato recognised elearning as one of its five key strategic directions for institutional growth (Dewstow, 2006). The Mixed Media Programme and the University of Waikato are the context for this study.

Other studies have explored other aspects of online learning at the University of Waikato. Some of these studies are briefly reviewed here in order to locate the current study and to demonstrate how it extends earlier local research. For example, Dewstow's (2006) thesis examined the apparent reluctance of academic staff to

engage in online teaching. While establishing that the then School of Education had the highest uptake of online teachers compared with other schools/faculties in the university, Dewstow (2006) reported that staff with a formal teaching qualification were more likely to teach online. He suggested that:

> For academics with no formal teaching qualification, the shift to teaching online is often not an easy one. They initially do not have the pedagogical knowledge regarding how they teach their subject material, to transfer this with any confidence into the online system (p. 117).

The importance of a formal teaching qualification in my study is two-fold, since in a teacher education context, the staff hold formal teaching qualifications, and the students are studying to obtain a formal teaching qualification, in this case a Bachelor of Teaching (BTch) degree.

Campbell (1997) conducted the first study in the context of the Mixed Media Programme (MMP) at the University of Waikato during its first year. She examined the issues academic staff identified, their strategies and changes in attitudes and practice during their first semester of teaching in MMP. Her key findings highlighted the anxiety and concern of staff learning to teach online, the need for support and incentives, the time pressures, the effects on teaching styles and lastly, the success and satisfaction staff experienced (Campbell, 1997). However, Campbell did not focus specifically on experiences of AOD. Now that MMP is in its second decade, I hope to build upon Campbell's research by including student perspectives alongside those of academic staff.

In a third instance of University of Waikato research, Donaghy and McGee (2003) and Donaghy et al (2003) carried out two studies into the experiences of teacher education students and their lecturers within the Mixed Media Programme (MMP). In one of these studies, the authors conducted case studies of teacher educators' experiences of e-education (Donaghy & McGee, 2003), but did not specifically elicit perspectives on online discussion. Rather, the teacher educators generally shared their reactions to online teaching in terms of attitude and approach, formatting of online papers, assessment challenges, induction, and comparisons with on-campus teaching. There was very little direct comment on AOD.

In the companion study, Donaghy, McGee, Ussher and Yates (2003) examined teacher education students' experiences within the Mixed Media Programme (MMP). This report focused on student reactions to the programme as a whole and elicited information on how students planned their study. They also examined the support systems and gathered evaluative judgments on the quality of MMP as a means of study. This time around, however, Donaghy et al (2003) generated data from online discussions to complement telephone interviews. As the authors explained:

> An interesting approach used in this research was to invite the students in the sample to take part in a confidential (to the group and researchers) online discussion. Students had the chance to respond to follow-up questions from researchers or fellow students (p. 31).

One pertinent finding from this study was the students' critique of inconsistency in the level of feedback received, along with the level of interaction, with different lecturers online.

In terms of understanding and developing pedagogical frameworks, Khoo's (2010) doctoral research aimed to better understand online teaching and learning, highlighting the roles of teachers and students in online learning communities, mainly in postgraduate classes. According to Khoo's (2010) categorization, teachers' roles took the form of intellectual/pedagogical, social, technical and managerial interventions. With some parallels to teachers, students' roles were categorized as content/intellectual, teamwork/social and supportive/emotionally related. Khoo's (2010) focus was broadly on online learning examining a range of activities, rather than a specific focus on asynchronous online discussion. It is also pertinent that Khoo's data collection, undertaken in 2002, occurred at a time when understanding how to "wield the technology" was a significant challenge for participants (Khoo, 2010, p. vii). My study seeks to determine whether there are other challenges for participants in AOD who have significant experience with the technology involved.

In summary, the need to explore teachers' and students' experiences of asynchronous online discussion reflects a building on, rather than a repetition of previous local studies, by asserting a need to focus:

- specifically on the experiences of both teacher and student participants in teacher education;
- specifically on experiences of AOD, rather than online learning activities more broadly;
- on revisiting and updating understandings of participants' perspectives several years after these earlier studies.

In choosing to highlight the perspectives of experienced participants, my study aligns with Spector's (2007) focus on voices and stories of experienced online educators in tertiary education. Spector's (2007) project stems from Ganesan's doctoral work (2005, cited by Spector 2007, preface), involving a qualitative study of the perceptions and practices of six highly experienced online tertiary educators in North America. However, neither of these studies included student voices alongside those of the tertiary educators, nor were they situated in a New Zealand context where there is a lack of examination of the use of AOD in teacher education. There is a need to explore in depth the use of one pedagogical tool - AOD, rather than online learning more generally.

Definitions

In summary, key terms used throughout this thesis include:

Online Learning – also referred to as elearning (e-learning or eLearning), Internet learning and web-based learning. In the context of my study, the focus is on formalised learning via a course offered by a tertiary institution and limited to enrolled students. This type of course takes place within a Learning Management System (LMS), in this case: Moodle.

Asynchronous Online Discussion (AOD) – also referred to as Computer Mediated Conferencing (CMC) (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997), web-based conferencing (Angeli et al, 2003), Electronic Discussion (ED) (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003), and Threaded Discussion/Conversation (Welser et al, 2007). These discussions occur in an Internet enabled environment without the need for discussion participants to be

present in the same physical location or at the same time (Cummings, Bonk & Jacobs, 2002; Laurillard, 2002; Locke & Daly, 2007; Shank & Sitze, 2004; Sternberg, 1999). In the discussions of relevance to this thesis, the participants are students and teachers engaged in discussions for learning purposes. Accordingly, each discussion is a formally constituted, topic-centred conversation established in the context of a specific learning environment (i.e., Moodle), using a web-based bulletin or message board (Locke and Daly, 2007).

Mediation – From a sociocultural vantage point, mediation recognises that the learner is active but in need of guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). To mediate is to provide this guidance, to scaffold (Bruner, 1990) and to involve the learner in an apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). Teachers undertake mediated actions as part of their teaching, and these actions depend on communication, employing "mediational means, such as technical tools (for example, a computer) and psychological tools (for example, language) to change thinking" (Bell, 2011, p. 32). In turn, the verb 'to mediate' is compatible with pedagogy, implying an intentional and relational set of actions.

Pedagogy – is teaching as **mediating** learning (Laurillard, 2002). That is, teaching as professional decision-making, complex and contextualized, and cognizant of the part played by students (Bell, 2003; 2011). Some authors refer to adult education as andragogy or heutagogy, to differentiate it from the association of pedagogy with the teaching of children (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). Nevertheless, in common with numerous influential commentators in the fields of higher education, teacher education and elearning, I prefer the term 'pedagogy' (Gallop, 1995; Laurillard, 2002; Leach & Moon, 1999; Loughran; Bell, 2011; Sharpe, Beetham & de Freitas, 2010). I consider it unnecessary to allocate new terminology based on the age of learners. Having taught at both primary and tertiary levels, I am convinced that some principles of learning and teaching apply to diverse learners, ages and contexts. In particular, principles of deep learning, including higher order thinking, intrinsic engagement, and learner choice are vital elements for learners of all ages.

If pedagogy (and mediation) signal a move beyond simplistic or technicist views of teaching as a skill-set (Bell, 2003; 2011; Loughran, 2006), then deep learning can be considered a parallel, reciprocal and intertwined concept. Teaching as pedagogy is in parallel with learning as deep learning. The concepts of pedagogy and deep learning are reciprocal: ideally, pedagogy emphasizes, generates and reinforces deep learning. In turn, deep learning challenges teachers to go beyond information transmission, as learners are empowered to expect active involvement and choice. Pedagogy and deep learning are relational since there is an element of deep learning in pedagogy as teachers are required to be learners, to innovate and to respond flexibly. There is also an element of pedagogy in deep learning, when learners become teachers and leaders as they interact and share learning.

Deep Learning – goes beyond memorisation and recall to discernment and construction of meaning. It is characterised by relating ideas to prior knowledge and experience, searching for patterns and principles, checking for evidence, and critical thinking and metacognition where learners develop their own awareness as learners. Essentially, learners are empowered to be aware of and manage their own learning (Entwistle, 2001; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Weigel, 2002).

Table 1: Parallels between concepts – teaching as pedagogy and learning as deep learning.

Teaching as Pedagogy	Learning as Deep Learning
• Beyond transmission of information	• Beyond receipt of information
• Promotes construction of new knowledge	• Promotes construction of new knowledge
• Promotes reasoning, decision-making	• Exercises choice, discernment
• Promotes active learning	• Active and interactive learning
• Contextualises concepts, so as to be meaningful for the learners	• Meaningful links to prior knowledge and current interest
• Promotes reflective practices	• Learning to learn (metacognition)
• Acknowledges affective dimensions	• Prompts engagement, curiosity
• Innovative	• Encourages risk-taking
• Requires teachers to learn alongside students	• Peer tutoring, student leadership

(Initial) Teacher Education – is pre-service teacher education. In my study's context, this is the Bachelor of Teaching Degree (Btch), primary, via MMP. This degree is a three-year undergraduate qualification leading to provisional registration as a primary (elementary, K-12) school teacher in New Zealand.

Mixed Media Programme (MMP) – is a mechanism for initial teacher education whereby students study at a distance, combining online work in Moodle with practicum time based in a local school, supplemented with short blocks of time on campus for face-to-face classes.

Teacher educators – lecturers, teachers, academic staff employed in teacher education. These terms are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. This is because:

 'Lecturer' or a variant like 'Senior Lecturer' is often an official job title and is often used by students in teacher education;

'Teacher educator' is the most accurate and inclusive terminology for this group of staff, but is cumbersome;

'Teacher' is useful shorthand and a reminder of the professional qualifications of the staff. This term differentiates us from academic staff in other faculties in our institution. However, student participants in my study are also studying to be teachers, which can create confusion when comparing staff and student perspectives;

'Staff' (as opposed to students) is a term used frequently throughout the research reports in this thesis, as a succinct way to differentiate between teacher educators and teacher education students.

As the above suggests, '**students'** in my study context are: teacher education students, sometimes referred to as 'student teachers' within the Mixed Media Programme.

Collectively, staff and students are referred to as **'participants'** in this study.

Structure of thesis

This thesis is organised in the following way: Chapter Two is the first half of a literature review arguing the continuing relevance of AOD in initial teacher education, despite the pace of change and increasing availability of synchronous and multimedia technologies. The advantages of AOD are detailed in terms of affordances. A divide between the potential of AOD and the experiences reported by some authors is identified. This chapter also describes the consensus in the literature on effective pedagogy for AOD, and highlights the need to examine participants' perspectives in order to develop a more complete picture. Chapter Three continues the literature review by drawing upon the work of seminal researchers in AOD, foregrounding issues of relevance to AOD, and locating the study in terms of sociocultural theorising. The research questions are presented in this chapter. Chapter Four outlines the methodology, positioning the research within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, and explaining its alignment with ethnography and phenomenography as a means of accessing participants' perspectives. The position of the researcher is disclosed and critically examined, alongside ethical considerations and quality assurance factors. Chapter Five contains an account of the research methods used in the study, detailing the data generation via face-to-face and online focus groups, and interviews with case study staff and student volunteers. The approach to the data analysis is also explained here. Chapter Six reports the student and staff findings in terms of their expectations and roles. Knowledge claims are supported with participants' verbatim quotes that communicate their perspectives in authentic voices. Chapter Seven contains my synthesis and discussion of the findings, comparing staff and student perspectives. The data are revisited and reviewed through my researcher/teacher educator lens based on my experiences of AOD and in relation to the literature and sociocultural theory. This chapter outlines three key aspects of participants' experience: purpose, presence and people. Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the thesis suggesting implications for pedagogy in AOD, in terms of strategies and conceptual tools for teachers and students.

Chapter Two: Relevance, affordance, pedagogy and perspectives

Previous research on asynchronous online discussion suggests the need to attend to key areas of relevance, affordance, pedagogy and perspectives of AOD. Each is discussed in turn.

Is AOD still relevant?

As defined in chapter one, asynchronous online discussions (AOD) are formally constituted, topic-centred conversations established in a specific learning environment, using a web-based bulletin or message board (Locke & Daly, 2007). The 'asynchronous' character of the discussion means that it occurs over time, with participants 'posting' messages to discussion over a period of hours or days. Communication occurs intermittently, anytime, at irregular intervals. Participants tend not to be present in the discussion simultaneously (Cummings, Bonk & Jacobs, 2002; Shank & Sitze, 2004; Sternberg, 1999).

Asynchronous online discussion contrasts with synchronous or 'real-time' discussion, which depends on every participant being available at the same time (Shank & Sitze, 2004). While synchronicity provides a more immediate connection between people and is arguably useful in promoting social interaction, evidence suggests that synchronous online discussion tends to remain at the level of social bond formation, rather than progressing to meaningful learning (Im & Lee, 2003; Locke, 2007; Ryan, Scott, Freeman & Patel, 2000). A further drawback of text-based synchronous online discussion is that participation requires fast thinking and fast typing, which can disadvantage some participants.

On the other hand, research suggests that asynchronous online discussion is suited to task-oriented communication (Im & Lee, 2003; Locke, 2007). It enables time for reflection, fostering deeper learning than synchronous discussion (Bates, 2005; Bonk & King, 1998b; Norsworthy, 2002; Salmon, 2000). By allowing participants time to

compose messages, AOD may also enable more equitable participation (Locke, 2007).

I contend that AOD is still relevant notwithstanding the advent of new technologies that make synchronous discussion and multi-media approaches easier. Even with the growing use of social media for informal learning, and alongside the advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), AOD is still widely used within formal educational contexts and there are still unanswered questions about how to generate effective discussion to precipitate deep learning. There are also distinct advantages in AOD. These three arguments are now addressed in turn.

Continued use of AOD

In terms of its place in online learning, AOD is still widely in use. Indeed, a number of commentators view asynchronous online discussion as central to learning online. For example, according to Bates (2005), AOD is very often "the 'core' of the course" (p. 151), or as Dennen and Wieland (2007) suggest, "a central hub for course activities" (p. 281). In Locke and Daly's (2007) terms, an asynchronous bulletin board is "one of the cornerstones of distance learning" (p. 2). Others similarly regard it as a "key element" (Repman, Zinskie & Carlson, 2005, p. 61), or "a major component of most online courses" (Lu & Jeng, 2006, p. 184). Overall, "research on online learning has consistently identified asynchronous course discussion as one of its more unique and promising features" (Swan & Shea, 2005, pp. 239-240). It is seen as "one of the most common modes of interaction in the online world" (Welser, Gleave, Fisher & Smith, 2007, p. 1). Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) assert that "the asynchronicity of discussion boards is the mainstay of contemporary e-learning practice" (p. 210). Of course, merely because AOD is still widely in use does not mean it should be. However, the continued use of AOD does require a closer look at how quality pedagogy and deep learning might be promoted by establishing conditions for effective discussion.

Unanswered questions

A closer look at AOD is justified because quite simply not enough is yet known about how to generate effective discussion, even though AOD has been in use in education for more than 20 years. Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) argue that the educational community has yet to fully understand the features of online communication and how these practices might be deliberately used for learning and teaching. Thus, although there are some areas of consensus about appropriate AOD pedagogical practices (as reviewed later in this chapter), the research community continues to seek "future research focused on developing much-needed frameworks and guidelines for instructional design within an asynchronous environment" (Dennen, 2005, p.146). In particular, Ferdig and Roehler (2003) assert that "More research is necessary that focuses on … the psychological uses of forums from students' perspectives" (p. 132).

Advantages and possibilities

Alongside the ongoing popularity of AOD, and the need for a closer look at the perspectives of discussion participants, the relevance of AOD is further underscored by the advantages and possibilities for action or 'affordances' of an asynchronous and text-based approach to discussion. Collison, Elbaum, Haavind and Tinker (2000) sum up the advantages of AOD well:

> Text-based asynchronous electronic communication is well suited for goal-oriented dialogue and learning environments. No one is left out of a fast-moving conversation or is silenced because he or she is not called upon in the classroom. The reverse is also true, in that the excuse of running out of time as the bell rings is no longer available to participants who are hoping to pass by simply attending class regularly. The act of committing thought to print impresses upon the participant a need for both reflection and clarity. And absence from dialogue, or shallow interaction, shows up quite clearly in threaded text formats (p. 9).

As the above quote suggests, four key AOD advantages include that:

1. no one is left out or silenced - *inclusivity;*
2. class time is extended – *flexibility;*
3. the writing process is valued – *textual communication;*
4. reflection and depth are promoted – *deep learning.*

17

Taking each of these four advantages in turn, there is ample support in the literature for each, reinforcing both AOD's educational benefits of AOD, and rendering it worthy of research.

Inclusivity

According to the literature, AOD can promote equality of speaking time (Bender, 2003; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Poole, 2000; Hewitt, 2005; Wegerif, 1998). This is because the forum arrangement means that participants can talk concurrently without fear of interruption (Hewitt, 2005). Hewitt (2005) also points out that there are often higher levels of peer discourse in AOD, and in Clegg and Heap's (2006) view, this opportunity for student-to-student interaction "means that online discussions are often the glue that binds a group of students together to become a collaborative learning community" (p. 1). Every participant can have a voice.

Flexibility

The fact that AOD is neither time nor place-bound is a key advantage for flexible learning, and one that proponents of synchronous media risk in their orientation to the here and now. AOD affords convenience and accessibility, as learners choose the time and place to contribute (Shank & Sitze, 2004). This choice is deemed by many to be liberating, as asynchronous duration effects free participants from "the tyranny of time" (Locke & Daly, 2007, p. 122), or by supplementing class time (Angeli, Valanides & Bonk, 2003; Bender, 2003; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Markel, 2001; Poole, 2000). Indeed, the most oft-cited benefit of AOD is 'time to think' (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Guiller, Durndell & Ross, 2008; Hew & Cheung, 2003; Hiltz & Goldman, 2005; Locke, 2007; Seddon, Postlethwaite & Lee, 2010; Shank & Sitze, 2004; Wegerif, 1998). By affording time to think, the literature on AOD suggests that "Asynchronous, as opposed to synchronous, responses allow students to think through what they post, thus reducing the potential for unexamined, disrespectful, or ill-informed responses" (Fauske & Wade, 2003, p. 145). Thus, "flexibility also refers to the fact that discussion forums allow students to be flexible in their thinking. They are given time to think out structured and more in-depth responses" (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003, p. 121).

Textual communication

The fact that engaging in AOD involves reading and writing in turn affords the meta-linguistic and meta-analytic advantages of print. So, learners can share thoughts and ideas informally, but can also review these, and develop habits of "careful thinking" (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003, p. 125). Garrison and Anderson (2003) argue that writing has advantages over speech for critical discourse and reflection because a *persistent* record is maintained. The persistent textual idea is also championed by other researchers (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Herring, 1999; Preece, 2000). The availability of such a persistent record means that learners are more likely to be more attentive to others' views, more systematic and more exploratory. Being able to weave or synthesise ideas is enhanced because all contributions are preserved (Salmon, 2000). Writing is useful as both process and product of rigorous critical thinking, argumentation, and reflection (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Guiller et al, 2008; Hew & Cheung, 2003; Hew, Cheung & Ng, 2010; Jetton, 2003).

Deep learning

Both the asynchronicity of time and the written communication format present advantages for thinking, affording thoughtful responses (Guiller et al, 2008). Having more time to think and reflect can lead to enhanced critical thinking, and to overall greater depth. This reflection time is mentioned as a key benefit in the literature (Bates, 2005; Bender, 2003; Guiller et al, 2008; Hew & Cheung, 2003; Hew et al, 2010; Hewitt, 2005; Laurillard, 2002; Poole, 2000). Since some of this time could be spent consulting research sources, this could potentially "give rise to an increase in the use of formal, research-based evidence and the quality of critical thinking" (Guiller et al, 2008, p. 188). AOD is positively related to creative and critical thinking (by Bates, 2005; Garrison & Anderson, 2003) because participants "spend time formulating their own ideas about course concepts" (Arend, 2007, p. 14). In turn, participants question their own assumptions and perspectives and challenge those put forward by other participants (Fauske & Wade, 2003). Because of this, Conrad and Donaldson (2004) say "depth of thought is likely to be greater in a reflective online discussion than in a reactive classroom-based discussion" (p. 20). The connection between reflection and deep learning has been made by others (Bates, 2005; Bonk &

King, 1998b; Norsworthy, 2002; Salmon, 2000). These connections are significant as they prompt further consideration of what is meant by deep learning, and raise questions about how it is experienced by learners.

The above four aspects (inclusivity, flexibility, textual communication and deep learning) are affordances of AOD, potentially supporting:

- Equality of contribution;
- Student choice and flexible use of time;
- Articulation via text, and the ability to revisit and synthesise persistent text;
- Thinking, reflection and depth in responses and therefore conceptual understanding.

However, as Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) remind us, affordances are what the media allow or make possible. Affordances such as the advantages listed above are opportunities and potential benefits, but may not always be realised in practice. After all, even though "features and communicative possibilities are available does not mean they are necessarily used. This is the paradox of affordances: they are possibilities, not uses" (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011, p. 67).

Thus, there can be gaps between the potential and actual use of AOD for learning.

Actualising affordances: Is there a gap between actual and potential AOD?

It is important to probe what asynchronous online discussion looks like when it is considered to be effective because this is not assured. In relation to gaps between practice and potential in online discussion, Cummings, Bonk and Jacobs (2002) observed that web-based courses were "characterized by the unidirectional flow of information from instructors to students" (p. 1). The majority of instructors in their study simply uploaded a syllabus for convenient distribution, and in order to market the course. Little use was made of asynchronous tools to enable dialogue between students, instructors and practitioners or experts in the field. Collaboration was also limited (Cummings et al, 2002). Cummings, Bonk and Jacobs (2002) reported that in

a few cases, there were occurrences of peer feedback mechanisms, small group work, debates and role-play took place. The potential for dialogue, collaboration, negotiating of meaning, apprenticeship and sharing were noted, however, these authors concluded that "we are clearly not exploiting this potential" (Cummings et al, 2002, p. 15).

Even where AOD is a feature of coursework, it can frustrate participants. For example, Bishop (2002) offers a telling critique of online discussion:

> Although asynchronous discussion is supposed to be a benefit of online learning, I found it tedious. Delays of hours or even days between postings killed their spark. Few people contradicted each other and even fewer made jokes. Unable to see each other's body language, and perhaps concerned about surveillance, students chose their words too carefully (p. 234).

In a similar vein, Thomas' (2002) critique of online discussion considers AOD to be incoherent. For Thomas (2002), this student's quote captures the essence of AOD:

> In [face-to-face] tutorials the discussion is much more alive and direct. My ideas can be changed, influenced and appreciated in a more integrated environment. The online discussion forum felt too much like monologue vs. monologue. It needs to be a discussion (p. 261).

It is apparent that both Bishop (2002) and Thomas's (2002) student have experienced AOD as lacking in energy and largely devoid of interpersonal or intellectual connection, most likely culminating in a frustrating and unsatisfactory experience. These insights into participants' personal lived experiences of online discussion are of particular interest to me, and lead me to ponder: To what extent is this how others experience online discussion? What factors kill the spark of online discussion, rendering it tedious? Conversely, what can make discussion powerful and stimulating for participants? How do students and teachers experience and interpret language in AOD? What concerns discussion participants in my local context?

Moreover, the sense of disappointment implicit in Bishop's (2002) and Thomas' (2002) reviews of online learning leads me to wonder about the disillusionment of students and staff who embark on AOD only to find that the experience does not meet their expectations. What do participants expect of AOD? For that matter, what do they expect of each other as participants in AOD?

Bishop's (2002) point about participants choosing their words too carefully is of particular note, since among the benefits of AOD is the ability to carefully reflect and to take one's time when composing a contribution. However, Bishop's insights suggest that while some participants value having time to think and to generate in depth responses, others prefer the spontaneity and immediacy. Similarly, while the ability to revisit and synthesise persistent text is acknowledged as an affordance, Thomas (2002) regards AOD as lacking in integration or coherence. These different interpretations lead me to question whether there are specific benefits or shortcomings of AOD, or whether these are in the eye of the beholder?

Alongside the different experiences of AOD, researchers offer a host of explanations for the failure of discussion to realise its potential. For the most part, these explanations tend to revolve around expectations, preparation of students, rewards and modelling of participation. For example, according to Brookfield and Preskill (2005) discussion doesn't work when teachers have unrealistic expectations and where students are ill-prepared. Similarly, LaPointe (2007) and Dennen and Wieland (2007) suggest that discussion falls short of aspirations when students are unsure of how to contribute. In addition, the literature suggests that the potential of AOD is not always met due to lack of motivation or when rewards are not evident (Bender, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen & Wieland, 2007). Accordingly, lack of participation, or low-level participation, is frequently mentioned in the literature (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Hew et al, 2010; LaPointe, 2007). A key issue then, is "student involvement with discussion forums" (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003, p. 125). There is agreement that there is a crucial distinction between the affordance or opportunity offered by the technology, and the extent to which it is realized through actual social interaction among people (Harms et al, 2010; Jacques & Salmon, 2007; Salmon, 2003).

Overall, the literature cited above suggests that there is a gap between the potential and actual use of AOD when teachers and students fail to exploit the potential for dialogue and deep learning, when participants' experiences fall short of their expectations, when expectations are unclear, motivation is lacking, and participation

is low or characterised by surface exchanges. This is in stark contrast to the potential AOD affords for active, deep learning. Nevertheless, as Brookfield and Preskill (2005) point out, "Never being able to get it completely right doesn't mean that we can't get better at creating the conditions under which good discussion is more likely to occur" (p. 41).

With this in mind, what are the conditions under which good discussion is more likely to occur? And what is already known about pedagogy that works with respect to AOD?

What do we know about pedagogy that works with respect to AOD?

A review of research on generating effective discussion suggests that it is the responsibility of e-moderators to both establish conditions conducive to discussion and to mediate learning through discussion (Laurillard, 2002). According to the research literature, key responsibilities of e-moderators includes:

- Establishing a purpose for discussion
- Maintaining appropriate presence
- And mediating in a manner that promotes participation and deeper learning.

This next section will report on purpose, presence and mediation.

Purpose

A sense of purpose for discussions is reinforced by links between discussion and class content (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). There is also resounding agreement that clear expectations at the outset of discussion are a necessity for this sense of purpose to be clear (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen, 2005; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Jackson et al, 2010; Jetton, 2003). Although clarity is considered vital, expectations or ground rules may be negotiable and subject to change on the basis of ongoing feedback from students (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Jackson et al, 2010). Overall, discussion activities in an educational context tend to have at least four potential purposes:

- to generate critical consideration of a topic, based upon consideration of multiple perspectives (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)
- to prompt individuals to articulate their position (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)
- to generate group learning (Dennen & Wieland, 2007)
- to act as a catalyst for action (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)

Dennen and Wieland (2007) suggest that the purpose of discussion activities may be either to document learning, or to engage in exploring ideas that hopefully lead to learning. As such, discussion may be for formative or summative purposes, a point examined further in Chapter Three.

Presence

A second key responsibility of the e-moderator is that of maintaining appropriate presence online. There is a tension evident in the literature, with a significant group of researchers arguing that e-moderators must be present, active and highly responsive (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Clegg & Heap, 2006; Jackson et al, 2010; Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw & Liu, 2006). On the other hand, some researchers advocate less teaching presence in AOD (Fauske & Wade, 2003; Gulati, 2008; Hew et al, 2010; Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003).

The case for high levels of instructor responsiveness tends to be based upon student feedback, and upon the need to extend students' thinking. For example, Jackson, Jones and Rodriguez (2010) found that "instructors' accessibility and timeliness of response in the online course positively affected students' perceptions of the value of online courses" (p. 92). Meanwhile, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) report that "In our experience the number one complaint from online learners is the low level of instructor responsiveness" (p. 224). These authors suggest therefore that e-moderators should be present, active and responsive in discussion because this is what students want (Donaghy, McGee, Ussher & Yates, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Ko & Rossen, 2004).

Alongside the drive to satisfy student preferences, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001) assert the need for "active teaching presence" (p. 10), in order to diagnose misconceptions, to ensure continuing cognitive development, and to model critical thinking. Otherwise students may remain in "continuous exploration mode" (Garrison et al, 2001, p. 10). Accordingly, there is support for the view that teaching presence is needed to move the discussion beyond surface exchanges, and to prompt deeper learning (Bates, 2005; Collison et al, 2000; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003).

However, while some authors emphasise active teaching presence, others caution that too much teacher authority can destroy discussion by discouraging students from participating. For example, Jetton (2003) advises that:

> Instructors who participate in the dialogue of CMD must be careful about how they participate in the discussion. When instructors assume an authoritative status during CMD by stating opinions and quoting theory, there is a danger that subsequent interactions will end, because students feel that the final authority has spoken (p. 184).

To redress imbalances in authority, a number of studies advocate less teaching presence and propose a shift to peer-moderated discussion without lecturer involvement. For example, for Gulati (2008), "awareness of teacher presence is the awareness that one is being watched" (p. 188). Surveillance, oppression and a lack of freedom to engage in genuine discussion are concerns also raised by Bishop (2002), Fauske and Wade (2003), and by Garrison and Anderson (2003). Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) argue that if learning is regarded as constructivist, the instructor should stand back to allow students to initiate discussion and answer each other's questions. These authors advocate "minimal" intervention (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003, p. 245).

Others however consider the minimal interventionist stance outlined above to be a misrepresentation of constructivist intent (Bell, 2011). To position the teacher as mediator precludes removing the teacher from the discussion. Mediation entails a more active role than neutral facilitation, requiring the teacher to moderate their presence.

Thus, between the extremes of highly responsive and minimal interventionist stances lies a middle ground emphasising moderation, balance and dependability. Proponents of this middle ground acknowledge the tension between "too little or too much teaching presence" (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 69). For example:

> The omnipresence of instructors' continual monitoring of postings can be inherently oppressive to certain students and ideas, yet to remove oneself may abdicate responsibility for overseeing a required learning activity (Fauske & Wade, 2003, p. 148).

For Dennen (2005), "the most favourable presence seemed to be one that let students know that their messages were being read without taking over the discussion" (p. 142). It may be that balancing the tension is key to responding while paving the way for student participation. Furthermore, Dennen and Wieland (2007) highlight the need for consistency and reliability, or being "dependably there throughout the threads " (p. 295). They found that a class with a consistent facilitative instructor was more likely to engage in discussion leading to negotiating and developing knowledge and understanding.

In relation to teaching presence, an overall pattern in the literature suggests that students are reassured by active and responsive teacher presence, and that pedagogically, this is likely to mediate for a high level of challenge and deeper learning through discussion. However, it is important to avoid authoritarian and oppressive teaching, which has led some researchers to promote more peer-moderation where students lead and teachers stand back from discussion. While these options are further explored later in this thesis, it appears that the compromise is to balance this moderation role to encourage participation from both teachers and students. The next section considers actions – that is, what does research suggest online teachers do when engaged in AOD?

Mediation

The third key responsibility for the e-moderator is mediation. The literature suggests that e-moderators should mediate discussion in order to:

1. Build and maintain relationships and connections with students

2. Focus and model
3. Encourage and challenge
4. Give feedback
5. Link and weave.

Each of these aspects is expanded next.

The moderator role has an element of pastoral care. Research literature on this often makes mention of the importance of elements of care, such as reaching out to learners, encouraging their participation, ensuring they are comfortable and confident to contribute (Clegg & Heap, 2005; Hammond, 2005; Harms, Neiderhauser, Davis, Roblyer & Gilbert, 2010; Mantyla, 1999; Maor, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Preece, 2000; Salmon, 2000, 2003). In Hiltz and Goldman's (2005, p. 11) terms, "It is the instructor who must take the primary responsibility for building a sense of connectedness and community in an online course".

Alongside relationships, e-moderators maintain the task-focus of the discussion (Clegg & Heap, 2005; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Harms et al, 2010; Hewitt, 2005); and can serve as models for communication strategies (Dennen & Wieland, 2007).

By balancing encouragement with challenge, e-moderators can coach students to think and extend their reasoning, according to Bates (2005) and Clegg and Heap (2005). Such mediation may involve challenging students' misconceptions (Clegg & Heap, 2005), raising alternative views (Dennen & Wieland, 2007), and highlighting unanswered questions (Hewitt, 2005). All of these mediation practices also serve the focusing and modeling role of an e-moderator. This goes hand-in-hand with providing feedback that is timely, clear and substantive in order to promote learning (Clegg & Heap, 2005; Dennen, 2005; Tallent-Runnels et al, 2006).

Literature centred on this issue of mediation also argues that e-moderators should help students to link the topic under discussion to theory and to wider contexts (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Denen & Wieland, 2007). Finally and importantly, key commentators reinforce the importance of the e-moderator working to periodically

summarise and weave fragments of conversation with the wider conceptual framework of the course (Bates, 2005; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Salmon, 2003).

These aspects are widely recognised as both key roles for moderators and best practices in the pedagogy of online discussion. However, it is also advantageous to ascertain the preferred pedagogies of those involved. Consultation with online teachers informs pedagogy by making the tacit reasoning underpinning teaching more explicit (Loughran, 2006; Spector, 2007). Consulting online students also informs pedagogy by highlighting how students respond to tasks and teaching behaviours (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Loughran, 2006).

Why participant perspectives?

Participant perspectives are important because discussion is experienced differently by different people. Even though we can't know how another person experiences any teaching and learning situation unless we ask them, a number of studies have confined their analysis to discussion board postings. It is relatively common to use electronic dialogue transcripts as data and the sole basis for inferring participants' viewpoints on the value of discussion, and inferring the reasoning, intentions, interpretations and reactions of those posting and reading the messages (Angeli et al, 2003; Bonk & King, 1998a & b; Dsythe, 2002; Roulet, Khan & Lazarus, 2008). In my view however, looking at postings without consulting the writers or readers of those messages about their intentions or interpretations distorts meaning and neglects both individual agency and individual perspective. Studying the interactions between people rather than between postings in isolation from AOD authors or audience is therefore necessary.

The concept of *perezhivanie* as proposed by Vygotsky (1994), is "perhaps his least-known concept. *Perezhivanie* describes the ways in which the participants perceive, experience and process the emotional aspects of social interaction" (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002, p. 49). In other words, perezhivanie is "lived or emotional experience" (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002, p. 49) suggesting that a situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced, or lived through by different people in different ways

(Vygotsky, 1935, in Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 354, note 1). This concept relates closely to the sociocultural emphasis of my research (to be explored in further depth in Chapter Three), and my intention to explore how teachers and students perceive and experience AOD.

In relation to participant perspectives, Marton and Booth (1997) advocate "learning through the eyes of the learner" (p. 14), and Loughran (1999) looks into pedagogy through students' eyes, as do Brookfield and Preskill (2005) who argue that "The most important lens is that of students' eyes" (p. 181). Laurillard (2002) aims "to see the learning process from the students' perspective, in all its complexity, and in such a way that we can make sense of it" (p. 41).

While also attentive to student perspectives, Salmon (2003, 2011) consistently asserts the need to look "through the eyes of online teachers" (Salmon, 2003, p. 3; Salmon, 2011, p. 3), and listen to "the learners' and teachers' voices" (Salmon, 2011, p. 4). Salmon's work thus informs and influences my study, as I am interested in both students' and teachers' perspectives, while ever mindful that their perspectives will be filtered by my own. I am confident that a more complete picture is gained by seeking to understand perspectives of both students and teachers, and by examining the spaces between these perspectives. I will build on Jacques and Salmon's (2007) concern for participants' "approach to learning, the personal meaning they derive, the factors that motivate, and the social context and value system in which the learning occurs" (p. 50).

Spector (2007) notes that there is little research on teachers' perceptions of online teaching, suggesting that:

> More research on teacher attitudes and perceptions would be useful in contributing to more realistic beliefs about the possibilities for meaningful online discourse (Spector, 2007, p. 11).

Literature also suggests a need for research on students' perspectives, and notes the neglect of student experience. This is suggestive of a growing awareness of what Van Manen (1999) refers to as "The pedagogy of student experience" (p. 21).

Nevertheless, Ellis et al (2008) consider that student views about studying in higher education per se, have been neglected by researchers. Furthermore:

> There are even fewer studies examining conceptions of and approaches to learning in situations in which students are using eLearning technologies for discussions or other collaborative purposes (Ellis et al, 2008, p. 269).

Specifically, "there are very few studies that ask students about their experiences of learning through discussion" (Ellis et al, 2008, p. 269). Jackson et al (2010) and Sharpe et al (2010) agree that there is limited published research on what students think of web-based learning and how it meets their needs. In particular, "few studies actually illuminated the teaching-learning experience in the online environment" (Jackson et al, 2010, p. 79).

Despite this apparent neglect, however, there is a growing recognition of the need to take learners' perspectives into account. In Sharpe, Beetham and de Freitas' (2010) estimation:

> The reorganization of learning is being driven by learners now, in a way that places a great deal more emphasis upon designing learning from their perspective (Sharpe et al, 2010, pp. 2-3).

It is therefore necessary to investigate learning from learners' perspectives, and in particular, I contend, to examine two aspects: the students' *experiences* and the students' *expectations*.

Van Manen (1999) argues that teachers "need to be attuned to the ways that students experience things, including our teaching practices" (p. 26). He is one of those who draw attention to the divide between what teachers intend and what students experience. For example, Goodyear (2002) makes the distinction between tasks and activities, where tasks are what the teacher prescribes and activities are what students actually do. Similarly, Loughran (2006) recognises that students often hold "contrary views about the very intent of the activities in the first place" (p. 17). Moreover, Beetham (2007) considers that students:

> make sense of the tasks they are set in terms of their own goals and perspectives, and they may experience tasks quite differently if digital technologies - with all the social and cultural meanings that they carry - are involved (p. 32).

Askell-Williams and Lawson (2005) argue that students' perspectives are important because their knowledge about learning mediates the nature of their engagement with a discussion activity:

> Why is it important to gain information about students' knowledge about how to act as effective learners in discussions? We argue that possessing information about students' knowledge about learning in an activity such as a class discussion is critical for teachers, because the students' knowledge about learning will mediate the nature of the students' engagement with the learning activity (p. 87).

In relation to students' expectations, Visser (2007) asserts "the need for instructors to know what the learners expect from their online instruction" (p. 106). Visser (2007), relates expectations to students' needs and wants, stopping short of arguing that teachers must strive to satisfy these, while asserting the value of becoming "better attuned" to students' needs (p. 120). Visser (2007) contends that teachers should strive to know and understand students' expectations, particularly with respect to academic and affective support, in order to "bring these expectations to the forefront and build on them" (p. 120). That the support expected by learners may be an area of contention, is also suggested by Sims and Bovard (2007) who report that:

> Our experience also highlights a conflict within online environments, where the expectations of the online learner for regular and frequent support are not necessarily aligned with those of the teachers, who often emphasize self-directed learning and student collaboration in order to support the development of an online community (p. 163).

This potential divide between teachers' intentions and students' experiences, and between teachers' and students' expectations of learning and support, highlights spaces between or around teachers and students. The character and affordance of these spaces are examined and theorised in Chapter Three.

Because of these spaces, I am investigating the perspectives of both students and teachers engaged in AOD. This will help me understand a larger, more complete picture about effective AOD. In turn, I can share these wider perspectives with colleagues and students. In order to do so, I will ask students and teachers about both their experiences and expectations of AOD. After all, as Askell-Williams and Lawson

(2005) point out, "To find out about what people think, it is necessary to ask them" (p. 88). Of course, in doing so, we make the assumption that people can and will share their thinking, and that this can in turn be understood by others.

It is important to acknowledge that using individuals' perspectives as data has its critics. For example, Lu and Jeng (2006) question reliance on "attitudinal data" (p. 183), and express doubt that perceptions of the learning situation are directly or accurately reflective of actual learning outcomes. I concede that my study will not *measure* learning in any definitive sense, neither do I seek to establish a *causal* link between variables and data. Nevertheless, I contend that insight into participant perspectives can *inform* pedagogy with the end result of enhancing learning. The study is therefore intended to be formative, and informative of pedagogy, rather than a summative evaluation of learning through AOD.

Dziuban, Moskal, Bradford, Brophy-Ellison and Groff (2010) raise another critical angle on the study of students' perspectives alongside those of staff, and ask: "Should students have a participatory voice in their education or are they imposing a consumer mentality on learning that undermines rigour and high standards?" (p. 57). Weimer (2002) too resists "the student-as-customer metaphor" (p. xvi). She also reasserts the need to involve learners actively in decision-making about their learning, values student input and recognises their ultimate responsibility for their learning. In her view:

> Being learner-centered is not about cowering in the competitive academic marketplace. It is not about kowtowing to student demands for easy options and is not about an ethically irresponsible diminution of academic standards in an attempt to placate "shoppers" who may opt to purchase educational products elsewhere. It is about creating climates in classes and on campus that advance learning outcomes. It is an orientation that advocates for more, not less, learning (Weimer, 2002, p. xvii).

Bender (2003) makes a similar point, as she:

> … shifts the emphasis from students being consumers to students being involved participants in their learning process. This should lead to a shared teaching and learning experience, and one that is conducted with integrity (p. 191).

There is a great deal of other support for this view of students' participatory voice, on democratic, ethical, pedagogical and pragmatic grounds (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Sharpe et al, 2010; Weimer, 2002). However, a participatory voice does not mean that students dictate the agenda. Teachers and students have joint responsibility for successful learning. Sharing the perspectives of students and teachers serves to bring these into the open, far from suggesting that they are immune from challenge. Rather, it acknowledges how each experiences AOD and brings diverse perspectives closer together. In the end, this may better actualise AOD affordances.

In summary, the AOD literature reviewed demonstrates its continuing relevance and highlights persistent challenges around how to generate effective discussion for learning purposes. Research suggests that four key affordances of AOD are inclusivity, flexibility, the value of textual communication, and deep learning. However, affordances are mere possibilities, and may not be actualised when teachers and students fail to exploit the potential for dialogue and deep learning. In order to turn affordances into effective discussion for learning, research suggests that pedagogy entails establishing a purpose for discussion, balancing teaching presence in order to mediate learning, and acting by fostering relationships, modeling, encouraging and challenging, giving feedback, and weaving contributions.

Finally, research suggests that people experience AOD differently. This means that the learning and teaching situation can only be understood by investigating the perspectives of those involved. However, there is little research pertaining to student and teacher experiences of online learning, and in particular of AOD in teacher education. There is a need to attend to the experiences and expectations of both students and teachers in this context in order to understand the distance between participants. In keeping with this focus, participants' perspectives encompass their perceptions of the learning situation, along with their lived experiences, expectations, beliefs, thinking, intentions and emotions (Wenger, 1999).

This chapter has reviewed research literature on the relevance, affordances, pedagogy and perspectives of AOD. The following chapter draws lessons from key researchers,

highlighting issues of relevance to AOD, and locating the study in terms of sociocultural theorising.

Chapter Three: Theorising Asynchronous Online Discussion

The previous chapter focused on pragmatics associated with Asynchronous Online Discussion (AOD), asserted its continuing relevance, and highlighted key affordances and approaches to pedagogy. I have argued that there is a need to understand participants' perspectives in order to gain a more complete picture of learning through AOD.

This chapter complements these pragmatic concerns by theorising AOD using a sociocultural lens. A fundamental interest in people and in their lived experiences, perspectives and expectations related to AOD positions this study within sociocultural theorising. A sociocultural perspective considers mind, action and context and the relationships between them (Bell, 2011). This centres on understanding AOD participants' thinking, emotions and intentions, their actions, and the AOD context in which they interact. To neglect any of these aspects is to only partially understand the experiences of participants in AOD (Bell, 2011), therefore multiple aspects of the sociocultural are pertinent in this study. AOD can be theorised as a social experience where understandings are co-constructed, as a spatial experience through the complexities of asynchronicity and its potential for fostering online community, and as a political experience through negotiating power and its potential for democracy (Bell, 2011).

In this chapter AOD is theorised as a sociocultural practice, which highlights human agency and which includes viewing AOD as: a constructivist practice; a relational practice incorporating presence and positioning; a communicative practice; a communitarian practice; and a contextualised learning (and assessment) practice. Each of these ways of conceptualising AOD within a sociocultural frame is examined next.

Human agency

If we foreground the **human, social and relational** aspects of AOD, these fit closely into a sociocultural frame. A sociocultural frame emphasises the human rather than

the technological. Preece (2000) for example, insists on emphasising people rather than the technology which she argues has overshadowed ICT-related research. Salmon (2003, 2011) also prioritises "the role of human intervention and support to harness the technology into the service of teaching and learning" (Salmon, 2003, p. x). In other words, she emphasises "humanness in technology" (Salmon, 2011, p. 4).

Far from being technologically determinist, a sociocultural perspective recognises the salience of human agency, highlighting students' and teachers' active participation in AOD. As Beetham (2007) reminds us, learners are "actors, not factors, in the learning situation" (p. 32), and their perspectives should not be ignored. Neither should teachers, who are also learners and active in AOD contexts. The active roles played by participants are foregrounded in Lehman and Conceicao's (2010) "perceptual systems approach" (p. 6), similar to the phenomenographic approach to be discussed in Chapter Four. As Lehman and Conceicao (2010) explain, "from this perspective, learners are active perceivers, rather than passive receivers, during the entire online learning experience" (p. 6).

The notion that all learners are active perceivers and participants is central to social constructivism, which is the view of learning underpinning AOD in much of the literature, and in my research, emphasising interaction, communication, collaboration and community (Cook & Ralston, 2003; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Hewitt, 2005; Locke, 2007; Mayes, 2001; Weller, 2002).

Social constructivism

Social constructivism is a view of learning which holds the knowledge constructed by learners is socially, not just individually constructed (Vygotsky, 1978). The role of language and communication during learning is highlighted. A key tenet of Vygotskian social constructivism is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This concept can be linked with Bruner's (1990) concept of scaffolding, and Rogoff's (1990) apprenticeship or guided participation. Together, these provide a theoretical explanation of interaction within AOD. Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as the

distance between the level of independent problem solving and the level of potential development when the learner is guided by a teacher or peers.

There is evidence of a ZPD within asynchronous online discussion when students work collaboratively to promote their learning. For example, during an online discussion when a problem is set in the form of a discussion topic, and students work through it, they collaborate to identify sub-problems and suggest solutions. Throughout such a discussion, cognitive processes are modelled, support is structured and scaffolding occurs as peers build on each other's ideas, and as teachers intervene to provoke thinking and meaning making, mediating learning. As a result of scaffolding within this context, the difficulty levels of problems that students can cope with independently and the level that can be accomplished with guidance or collaboration represents the zone of proximal development (Johnston, 2000; McLoughlin, 2000; Le Francois, 2000).

When working online, teachers apprentice students through the use of authentic learning experiences and timely exposure to cultural practices (Bonk & King, 1998a). In an online discussion, cultural practices include the genre of language used, netiquette practices and visual tools like emoticons. Students' development and learning occurs through a guided participation in the social activity of the discussion. Together they support and stretch each others' understanding of, and skill in using, these tools of culture (Rogoff, 1990). As Rogoff (1990) points out, the social interactions students engage in provide guidance, support, direction, challenge and impetus for development. These are often initiated by the teacher.

For interaction to occur, participants must be present. Whereas Chapter Two touched upon the practicalities of teaching presence as part of pedagogy in AOD, theorising AOD from a sociocultural perspective entails a more holistic consideration of social presence as a relational practice (Bell, 2011).

Relational practice

Two key aspects of teaching and learning in AOD as a relational practice are presence and positioning.

Presence

A sociocultural view of AOD underscores the presence of human participants in discussion, and reminds us that *presence* is about the capacity of the people involved, rather than merely a function of the media (Kehrwald, 2008). In terms of presence in AOD, Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000) propose three categories of presence: *cognitive, social, and teaching presence*. Conceived as three core elements of a community of inquiry (COI), *cognitive presence* equates with constructing meaning through discussion; *social presence* is the projection of personality so that participants are seen as 'real people'; and *teaching presence* is about the design and facilitation of course content (Garrison et al, 2000).

Over time, the COI model and variations on presence have been widely discussed in elearning literature. A pattern has emerged whereby it is often assumed that teachers primarily tend to have teaching presence, whereas social presence is very often associated with students (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). For example, Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer (1999) define social presence as the ability of *learners* to project themselves socially and affectively. However, Boston, Diaz, Gibson, Ice, Richardson & Swan (2009) argue that "it may be that it is hard to tease apart the social presence of instructors from teaching presence" (p. 68), even though their methodological instruments maintain a rigid division between social (student) presence and teaching (teacher) presence.

While there is also growing recognition that students can have teaching presence, for example through peer teaching, and when engaged in leading online discussions (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Dennen, 2005; Durrington & Chien, 2004; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Hew & Cheung, 2011; Hew et al, 2010; Poole, 2000; Prestridge, 2010; Rourke et al, 1999; Visser, 2007), there is little recognition of the social presence of teachers. Thus, the separation of presence into three categories may be somewhat arbitrary and the divisions debatable. For example, Akyol and Garrison

(2008) classify effective communication as part of teaching presence, but this could also be social presence. If teaching is social, it is futile to attempt the separation of social and teaching presence because these elements are intertwined.

Social presence in the literature is further complicated by three apparent paradoxes. These are:

1. Politeness can be positive or pathological
2. Less obvious social comment can mean more presence
3. Social presence is performative, but this is only part of the picture.

Firstly, while social presence is considered to be a positive element within a community of inquiry, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. For example, one manifestation of social presence is politeness. Locke and Daly (2007) suggest:

> positive politeness strategies employed by participants had a role to play in the success of the paper since they helped create a congenial space in which participants felt encouraged and supported to give opinions, ask questions and share doubts and disagreements (p. 121).

Whilst Locke and Daly (2007) celebrate "positive politeness" (p. 121), Archer coined the term "pathological politeness" to describe situations where the pendulum of politeness swings too far toward bland agreement and surface level chatter (acknowledged by Archer's colleagues, Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 50).

The characterisation of politeness as potentially either positive or pathological reminds us to strive for balance. Chapter Two discussed the need for balance in teacher intervention. The challenge for social presence is to generate a climate whereby participants can engage in deep discussion of the topic, and tolerate divergent opinions and perspectives.

The second paradox related to social presence in AOD is characterised as 'the old married couple effect' (Eggins & Slade, 1997), and occurs when participants are very comfortable and familiar with one another. In such contexts there is apparently less need for overt displays of affective expression such as personal disclosure (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Rourke et al, 1999). As a result of familiarity and group cohesion,

fewer superficial and formal social expressions occur. Social presence thus becomes more difficult to discover through the usual observational means such as content and discourse analysis. Paradoxically, social presence may be even more difficult to observe when it is at its most developed. This in turn is a challenge for researchers investigating social presence and links to the third paradox discussed next.

The performative role of presence links to the need to signal one's presence online. In online contexts, silence is absence or invisibility, since participants are unlikely to know that others are present in the discussion unless this is overtly communicated. As such, "in the online world, presence requires action" (Blignaut & Trollip, 2003, p. 347). For Kerhwald (2008), social presence is "performative" (p. 94) and has to be demonstrated by visible activity. However, as seen in the second paradox above, this can be misleading as a cohesive group with strong relationships may have less need for overt indicators of social presence. For this reason, it is necessary to move beyond a behaviourist view of social presence, and examine how participants experience social presence. In order to do so, we must examine intention and perception as well as action. This is where a sociocultural frame helps.

Complications around social presence lead Akyol and Garrison (2008) to conclude that "social presence is a dynamic multidimensional construct that is in need of further study " (p. 16). Overall, the view of AOD as social, relational and multidimensional helps me investigate both how participants regard their own presence in online discussions and what they expect of each other. Only by asking participants can we determine whether politeness is perceived positively or as a hindrance. Only by asking participants can we determine the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging and comfort. And only by probing the participants' intentions and perceptions can we know how they experience the presence of their colleagues.

Positioning

Alongside *presence* as a relational factor in AOD, there is also a need to consider *positioning*. Work by post-structural theorists such as Ellsworth (1997) and Felman (1987) lends itself to an analysis of the dynamics within asynchronous online

discussion, in relation to social positioning. Ellsworth (1997) uses the concept 'Mode of address' to denote ways in which participants within discussions position each other. Using Louis Althusser's notion of 'interpellation', Devine (2003) also considers how teachers' and students' conceptual systems can call different kinds of learner into being. Similarly, Bell's (2011) view of teaching as a relational practice encapsulates how teachers and students discursively construct and position each other, and this closely links to student and staff expectations of each other. For example, Litvak (1995) argues that students cast lecturers in a pedagogical role, and thus aligns with Frank's (1995) view. He suggests that this role may be understood as a version of Lacan's "subject-presumed-to-know" (Frank, 1995, p. 31). That is, students expect teachers to be experts and authorities. Teachers resisting this pedagogical role may therefore position themselves in ways at odds with student expectations. This is not to suggest, however, that all students will have the same expectations of their teacher, or that student expectations are constant over time or remain the same whether online or face-to-face contexts are the medium for discussions. As Johnson (1995) points out, every participant in dialogue has their own "terms of reference" about the teacher, and their own "reading" of the teacher (p. 131). One of my aims is to investigate how student teachers 'read' their teachers in association with AOD within an initial teacher education context. I want to know what teacher education students expect of their online teachers.

I want to explore Salmon's (2003) claims that students have "very high" (p. 107) expectations of e-moderators, to the point of being "demanding" (p. 23), and, at times, even "unreasonable" (Salmon, 2011, p. 109). I am also interested in students' expectations of their peers. After all, if learning collaboratively involves students' active involvement in student-to-student interactions and teacher-to-student interactions, then it is also important to ascertain what students want from their peers as collaborators. Salmon suggests that experienced AOD participants can help newcomers. What advice do participants in our context have for newcomers? In what ways do teacher education students demonstrate AOD leadership? In what ways do they position themselves as teachers as well as learners?

Misaligning expectations between participants in AOD can be understood in terms of the theory of transactional distance. In this theory, there is a psychological and communicative space separating teachers and learners: this space is one of potential misunderstanding (Moore & Keegan, 1993). A similar concept is "relational distance" (Bender, 2003, p. 6), and further explicated in recent sociocultural theorising (Bell, 2011). She points out that:

> As the online teacher is usually separated in time and space from students, especially in asynchronous online communication, the relational distance between teacher and student becomes highlighted and in need of attention (p. 109).

Technology can either highlight or reduce this distance, as affordances mediate "relational connection" (Harms et al, 2010, p. 76). Rather than connecting, however, it seems that teachers and students may be 'talking past each other', a term first mooted in descriptions of what happens in a multicultural context (Metge & Kinloch, 1984).

In Metge and Kinloch's (1984) study of cross-cultural communication, parties misunderstand each other because they assume common understandings that are not in fact commonly understood. 'Talking past each other' means acting on the assumption that particular words and actions have the same meaning for both parties, when that may not be so. Because shared understandings are taken for granted, words and deeds are misread, responses are judged by recipients as inappropriate, and people then judge each other, often harshly, in light of their own partial perspectives. Furthermore, as Metge and Kinloch (1984) explain:

> because this happens below the level of conscious awareness they can go on making the same mistakes indefinitely, failing to connect, feeling irritated and confused, unless someone opens their eyes to what is happening (p. 9).

Ellsworth's (1997) focus on "mode of address" (p. 1) similarly explains power relations that position teachers and students in particular ways. According to Ellsworth (1997), "mode of address… shapes and misshapes who teachers think students are, and who students come to think themselves to be" (p. 6). When there is a gap or misfit between mode of address and response, this can be conceptualised as a space of difference, as in "the space of difference between a speaker's text and a

listener's response in dialogue" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 47). What is compelling about Ellsworth's explanation, however, is that while this space of difference highlights misunderstanding, the space can also be positively harnessed as a pedagogical resource.

Ellsworth considers that some pedagogies work because they offer students a particular position that they desire. Indeed, some pedagogies work because of the space of difference, and because the difference in address moves students to somewhere they want to be. This notion of relational spaces as pedagogical resources is useful for my study in three respects: Firstly, in recognising students' expectations of each other and their teachers to understand how they position themselves and others; secondly, in support of my interest in comparing student and teacher perspectives to explore the space of difference; and thirdly, because in a teacher education context moving the student to where they want to be is likely to position them as a teaching/learning partner and colleague. This context is examined more closely in the latter part of this chapter. To summarise, two key aspects of teaching and learning in AOD as a relational practice, are presence and positioning.

Communicative practice

The third aspect of theorising AOD as a sociocultural practice entails viewing it as a communicative practice. In relation to the space of difference in teacher/student relationships, the role of language and communication is an important piece of sociocultural theorising (Bell, 2011). A sociolinguistic perspective of AOD further illuminates interaction within asynchronous online discussion because it emphasises the need for commonly held understandings and shared meanings. Interaction within asynchronous online discussion can involve lecturers and students sharing and negotiating meaning about both the learning that has taken place, and the next learning steps to create a new ZPD. Language is used to construct commonly held understandings about learning, however as Metge and Kinloch (1984) argue, language can also be obstructive. There are clear links here with Rogoff's (1990) notion of intersubjectivity, since negotiating meaning in the process of arriving at shared understandings occurs through language.

Intersubjectivity is key to interactions within AOD. It emphasises that understanding happens *between* people (Bonk & King, 1998a; Rogoff, 1990). Meaning is negotiated when each party modifies their perspective in order to reach an understanding of others' perspectives (Ellsworth, 1997). Language is the medium for this growth. When learners adjust to collaborative and aware ways to communicate their ideas, acknowledging new perspectives amounts to greater understanding itself (i.e. learning), and is the basis for future growth (Rogoff, 1990). This is, however, by no means unproblematic, particularly in the context of asynchronous online discussion, given that the peculiarities of language-in-use within AOD can contribute to distortion of meaning between senders and recipients of messages online (Jacques & Salmon, 2007). The potential for distortion of meaning reminds us that meaning always assumes a subject, or someone who understands (Marton, 2000). This points to Ellsworth's (1997) space of difference, and to the Bakhtinian notion of addressivity: every utterance anticipates a response and implicitly replies to an earlier thought (Bakhtin, 1986; Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Herring, 1999; Locke, 2007).

Bakhtin's (1986) work might further be applied to this context, given his acknowledgement of social languages or discourses used by particular groups within given systems, at given times (Holquist, 1981; Locke, 2007). In a similar vein, in his discussion of semiotic apprenticeship, Nuthall (1997) defines genres in discourse as "ways of talking and interacting through symbols that are characteristic of a social role or active membership in an expert community" (p. 18). Asynchronous online discussions have their own genre, making interaction in this context and in terms of this genre, distinct.

Wells (1994) refers to formal and informal genres. Informal genres are used to negotiate goals and means, and to manage interpersonal interaction and relationships. Formal genres are used to represent, classify, interpret and explain. Interaction within asynchronous online discussion combines both informal and formal genres, so that the meaning of feedback and elements such as task, goals, and required action can be negotiated. In this way, online interaction is experienced as "dialogic" or "multi-

vocal" (Nuthall, 1997, p. 722) and open to being shaped by alternative interpretations. This means that I must attend to multiple perspectives and to remain open to various ways in which language has an impact on AOD interactions.

Language in AOD is not clear-cut. It does not smoothly align with more familiar genres of speaking or writing. Literature frequently characterises AOD as "between written and spoken words" on the speech-writing continuum (Collis & Moonen, 2007, p. 30; see also Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Yates, 1996). Functioning as "say-writing" (Wegerif, 1998, p. 3), or "written talk" (Locke & Daly, 2007, p. 122), AOD is described as "written, but spontaneous; ephemeral, yet preserved" (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011, pp. 91-92). While this affects the form of text, it also necessarily affects the ways participants interact and interpret what they read in AOD since "we listen by reading and talk by writing" (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 77).

Alongside comparisons with writing and speaking, AOD is typically viewed as lacking in social cues. This has implications for how participants communicate a sense of presence. For example, AOD is characterised as a lean medium with fewer channels for transmission than face-to-face communication (Herring, 1999; Locke & Daly, 2007). The lack of visual and intonation cues is frequently mentioned (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Hewitt, 2005). However, there is growing recognition that participants in AOD can compensate for reduced or filtered cues with a variety of strategies (Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Herring, 1999; Rourke et al, 1999). Compensating strategies include using social acknowledgements, paralinguistic emphasis (such as emoticons), personal vignettes or self-disclosure (Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Garrison & Anderson, 2003) to overcome this lack.

The challenge for participants in AOD is learning how to effectively use and learn from these compensating strategies. Some theorists suggest that this is tantamount to learning a new language with distinct local patterns and norms (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). For this reason, it is interesting to consider whether and how rules and conventions operate in relation to AOD in my study context. What characterises the dialect/s of AOD in initial teacher

education? How do participants experience communicative issues in AOD within my study context?

Bregman and Haythornthwaite (2003) found that students worried about making each presentation perfect when contributing to discussions. This attention to student concerns is consistent with my interests, and like Bregman and Haythornthwaite (2003), I aim to explore the challenges that students face when learning to communicate effectively in AOD.

There is growing awareness that "determining how to increase the effectiveness of students' online communication efforts is important" (Dennen & Wieland, 2007, p. 282). I suspect and hypothesise that one approach to helping participants to become more effective online communicators could be to lead students toward an understanding of what their peers and teachers expect of them within the AOD context. In particular, the perspectives and expectations of *peers* are important. As Dennen and Wieland (2007) point out, "students may need to be taught how to effectively write to their classmates on an online forum, with a focus on identifying peer readers as their audience" (p. 296). The need for participants to learn how to send and read online social cues is supported by Kehrwald (2008) and by Locke and Daly (2007). This is developed further in the later section on guidance.

Communitarian practice

Another aspect of a sociocultural view of learning is the "community focused perspective" (Nuthall, 1997, p. 700). In accordance with this perspective, an online class is viewed as a community of learners, or a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999), or a community of inquiry (Garrison et al, 2000). Learning occurs as people interact with each other in a communal activity (Nuthall, 1997). An example of this would be participation in asynchronous online discussions as a medium for learning.

The phrase "online learning communities" appears frequently in the literature (Salmon, 2000, p. 19; Hine, 2000, p. 19; Hramiak, 2010, p. 47; Palloff & Pratt, 2001,

p. 88). Within such communities, students and teachers interact to construct

knowledge as they:

> …work together to solve problems, argue about interpretations, negotiate meaning, or engage in other educational activities including coaching, modelling, and scaffolding of performance. While conferencing, the learner is electronically engaged in discussion and interaction with peers and experts in a process of social negotiation. Knowledge construction occurs when participants explore issues, take positions, discuss their positions in an argumentative format and reflect on and re-evaluate their positions (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995, p. 16).

The community-focused perspective is of particular relevance to online teacher

education, as this is a practice-oriented professional community (Salmon, 2000).

Within such a "community of professionals", practicing teachers provide guidance to

students (Cummings, Bonk & Jacobs, 2002, p. 11). This links to Rogoff's (1990)

notion of apprenticeship, and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development,

where shared problem-solving occurs as active learners work with more skilled

partners. Rogoff (1990) observes that:

> the apprenticeship model has the value of including more people than a single expert and a single novice; the apprenticeship system often involves a group of novices (peers) who serve as resources for one another in exploring the new domain and aiding and challenging one another. Among themselves, the novices are likely to differ usefully in expertise as well. The "master", or expert, is relatively more skilled than the novices, with a broader vision of the important features of the culturally valued activity. However, the expert too is still developing breadth and depth of skill and understanding in the process of carrying out the activity and guiding others in it. Hence the model provided by apprenticeship is one of active learners in a community of people who support, challenge, and guide novices as they increasingly participate in skilled, valued sociocultural activity (Rogoff, 1990, p. 39).

Rogoff, Matusov and White (1996) "propose a 'community of learners' involving

both active learners and more skilled partners who provide leadership and guidance"

(p. 388). In such a community, students collaborate with the teacher in intellectual

inquiry, and this includes helping to shape the learning agenda (Rogoff et al, 1996).

This implies that whether a discussion is online or face-to-face, the direction of a

discussion is often determined by where students wish to take it, even though teachers

have a learning intention in mind. Both students and teachers actively coordinate with

each other to contribute to the direction of the activity, potentially all providing

guidance and orientation (Rogoff et al, 1996). Rogoff's description of a classroom functioning as a community bears striking parallels to online discussion:

> The organization involves a community working together with all serving as resources to the others, with varying roles according to their understanding of the activity at hand and differing (and shifting) responsibilities in the system. The discourse is often conversational, in the sense that people build on each other's ideas on a common topic guided by the teacher's leadership (Rogoff et al, 1996, p. 397).

The notion of online communities is not without critics however. Some suggest that the level of commitment and responsibility of participants within online social formations is insufficient to constitute a community. They argue that online formations cannot be considered communities when participants can simply log out or turn off when they choose, or when many contacts are relatively brief and superficial (Hine, 2000; Westera & Sloep, 2001). However, within the confines of an online qualifications-oriented programme participants in a course cannot simply log out and go away without returning, as this would risk failing the course. With this in mind, I propose that online classes can indeed be real communities. Extended interactions within asynchronous online discussions raise the levels of interpersonal contact above the brief and superficial, and can transform classes into valid communities.

As Hardie (2002, p. 13) points out, "Interaction is at the heart of community", and:

> In teacher education it could be argued that a community of learners exists because the student teachers have come together for a common purpose, so there is the connection of intention and experiences to strengthen links of community.

Taking this argument one step further, if interaction and purpose are central to community, then it is certainly the case that interaction for the purpose of enhancing learning is central to a learning community. Thus, it is through interaction within asynchronous online discussion that learning communities can be built.

Building community is necessarily a democratic endeavour. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) link discussion to the promotion of democracy. They contend that:

Discussion is a way of talking that emphasizes the inclusion of the widest variety of perspectives and a self-critical willingness to change what we believe if convinced by the arguments of others (p. xvii).

The possibilities for democratic participation have also been considered in relation to the place of student voice and the need to consult with students as active participants in their learning. Studying AOD by exploring participant perspectives is an extension of this promotion of democracy. Participant perspectives will inform pedagogy. This is fundamentally democratic.

Contextualised learning

Context is key to sociocultural theorising as the context is crucial in making sense of a person's action and mind. Hew et al (2010) recommend future study of asynchronous online discussion involving different contextual elements, and my review of the literature suggests a need to attend to the context of AOD in initial (preservice) teacher education in New Zealand, and to explore learning and assessment as key contextual issues.

Initial teacher education

Preece (2000) and Salmon (2003) take a wider view of a range of community contexts like health and commerce. However, they touch upon education generally, rather than teacher education specifically. By implication, participants in AOD have different professional identities. This, I suspect, has implications for pedagogy. This is because Preece's moderators are somewhat distinct from my colleagues in teacher education. Both Preece and Salmon separate roles into developers and moderators, tending to regard moderators as tutors. These are sometimes volunteers in Preece's context, whilst Salmon's e-moderators are part-time tutors and often graduate students (Salmon, 2003).

In my study context however, the online teacher is not a volunteer or tutor, but a teacher educator. These staff are pedagogical academics, whose roles span research-informed teaching, academic decision-making, course design, moderation and assessment. Their students are preservice teachers, developing their own awareness of

pedagogy. These distinctions matter because there are implications for the expectations that participants must have. For example, Preece (2000) argues that moderators should suspend personal opinion when facilitating discussion, stepping aside to become a 'guide on the side', as opposed to the 'sage on the stage'. However, at issue here is the assumption that one must select from these two positions, occupying either the 'side' or the 'stage'. On the contrary, I contend that teachers can move from side to front and hover in between in accordance with responding to the needs of the students, the task and the pedagogical approach they consider most appropriate. In this respect, a compelling extension of the 'stage' metaphor is proposed by Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) who suggest that at times, teachers production manage off-stage, while learners step up to take the stage. In any case, my view is that suspending the personal is impossible, unrealistic and deceptive. By aiming or claiming to suspend the personal a teacher denies its role in building an effective online community. By the personal, I mean demonstrating an authentic online self. This helps address the space of difference (Ellsworth, 1997) and issues associated with presence. In turn, this helps students of teaching to accommodate and understand different positions, perspectives and pedagogies that assist learning.

Loughran (2006) focuses on pre-service teacher preparation. His key ideas are that in teacher education the spotlight is on pedagogy. He argues that teacher educators must make the tacit explicit in order to help student teachers to learn to be teachers. As part of this process, multiple perspectives and practices are unpacked to encourage, challenge or extend student thinking about pedagogy. Loughran (2006) draws our attention to the "pedagogy of teacher education" (p. 4), according to which:

> Not only must both teachers and students of teaching pay careful attention to the subject matter being taught, they must also simultaneously pay attention to the manner in which that knowledge is being taught; and both must overtly be embraced in a *pedagogy of teacher education* (p. 4. Italics in original)

This means students need to learn not only what is taught but also integrate and learn about the way it is being taught. As Loughran (2006) explains, this means there is a need to make the tacit knowledge of teaching explicit, since:

> if students of teaching are to genuinely "see into teaching", then they require access to the thoughts and actions that shape such practice; they need to be

able to see and hear the pedagogical reasoning that underpins the teaching that they are experiencing (p. 5)

This means that in order to make the tacit explicit, teacher educators need to articulate their pedagogy, including intentions, expectations, perspectives and experiences. In this way, the basis of decision-making is shared with student teachers, enabling them to understand the underpinning pedagogical reasoning. In return, this also means respecting student teachers' perspectives so that "dilemmas, issues and concerns of teaching and learning" are surfaced (Loughran, 2006, p. 17).

Loughran (2006) argues that we can learn more about teaching by learning how others see the same situation. In my study, this situation is AOD in ITE, and learning more about teachers' and students' experiences. Looking more deeply into what is happening by examining teachers' and students' perspectives, particularly with respect to learning and assessment, is key.

Learning and assessment

Learning and assessment are key contexts in the AOD-related literature. I discuss these issues together due to the element of learning contained in assessment, and due to the primacy of assessment for formative (learning) purposes as an aspect of pedagogy. My study does not purport to 'measure' student learning, however I expect that learning is at the heart of participant experiences and will be a topic for consideration when talking with students and teachers about their AOD perceptions and experiences.

For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the emphasis in the literature on deep learning, as opposed to surface learning. To build on previous discussion, deep learning is characterised by striving to understand, to make sense, and to learn actively, leading to conceptual development and change as a person (Ellis et al, 2008). As such, deep learning requires higher order cognitive processing, including critical thinking and self direction (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Deep learning entails learners coming to see things differently (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Holmes & Gardner, 2006; Loughran, 2006). For teachers and teacher education

students, Ben-Peretz and Kupferberg (2007) "define teachers' learning as gaining new insights into processes of teaching and learning" (p. 126).

It may be a challenge to measure or assess the extent to which students come to view teaching and learning differently, which could be why AOD assessment sometimes focuses more on surface features like quantifying participation rather than on the demonstration of deep learning. Assessment is often a contentious issue, not least because assessment can constrain students' participation and their enjoyment of discussion, inhibiting their expression of genuine views (Askell-Williams & Lawson, 2005; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Locke, 2007).

A common approach to AOD assessment is to grade for attendance and participation. For example, Arend (2007) notes the typicality of this approach and the reasoning behind it:

> Online, the instructor cannot tell whether the student is in attendance unless he or she is actively contributing something to the virtual class. As a result, online instructors grade for participation, typically between 10 and 25% of the course grade for discussion participation (p. 3).

Discussion is often graded on a weekly basis. This is designed to make students participate all the way through their course, much like taking a roll in a face-to-face class (Arend, 2007). Grading for participation is advocated by Earl and Cong (2011) on the grounds that students expect and appreciate receiving a participation grade. The Chinese students studying in a New Zealand context in their small study, indicated that they approve of awarding grades for discussion participation, and that a grade is useful for encouragement, is an incentive to participate, is motivating, provides feedback, and reassures them that a "teacher's requirements" have been met (Earl & Cong, 2011, p. 99). The authors conclude that since the students want a mark for discussion, they should receive one. However, I question whether providing a mark/grade for participating in an online discussion is the most pedagogically sound way to promote deep learning while meeting students' needs for rewards. For example, I wonder whether encouragement and feedback can occur by interacting formatively with other learners in discussions; and whether incentive and motivation

can be intrinsic to discussions rather than rewarded extrinsically (Forbes, 2005; Gikandi, Morrow & Davis, 2011).

Other authors take issue with grading participation. Hew and Cheung (2003) criticise the practice and consider it encourages students merely to post just for the sake of showing the teacher they have done so (Hew & Cheung, 2003). Hewitt (2005), also questions the value of posting to be seen:

> Rather than focusing on progressive, sustained knowledge advancement, learners may feel that their primary objective is to simply participate in the conference and to be seen participating. Grading schemes that require students to contribute a certain number of notes each week may reinforce this view (Hewitt, 2005, p. 584).

A number of critics therefore argue that grading participation in AOD weakens the potential for students to work as a learning community. According to Brookfield and Preskill (2005) for example:

> When discussion participation is graded it can easily undermine the quality of class exchanges, as the focus shifts away from developing shared understandings and toward making sure that individuals get full credit for what they say (p. 242).

In this way, the purpose of discussion is interpreted as meeting teachers' requirements, as students in Earl and Cong's (2011) study demonstrate. Garrison and Anderson (2003) highlight the student perspective, saying that:

> Omnipresent assessment may lead students to conclude that the discussion is a 'teacher tool' and not one which they may create and modify to meet their individual and group educational needs (p. 95)

Thus, Garrison and Anderson (2003) argue that such grading reduces student agency. This too links to the above argument about weakening potential online communities. If participation is graded, students come to see that participation is about posting to be seen, to meet the requirements of the teacher, and to gain an individual grade. This is at the expense of interacting within a learning community and contributing to the learning of others. Thus:

> Systems based on extrinsic rewards quickly turn moral obligation into acts of self-interest, and could potentially destroy the open provision of knowledge in a community (McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000, p. 170)

An alternative approach is to leave discussion ungraded. However, teachers may be reluctant to remove all assessment on the grounds that this can render AOD peripheral (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen, 2005; La Pointe, 2007). After all, as Garrison and Anderson (2003) recognise:

> Most students are practical adults with much competition for their time, thus they are unlikely to participate in activities that are marginalized or viewed as supplemental to the course goals and assessment schema (p. 96)

Since assessment influences both how students spend their time and the type of learning taking place, the challenge is to assess in such a way as to encourage deep as opposed to surface approaches to learning (Arend, 2007). While grading for participation arguably encourages 'going through the motions' or posting just to satisfy teachers' requirements (Hew & Cheung, 2003), a solution gaining popularity is to devise a separate assessment task that is contingent upon discussion, while leaving the discussion itself ungraded. The contingent task can take the form of a reflective self assessment portfolio in which students audit, analyse and quote their own contributions to discussion in order to present evidence of meaningful participation and subsequent learning (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Jetton, 2003).

With the above in mind, I am interested in exploring how teacher educators and student teachers approach assessment related to AOD, and whether/how assessment influences experiences of AOD. It is likely that a further influence on experiences may be the background of policy and provision for guidance related to learning and teaching through AOD.

Policy and guidance

A final element of the sociocultural context examined here is policy and guidance pertaining to AOD in the initial teacher education context. Preece (2000) calls for a moderation policy and guidelines for moderators and participants. This is a compelling idea, given the lack of policy and guidelines in my own institution, and the reported inconsistency of lecturers' approaches to moderation within my faculty (Donaghy et al, 2003). Exploring this now seems timely. Preece's view of policies as

a framework for socially evolving and participatory development is also appealing, as this is congruent with constructivist theorising of educational endeavours. That is, policies need not be rigid or static. They can develop and grow over time as participants co-construct ways of working. Moderation policies and guidelines provide a starting point. In this way, guidelines can operate as "liberating constraints", balancing flexibility with clear frameworks as part of responsive course design (McGrath, Mackey & Davis, 2008, p. 615).

Like Preece (2000), Bonk argues for AOD guides, in the form of clear expectations, rules and training (Bonk, 2004; Bonk & Dennen, 2003; Bonk & King, 1998a). However, Bonk (2004) refers to 'roles and guidelines' for staff on one hand, but to 'expectations and rules' for students on the other. Bonk (2004) considers it vital "that the instructor provide expectations for online students" (p. 99), as well as "provide rules for interaction" (p. 100). This positions students as having to be compliant rather than having agency. In initial teacher education, such inequitable positioning is inappropriate. I favour a more even approach, such as ascertaining students' expectations rather than imposing them. Bonk's (2004, p. 100) emphasis on "rules" is thus restrictive and I prefer Preece's (2000) use of guidelines as part of evolving participatory policy development in keeping with constructivist principles.

Along similar lines, I also question the emphasis on "training" rather than education evident in the work of Bonk and others. For example, Angeli, Valanides and Bonk (2003) assert that "instructors, mentors, or e-moderators must be well-trained to take full advantage of the affordances of any employed electronic conferencing system" (p. 42). Teacher educators may resist 'training' on the grounds that they are professional educators. Furthermore, approaches to training tend to imply that moderation is a technical task rather than a pedagogical process. Accordingly, I propose that moderation policies and guidelines should evolve and be negotiated. This would better inform the decision-making of professionals, and prompt research and inquiry befitting the roles of the academics involved. Quite simply, when we are working with professional teacher educators and academics, and our ITE students, we do not train them. Instead, we attempt to model, apprentice and provoke deep thinking through a sociocultural pedagogical framework.

Salmon's mission is to promote the training of e-moderators (Salmon, 2000; 2002; 2003; 2011). Whilst there is a shift in terminology from "training" to "development" of e-moderators by the third edition, the terminology reverts to recommendations about training beyond the chapter title. Since my colleagues are often very experienced online teachers, I don't wish to promote training, or re-training. Rather, I'd like to encourage a fresh look at our practice by endeavouring to engage more closely with students' perspectives, as well as those of experienced staff. As argued with respect to Bonk's work above, in the context of teacher education, training of e-moderators is a dead-end. Instead, an approach that raises questions for the teachers and prompts them to take steps to research and enhance their own practice is more suited to the people and situation at hand – that is, in the New Zealand initial teacher education AOD context.

Students may not already have skills associated with the online communicative competence discussed above (Ellis et al, 2008; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Locke & Daly, 2007; LaPointe, 2007). For example, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) caution that "teachers cannot expect that students are ready and willing to engage in discussion, much less able to do so" (p. 42). Similarly, as Thomas (2002) points out:

> the rich interactive discussion of the tutorial environment does not necessarily come naturally to students as they work in a virtual learning environment. The facilitation of discussion must be a focus of further research and the mechanisms by which instructors are able to assist groups of students in creating vibrant online discussion made explicit (p. 363).

For this reason, it is deemed necessary to provide guidance in the form of direct and explicit instruction about how to participate effectively in discussion (Askell-Williams & Lawson, 2005; Ellis et al, 2008; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Hew & Cheung, 2003). Some suggest modelling and sharing exemplary responses to demonstrate effective discussion (Fauske & Wade, 2003; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Evolving ground rules for students is also a popular suggestion (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). There are links here with an earlier point about the need to establish purpose and expectations in relation to AOD, as well as with the need to foster communicative competence (Locke & Daly, 2007). An

important issue is highlighted by Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011), who found that:

> While much attention is paid to the technological basis of e-learning, reports from students showed that not knowing what to post was a psychological barrier that needed to be addressed (p. 121)

I would like to investigate the extent to which this is a problem for students in our institution.

It is widely recognised that teachers may also require guidance in order to effectively mediate discussion (Blignaut & Trollip, 2003; Hew & Cheung, 2003; Hiltz et al, 2010; Salmon, 2000, 2003, 2011). While the literature is resounding in the call for guidelines, ground rules, and explicit instruction and guidance, there is not a clear-cut and consistent approach to this in my institution. When I started teaching online a decade ago, I received no guidelines or ground rules. I was fortunate to be mentored and guided by an experienced co-teacher. In relation to teaching courses online, in Tallent-Runnels et al's (2006) literature review, they concluded that few universities have AOD policies or guidelines for staff or students.

Overall, consideration of the literature in light of sociocultural theorising affirms the human and social dimensions of AOD. The literature suggests a need to determine the purpose of AOD from all participants' perspectives and to explore the complexities of presence in light of participants' experiences. The role of language and communicative competence in AOD needs exploring. It is likely to be pertinent to how discussion is experienced. Issues of learning and assessment are also pertinent. Attention to the challenges participants face can suggest practical implications for guidance in the ITE context.

Research Questions

Given the literature review in this chapter, the research questions to be explored in this study are:

- How do teacher educators and students in ITE experience AOD?
- What do the participants expect of each other?
- How can these participant perspectives inform pedagogy?

In order to examine experiences, expectations and perspectives, it is necessary to approach the study through a qualitative, interpretive lens, incorporating ethnographic and phenomenographic approaches. There is a synergy between the sociocultural perspectives outlined above and the intended methodology. The study probes participants' thinking, emotions, intentions and purposeful action in relation to AOD in initial teacher education (Bell, 2011). The methods employed aim to co-construct meaning between participants by supporting a social dynamic, via focus groups, interviews, and co-analysis with participants, as will be seen in the following chapters on methodology and data generation methods.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter explains the underpinning methodological theory and my positioning as the researcher. A philosophical basis for this study is explained in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology and ethics, in keeping with the research paradigm and the research design.

The research paradigm

The research sits within a qualitative interpretive paradigm. This is an established form of scholarship, challenging conventional models of positivist, quantitative and experimental research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Interpretivism looks at meanings that people make. It accepts the messy, partial and contradictory nature of the representations of lived experience (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Punch, 2009). Thus, while research in a positivist tradition would emphasise objectivity, my research values the subjectivity of multiple perspectives. Rather than claiming neutrality, an interpretivist stance dismisses this as impossible and undesirable, opting instead to disclose and value my role as a researcher. While experimental and statistical research strives to transcend and generalise, my study aims to situate and contextualise, employing what Lather (2003) characterizes as "interactive, contextualised methods which search for pattern and meaning rather than for prediction and control" (p. 192).

The qualitative-interpretive research paradigm is aligned with a constructivist ontological and epistemological standpoint, where realities are local, specific, social and experiential, and where knowledge is situated (Punch, 2009). Knowledge is subjective and active, individual and personal and based on previously constructed knowledge (Arlidge, 2000). Working within this paradigm, it is possible to derive a deeper understanding of interactions within asynchronous online discussions (AOD) by attending to discussions in the local context, and how the individuals involved in discussion perceive it. All of the aforementioned factors position the research as a sociocultural practice, since there is synergy between sociocultural theorising in the literature on education (see Bell, 2011), and the qualitative interpretive paradigm in the literature on research methods. This is because the focus of the study is on the

interactions of mind and action in context (Nuthall, 1997; Wertsch, 1991), in terms of participants' thinking, emotions, intentions and purposeful action (Bell, 2011). My intention has been to study the perspectives of participants in AOD, attending to meanings they ascribe to discussions and to the various ways they experience learning and teaching through discussion. The study is therefore situated and contextualised, informed by my experiences, and intent on co-constructing meaning between participants via methods that support a social dynamic, including focus groups, interviews, and co-analysis with participants.

The research design: Ethnography

My research design is aligned with ethnographic case study research. While teacher-researcher work often takes the form of action research, this project has not been cyclical, a key feature of action research, and does not seek to test theory. However, in common with action research, it is practice-related and participatory. In keeping with the qualitative, interpretive paradigm, my ethnographic approach seeks to understand asynchronous online discussion from the point of view of participants, on their terms, as far as possible (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Punch, 2009). Since ethnography is suited to investigating meaning making, uncovering assumptions, challenging generalisations, and "developing valid understanding of local situations in all their complexity" (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 282), this suits my focus. This approach is therefore entirely compatible with the paradigm and the subjective and contextualised character of my research endeavour, as discussed in the previous section. As Punch (2009) points out, ethnography:

> uses methods that are sensitive to the nature of the setting, and the primary aim is to describe what happens in the setting, and how the people involved see their own actions, others' actions and the context (p. 125).

Punch's view and my research intention are closely aligned.

Ethnographic case studies

Case studies are often used in conjunction with ethnography, since an ethnographic emphasis on interpretive, subjective, complex and contextualised dimensions is in turn congruent with a case study approach (Cohen et al, 2000; Creswell, 2005). Case

studies such as those in my study can be regarded as "Microethnography", since the focus is on small units of an organisation and on very specific organisational activity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 66). Case studies allow us to illuminate a particular situation in order to get a close understanding of it (Yin, 2006), and in particular to understand participants' perceptions of events, and their "lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation" (Cohen et al, 2000, pp. 182-3). Collective case studies, incorporating multiple cases, serve to strengthen findings due to the potential for cross-case analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2006). Cases replicate each other, producing confirmatory and contrasting illustrations, enabling a fuller picture of localised experience. In this way, case studies are useful where there is a need to discover important features, develop understanding and conceptualise for further study (Punch, 2009). Ethnographic case study approaches are appropriate to my study as they are aimed at theory generation, seeking to raise questions and to identify possibilities. Such possibilities arise from accessing others' perspectives via a phenomenographic approach.

Phenomenography

Phenomenography focuses on qualitatively describing different ways that people experience, perceive and approach particular tasks in relation to particular contexts. In education, a key intention is to understand relations between participants' experiences of teaching and learning, and the eventual aim to improve the quality of student learning (Prosser, 2000). Seminal research in the phenomenographic tradition asked questions about how students went about their study, what they focused on and were aware of, and how this related to course design (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Phenomenographic research emphasises "the special place of students' perceptions of their learning situation" (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 10), or the imperative to view "learning through the eyes of the learner" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 14). Phenomenographic researchers have also asked teachers how they approach their teaching, giving credence to self-reports of experience in order to gain insight into learning and teaching as it is experienced (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). It is thus the situation as *perceived* that is central to the quality of learning and teaching. This puts students and teachers and their experiences at the centre of efforts to improve learning

and teaching. Since my focus relates to perceptions and experiences, pheonomenography helps position my research. We all experience the world differently because our experience is always partial (Marton & Booth, 1997).

A less partial awareness is gained by gathering experiences as reported by multiple parties, from multiple perspectives. For example, Prosser & Trigwell (1999, p.11) ask "Do university teachers and learners experience learning and teaching situations in different ways, and if so, what are these different ways?" This question closely aligns with my focus, which is centred on the ways in which teacher educators and teacher education students experience asynchronous online discussion. Furthermore, I propose that participant perspectives can inform pedagogy and suggest ways to improve learning through AOD. Therefore, phenomenography resonates with my research intentions.

The explorative and interpretative character of phenomenography distinguishes it from a quantitative methodological tradition, while reflecting inspiration from hermeneutic, ethnographic and phenomenological methodological traditions (Svensson, 1997). In particular, phenomenology is the branch of philosophy to which some phenomenographers have looked for support (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). Others distinguish phenomenography from phenomenology on the grounds that phenomenographic methods are more flexible and adaptable to the specifics of the phenomenon and the situation under investigation. Phenomenographic methods are viewed as less prescriptive than phenomenology would dictate (Marton & Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997). In fact, pioneers like Svensson (1997) continue to encourage creation and adaptation of methods as a "problem-solving" approach (p. 162).

Theoretically, phenomenography represents a movement from positivist and objectivist to more subjectivist views, aligned with moderate realism (e.g., Aristotle) or perspectivism (Nietzche). While one might expect phenomenography to entail a relativist ontological position, key commentators espouse a moderate orientation toward the existence of reality. This means ontologically, "our world is a real world, but it is a described world, a world experienced by humans" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 113). This ontological stance is still compatible with the qualitative interpretive

paradigm since most qualitative research does not stem from a radical idealist stance, denying any external reality, but does emphasise that "reality comes to be understood to human beings only in the form in which it is perceived" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 26). Knowledge does not result from the observation of facts, nor is it constructed independently of reality. Rather, knowledge is relational – created through thinking about reality: the world cannot be separated from those who give it meaning (Marton & Booth, 1997). The non-dualistic ontological stance means that the phenomenon *can only be understood as it is experienced*, rather than defined independent of ways in which it is experienced or understood (Marton, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997; Rogoff, 1990). This ontological position correlates with an examination of online discussions since how the participants understand discussions constitutes or defines the discussion. It is also consistent with my critique of studies that purport to examine discussion by looking solely at postings rather than probing more deeply into the perspectives of the people who read and write the postings.

Epistemologically, coming to know is regarded as dependent upon context and perspective. There are no absolute or universal truths (Richardson, 1997). Rather, knowledge is meaning, and can be varied. Differences and similarities in meaning are derived from variations in ways of experiencing (Marton & Booth, 1997). In terms of evaluating the quality of knowledge or meaning, "certain ways of experiencing something are more complex or fuller than others. They spring from the simultaneous awareness of more parts or more aspects of the whole" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 113). The centrality of meaning to phenomenography is further underscored by the key aim of describing conceptions, whereby:

> Conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world, and in so doing, use those abstract representations to delimit something from, and relate it to, other aspects of our world. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world (Pratt, 1992, p. 204).

Accordingly, through our experiences we form conceptions, constructing meanings and understandings, and these in turn inform our ongoing experiences. In phenomenographic research, the intention is to find out how people experience,

conceptualise, perceive and understand a phenomenon. My study focuses on how teacher education staff and students experience, make sense of, conceptualise, perceive, understand, and act in asynchronous online discussion (AOD). In the developmental form of phenomenography, the intention is to effect change in order to improve learning. As Dall'Alba (2000) points out:

> As we come to better understand other ways of seeing or understanding, we are more likely to be able to develop our own ways of seeing…. As we identify students' and teachers' understandings we can determine where they can be developed. This provides a starting point for our attempts to bring about changes in ways of seeing or understanding (pp. 98-99).

The above quote links closely to my intention to become aware of new possibilities for understanding, so that these might inform subsequent praxis. So, developmental phenomenography is fundamentally practical in intent. As Trigwell (2000) notes, phenomenographic research is designed to "represent the complexity of educational settings and situations to produce meaningful and useful conclusions" (p. 65). This developmental intent is reflected in my study as I strive to represent the complexity of AOD in order to derive useful, practically-relevant conclusions as part of the newly created research knowledge.

A developmental phenomenographic method thus suits the purpose of my study since the ultimate aim is to generate insights that could be used to improve teaching and learning through AOD. This process starts with enhancing my own insight as I strive to look at AOD differently. The underpinning aims and intentions of the study are therefore in keeping with a phenomenographic research approach whereby "Learning is characterised as coming to experience things in distinctly new ways" (Booth & Hulten, 2003, p. 65). Phenomenography is an intuitively satisfying approach due to the congruence of the methodology and the everyday work of an academic engaged in teaching and learning. There is a good fit between the methodology and the pedagogy (Trigwell, 2000). Phenomenography is compatible with the scholarship of teaching and learning (see Prosser & Trigwell, 1999), which in turn resonates with the notion of teaching as inquiry embodied in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). As a teacher educator, phenomenography sheds light on what I

have been wondering about as I teach through AOD: That is, how do students and my colleagues experience this?

Lessons from previous studies of participants' experiences of online learning

In recent years, a small group of studies have applied a phenomenographic approach to participant experiences of online learning. For example in Sweden, Hulten and Booth (2002) analysed and described the experiences of industrial engineers' learning whilst participating in an inservice web-based course. Hulten and Booth (2002) applied a phenomenographic approach to considering how course participants went about their distance learning, what they learned in so doing, and how they related their learning to their practice. In a subsequent report, Booth and Hulten (2003) turned their attention to undergraduate engineering students and focused on the characteristics of their contributions to web-based discussion. This led to outlining implications for learning. In Australia, a number of recent studies grouped as phenomenographic explored student and staff perspectives regarding their learning and have very recently applied this approach to online discussions (Ellis et al, 2004; Ellis et al, 2006). In their 2004 study, Ellis and colleagues compared student and staff perspectives of both f2f and online discussions, investigating the congruence of staff and student approaches in terms of intention and strategy. Interestingly, students completed questionnaires, while staff were interviewed, and staff involvement was restricted to tutors rather than to lecturers or coordinators of the courses. This final point is significant since the researchers had to resort to asking the tutors to infer their subject coordinator's purpose and learning intentions for the discussions. In my study, I will build upon this by involving staff participants inclusive of the full academic spectrum from Senior Tutors, Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors and Professors, and Coordinators of classes in which discussion occurs.

More locally and recently, at around the same time as my study, Gerbic (2010), working in a NZ university, used a qualitative case study approach in order to study student perspectives on online discussion, and particularly how these contrasted and compared with face-to-face discussions. In Gerbic's study, individual interviews were

the main source of student views about the online and f2f discussion environments. As Gerbic (2010) describes the method:

> An in-depth approach was used in order to develop a deep understanding of their perspectives and included conversations about how they liked to learn, how they participated in online and class discussions, the differences and similarities between them and the relationships of the online discussions to the face-to-face elements of the course. The interviews lasted for 45–60 min and students could refer to an archive of their debate message postings on a laptop screen (p. 129).

This methodology is compelling, since Gerbic's aims were congruent with mine. We both sought student perspectives. As in Gerbic's study, I conducted interviews to develop a deep understanding of participants' perspectives, viewing postings during the interview. In contrast with Gerbic's study, however, my study includes staff perspectives in addition to those of students. In order to generate more in-depth data, I also began with focus groups (f2f and online) in addition to individual interviews, and conducted three separate 45 minute interviews with each staff member and student, leading to more in-depth and longitudinal data than a single 45-60 minute conversation might yield (see Chapter Five for further details). Like Gerbic, Ellis et al (2006) also conducted a single interview with students, but of even shorter duration at only 30 minutes. It would therefore seem that there is room to use a series of substantial interviews over time to add to the existing shorter term methods as demonstrated in Ellis et al (2006) and Gerbic's (2010) work. I contend that more detailed and iterative conversations are significant because these elicited more in-depth data encompassing general views of discussion, experience with discussion, current happenings in discussion and retrospective consideration of a recent discussion. The time spent on the interviews was intended to develop rapport, revisit earlier ideas, and check emerging findings with participants. This crucially allowed for the co-analysis of discussions with participants.

While Booth, Hulten, and Gerbic looked at student perspectives, Ellis et al (2004, 2006), Roberts (2003) and Kember & Kwan (2000) considered the perspectives of university staff teaching via the Web. However, the university teachers in these previous studies were not teacher educators, but rather taught in commerce-related areas such as economics, marketing and management in Roberts' (2003) case; and in

engineering, social work and health in Ellis et al (2004, 2006), and Kember and Kwan's (2000) case; just as the students in Booth and Hulten's studies were engineers (Hulten & Booth, 2002; Booth & Hulten, 2003); and those in Gerbic's (2010) study were enrolled in a business studies course. While these studies are relevant for comparing aspects of perspectives and learning and teaching through AOD, I contend that examination of student and staff perspectives in a teacher education context opens up a new range of possibilities, and stands apart from reflections on teaching and learning outside of teacher education. This is because teacher educators hold formal teaching qualifications in addition to higher degrees as academics, having qualified as teachers (rather than scientists or economists). They also have experience in the formal schooling sector where that pedagogical knowledge helps learners. Thus, teacher educators have necessarily studied teaching, learning and pedagogy explicitly in the course of their professional lives. Parallel to this, students in teacher education are student-teachers, engaged in study about the stuff of teaching, learning and pedagogy. For staff and students in teacher education, pedagogy is both a means and an end, a product and process. It is the subject of study even while it is demonstrated and modeled in the course of study (Loughran, 2006). For these reasons, we can hypothesise that teacher educators and student-teachers may exhibit more detailed thinking about pedagogy than students and staff in other fields of study in a university.

In light of this comparison with similar studies in Sweden, Australia and New Zealand, it is evident that my study makes a contribution to the field by involving a range of staff in focus groups, as well as eliciting student and staff perspectives via a series of in-depth interviews strategically timed to promote reflection before, during and after an episode of discussion. Finally, the examination of teaching and learning through AOD in teacher education is significant, given the arguably heightened awareness of pedagogy in this context and the need to model effective pedagogy to preservice teachers.

Position of the researcher

My personal experience of learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion was a driving force in this research study. I am unavoidably "connected and involved" as a teacher, co-learner, teacher-educator and researcher (Taber & Student, 2003, p. 43). The qualitative interpretive paradigm acknowledges and values my personal involvement as a researcher, since my empathy and sincere attempts to understand the perspectives of participants make me a key research instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al, 2000). In light of this involvement, it is important to take a reflexive stance, giving consideration to how participants positioned me in the research, and in turn to articulate my view of our research relationships.

There is a relationship between me, as a researcher, and the research participants. This relationship is not objective and distanced, but rather like a partnership, one that is built on mutual respect and trust, mutual exchange, privacy, confidentiality, and negotiating aspects of the research processes, strategies and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Data generation occurs as participants and I interact during focus groups (face-to-face and online) and interviews. This means that I am part of the context through which the findings emerge, part of the social dynamic characterising the methodology. As I strive to represent participant perspectives in terms of phenomenographic and ethnographic design, I am mindful that my own perspectives are intertwined with participants' as I draw on my own knowledge while making sense of participants' contributions. My professional life, prior knowledge and experiences of AOD are embedded in this, along with the meanings I bring to the situation. The study participants, aware of my position as a lecturer/online teacher, (and in all probability my reputation as a passionate online learning enthusiast), were probably influenced by this, affecting how and what they revealed to me. This means I could not be regarded as neutral or objective (Lather, 2003).

Accordingly, as a colleague of the participant lecturers, I enjoyed positive elements of collegiality as the staff supported me in my doctoral journey and in my research endeavours generally. This linked to high attendance at the face-to-face focus group

sessions with staff, and recruitment of two case study staff volunteers. At the same time, however, staff also reported the need to prioritise their own research, and some admitted a reticence to expose their ideas and practices to scrutiny in an online forum, where their written comments would persist long after posting. These latter factors may have influenced the reluctance of staff to become involved in the *online* focus group in particular.

With student participants, one might expect a differential in power given my status as a lecturer. However, to some extent this is likely to have been balanced by the fact that I am a similar age to the student participants and identify with them as a working parent, fellow student, and fellow online learner with insight into AOD. Some student comments suggested I was viewed as an ally or advocate who could represent their concerns to staff.

For my part, I relate to Taber's expressed gratitude to participants (Taber & Student, 2003), as I am grateful that the participants in the study shared their perspectives with me, giving up valuable time to do so. I am confident that the experience was worthwhile for all parties since there is an element of reciprocity to the research relationship with each party gaining value from taking part, as Taber and Student (2003) also discovered. That is, the students and staff alike enjoyed the opportunities to reflect and to share their thinking and practice with others, via the focus group discussions and individual interviews, my data generation methods.

By acknowledging and valuing subjectivity and my own stance in the research, this interpretive study aims to move beyond what Harraway (2003) terms "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (p. 27). Harraway's (2003) alternative is to claim "the privilege of partial perspective" (p. 21). In doing so, I acknowledge that I must take a position in order to see, and that from my vantage point, my knowledge is necessarily partial. I can strive to make this knowledge more complete by enriching it through a greater awareness of others' perspectives, but may be hampered by my own partial perspective.

I acknowledge my own positioning by relating some of my own experience with online discussion, including my own struggles and insights. I also acknowledge my position by explicitly locating myself as a lecturer in my own workplace with colleagues and students within the same programme. My own interpretations and actions were journaled throughout the period of research, and these entries are a data source beside other participants' views. I am thus an insider-researcher, aiming to enrich, extend and restructure my partial understanding, while acknowledging that the results will still be partial. Despite my partiality, this process and my insights are worth sharing in order to inform the journeys and to interact with the perspectives of others. To use Halse & Honey's (2010) phrase, the aim is to "make visible, and therefore revisable" (p. 136).

Ethical considerations

Throughout this research process, it is of course vital to behave ethically. It is crucial to ensure the research entails no harm to participants, and their welfare is safeguarded (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Cohen et al, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Punch, 2009). With this in mind, key ethical issues included: the potential for conflicts of interest; gaining informed consent from all participants; respecting their right of withdrawal; ensuring their privacy and confidentiality as far as possible, with full disclosure of the limits to which privacy and confidentiality can be assured when the Internet is used as a site for research (James & Busher, 2007).

Conflicts of interest

In relation to my position as researcher, discussed in the previous section, it is important to acknowledge the potential for conflicts of interest. My position as a lecturer in the same programme as the study participants is a potential problem due to the possibility of power differentials and relationship issues. For example, some participants may have felt compelled to contribute to the research in order to please or influence me. It is difficult to entirely eliminate this problem, however risks were minimised by adopting the practices of invitation and enabling choice, particularly with respect to access to participants. That is, I issued invitations to staff and students

to participate in the study, then left the decision to participate to the individual volunteer, without further solicitation. In a formal sense, the power differentials were mitigated by the fact that I did not hold any middle management or staff appraisal role within the institution. Case study staff were intentionally colleagues with whom I do not directly teach, as we were employed in different academic departments, albeit within the same faculty. Two of the students joining the online focus group, however, were enrolled as students in a class I taught at the time. It was therefore necessary to arrange an alternative marker for the students' work, in accordance with ethical procedures. This was accomplished with the cooperation of a colleague teaching the same class. I did not mark the work of any student involved in contributing to this study during the data generation phase.

Informed consent

Fundamental to research ethics is the principle of informed consent, according to which research participants should receive a fair explanation of the purpose and procedures involved in the study, with disclosure of potential risks and benefits, the limits to confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the research (Cohen et al, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). To this end, an Information Sheet (See Appendix 3) was provided to all staff and students, outlining the aims of the study, data generation methods, and highlighting considerations such as time commitment, right of withdrawal, conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and benefits to participants. In addition, separate consent forms were used for each method of data generation – f2f focus groups with staff (Consent A, Appendix 4); online focus groups with staff (Consent B, Appendix 5) and students (Consent C, Appendix 6); archiving of online discussion (Consent D, Appendix 7); and individual semi-structured interviews with staff (Consent E, Appendix 8) and students (Consent F, Appendix 9).

With respect to right of withdrawal, staff and students were advised of their right to withdraw from the study during the data generation phase. Participants were however advised that data collected via online focus groups would remain part of the analysis, due to the disruption caused by deleting segments of discussion. Participants could still withdraw from the focus group by simply discontinuing postings to the focus

group forum, or a participant could request removal from the access list to the Moodle forum. While some participants did discontinue postings to the staff online focus group in particular, no participant requested formal withdrawal or removal of access from the forum, or from the study at any point. All participants signed the relevant consent forms (A-F, Appendices 4-9), including every student in classes where discussion was archived.

Privacy

There is an ethical responsibility to respect and protect the privacy of participants (James & Busher, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Where the identities of the participants are known to the researcher, the research cannot promise anonymity. Instead, the ethical respect relies on trust and on ensuring that the dignity and decision making powers of the participants are safeguarded. Participants were invited to nominate a venue used for individual face-to-face interviews. In doing so, they determined the time and circumstances under which information was shared or withheld, thereby controlling their privacy and comfort (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Most students invited me into their homes, thereby demonstrating considerable openness. One student elected to be interviewed at her base school rather than home, suggesting that this location was more convenient for her. Another student was interviewed over the telephone, as she is located in another part of the country. She advised the time and day I should telephone her. The staff members preferred to meet in my office, in order to avoid the interruptions which may have occurred in their own environments.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means protecting the identity of participants, by avoiding disclosure of information that could enable others to identify them (Cohen et al, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Where the research design compromises confidentiality, there is a need to be open with participants about the limits to safeguards, so that their decision to take part is fully informed. There are limits to confidentiality when, in studies like mine, participants in focus groups know the identities of fellow-

participants; and where rich case study data may make participants recognisable to insiders in an organisation. For these reasons, confidentiality was raised firstly in relation to the focus group conversations, face-to-face and online, where participants were reminded to keep the discussions confidential to those within the group. This is a particular concern online, however, since although the Moodle forums are password protected, directly accessible only to enrolled students and to staff teaching in a paper, there is no safeguard against 'backseat browsers' or those who may look over a participant's shoulder when s/he is logged into an online discussion. Thus, although any participant in a f2f or online focus group (OFG) could report focus group conversation to outsiders, and agreement was made not to do so, only in an OFG could the participant potentially breach confidence by inviting someone into the research space to eavesdrop first-hand. For this reason, the ethical responsibilities are more complex online. Participants were therefore reminded about confidentiality and the responsibilities thus entailed, with signed agreement obtained via consent forms B and C (See Appendices 5 and 6).

In relation to online research, James and Busher (2007) for example, cite establishing authenticity online as an ethical challenge, particularly in relation to the identities expressed online. In the context of an online focus group involving either students or staff, however, identity is continuous with the usual identity assumed in class discussion. As mentioned, institutional usernames and passwords are used to access the online environment, and there is no anonymity of participants in the forum. However, looking more deeply at the functional form of identity, it is likely that students would feel more comfortable with the online focus group format since they are well used to discussing their ideas online with peers within online classes, and may enjoy greater freedom of expression without the constraints of course requirements. In contrast, however, the online focus group may have challenged staff since colleagues do not often discuss their pedagogy with other staff in an online setting. It could be that this method opens the professional identities of staff to scrutiny in an unusual way. For this reason, the face-to-face focus groups were intended to involve staff in more familiar discussion and to invite further involvement from those interested in taking part online.

A further aspect of confidentiality relates to the need to store data securely so that it is confidential to the research participants. This was accomplished for the most part, by establishing designated research spaces in Moodle, accessible only by research participants, although technical staff also had access, as per institutional protocols. I controlled the access by making the online research space unavailable to participants shortly after the online focus groups closed. Other data, in the form of audio recordings of individual interviews, was confidential to one transcribing assistant and me. All transcripts have been stored securely. Individual interviews were shared only with the participants concerned. I transcribed the face-to-face focus groups, and did not share the recordings or transcripts with any other person. As such, data was as secure as practicable.

Fundamentally, my ethical approach entailed creating and maintaining respectful relationships with participants, with openness and honesty as guiding principles. As part of this, Lincoln and Guba (2003) reinforce the need to consider whose agendas are served by the research. With this in mind, doctoral research primarily serves the agenda of the candidate and this is true of mine. Nevertheless, beyond this, my aim of improving insight into how participants experience AOD is an agenda to share with students and staff alike. The interest in multiple perspectives is key to the integrity of the research.

Quality assurance

In keeping with the qualitative interpretive paradigm, the research aimed to maximize validity as data credibility, and trustworthiness of the researcher as fundamental to quality assurance. There are limits to generalisability due to the local and contextual character of the study, again compatible with the emphasis on multiple perspectives and experiences befitting the paradigm.

Credibility of data

Care was taken to ensure credibility or trustworthiness of data via the research design by seeking diversity in sources and methods (Lather, 2003). The mechanisms by

which credibility is assured include building comparative case studies into the research design, in order to invite disconfirmation. The research design seeks counterpatterns as well as convergences, by including contrary or negative cases and probing for discrepant evidence (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Lather, 2003; Maxwell, 2010). In order to promote this form of triangulation, the focus groups included staff and students who were less favourably disposed toward AOD. In addition, there was a mix of gender and of staff experience. Despite this mix, however, my study does not purport to provide an exhaustive or representative range of conceptions or outcomes, since the voluntary nature of participation, according to which participants opted in to the research, meant that I was faced with accepting any who volunteered. It is highly likely that students and staff who volunteered for participation in a study concerned with asynchronous online discussion will be those who are more interested in or even more conscientious about, or perhaps favourably disposed toward AOD. Mindful of this likelihood from the outset, I was receptive to a few 'wild card' participants in the study. For example, when recruiting student participants via the online focus group, a student mentioned a peer who apparently disliked AOD, and who therefore could contribute a divergent stance. In the midst of the student interviews, another student withdrew from the teacher education course, but agreed to continue with the interview series, which also diversified the potential viewpoints available (by including an ex-student with a different experience of the course). And it was fortunate that one of the participants was male, given that most of the students in the course are female. In addition to student participants, there was a deliberate attempt to encourage as diverse a group of staff as possible to contribute – via the timing of the focus groups, and the decision to hold two face-to-face sessions. Again, one staff member stated a dislike of online teaching, while another stated a preference for synchronous communication, thus ensuring wider perspectives on AOD. Participants were frequently reminded of the focus on genuine personal perspectives.

Data credibility was also behind the strategy to keep interviews (both focus group and individual) deliberately open so as to elicit participants' own thinking on issues. In order to preserve validity, my thesis quotes from verbatim transcripts (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Maxwell, 2010). This is intended to ensure that categories or key

messages also preserve the images of their experience (Charmaz, 2010). While these are important measures from a methodological vantage point, they are also of ethical importance due to the imperative to value participants by enabling their voices to be heard (Taber & Student, 2003). Accordingly, the research design incorporated member checks or respondent validation in order to secure face validity (Lather, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Credible data strengthen validity if the research succeeds in its goal to represent multiple perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Seale, 2003). In turn, sharing these perspectives among participants, for example via focus group discussions, can help participants to appreciate the views of others, leading to a form of educative authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To the extent that the research stands to stimulate insight and action, it has a degree of catalytic validity, as participants are encouraged to reflect on their own learning and teaching, providing an opportunity (or catalyst) for growth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lather, 2003).

Trustworthiness

Just as my research design invited participants to reflect, there was also a systematic approach to my own reflexivity via a journal detailing the process, decision making, and how my assumptions were challenged by research data. In this way, I documented my own perspectives in order to "bracket" these (Walsh, 2000, p. 30), increasing transparency and reducing my potential researcher bias. At the same time, I recognised that this bias can never be eliminated since my own partial perspectives are integral to the work.

There are suggestions that multiple researchers may be required for phenomenographic research. Phenomenographers, such as Bowden (2000b) and Walsh (2000), question whether valid studies can be conducted by individual researchers. They argue that this is because of the need to check and to stimulate more thorough analysis. Involving a team of researchers is a way to regularly challenge assumptions and preconceptions, since:

the lone researcher may find it difficult to bracket his or her own perceptions when reading the data and developing a description of the categories. However, where a lone researcher makes explicit his or her input into the analysis and allows other researchers to check, test and probe the initial results, such bias can be overcome (Walsh, 2000, p. 30).

Three researchers, for example, were involved in the process in Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser and O'Hara's (2006) study, just as Ferry, Kiggins, Hoban and Lockyer (2000) used peer review within their research team. In my case, the individual nature of doctoral study makes such peer review difficult, so instead "participant review or member checking" was accomplished by returning to the interview participants with the initial set of key messages (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 405). Such checking is rare in phenomenography, where transcripts of interviews are usually taken as the only evidence of participants' understandings. In my case, the transcripts were all checked with the students and staff to prompt further comment and feedback. Patrick (2000, p. 133) also used this approach in a "quasi-phenomenographic" doctoral study. Supervisors were also consulted about the findings at several stages. It is not possible to remove the influence of the idiosyncratic views of researchers. Instead, I fully accept the partial and insider nature of my role. However, my aim of interacting with the ideas of others has been achieved.

Researcher-bias is of course a key criticism of phenomenography, in common with many other qualitative approaches. In particular, critics of phenomenography argue that when researchers categorise data, participants' voices can be silenced (Bowden, 2000a). Walsh (2000) questions whether categories emerge or whether they are constructed by the researcher. It seems to me that categorisation or construction of meaning, and sifting through data to produce findings, interpretations and conclusions is a necessary part of qualitative research. If researchers do not categorise, an alternative may be to ask the interviewees to do so. However, this turns them into researchers and criticisms of their categorisation can just as readily be applied. Instead, I have compromised by checking my transcripts and initial attempts to draw out key messages with the participants. My attempt at co-analysis with research participants is designed to strengthen validity and to preserve the participants' voices. Therefore I argue that the researcher is part of the relationship, along with the

interviewee and the phenomenon under investigation (Schwandt, 1997). The viewpoints interact and the triangular relationship should be acknowledged. This is co-construction, not purely discovery or construction by the researcher alone.

Overall, the strengths of the research in terms of validity, credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness are: the attention to multiple perspectives and experiences of the participants; the checking with participants and their involvement in co-analysis; the triangulation of case studies, data sources and methods; my systematic reflections and the opportunities for participants to reflect, with potential impact on the participants' own work.

Generalisability

Finally, in keeping with the sociocultural underpinnings and the qualitative interpretive paradigm, generalisability is necessarily limited due to the local, contextualised, and experiential nature of the study. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) remind us, "It is multiple realities rather than a single reality that concern the qualitative researcher" (p. 30). In view of this, it would be odd to insist on generalisation given that I am concerned with multiple perspectives which are partial and context-bound. Accordingly, I do not expect findings from one context to neatly map onto another, but hope instead to stimulate generation of emergent patterns in alternative contexts. While some of the more abstract concepts and propositions developed here may apply to other similar contexts, I contend that it is the questions raised, methods employed and issues explored that stand to inform work in other settings. Just as I have endeavoured to see differently, I invite my fellow researchers and educators to view the findings of this study in light of their own experiences and those of their students. Researchers may choose to apply some of the questions in alternative contexts while educators may work with students to negotiate the applicability of my findings to their particular situations. If the findings raise questions and prompt further investigations in diverse contexts, this is positive. This is all the more valuable if the findings prompt awareness of the importance of contextual influences, since:

By becoming aware of the possibility of a variation in ways of experiencing a phenomenon and by considering that variation, one becomes open to the possibility of change (Booth, 1997, p. 137).

My intention is to share with students and staff an account of their own meanings and understandings as well as some alternative conceptions in the hope that this has a liberating effect, contributing to a foundation for further development of teaching and learning through discussion.

Chapter Five: Methods of Data Generation

This chapter explains the methods involved in the research, and recounts the practical decisions made throughout the process along with relevant reasoning, challenges and moments of serendipity.

The research design incorporated case studies of staff and students working online within teacher education at the University of Waikato School of Education (now 'Faculty'). Data generation occurred during a single semester (Semester A, 2008), commencing with face-to-face focus groups with sixteen staff members. Originally one focus group was planned, but the number of volunteer staff necessitated two group meetings. The staff were then invited online to continue an asynchronous online focus group within Moodle. Two staff case study volunteers were sought and found, and each of these staff nominated a class for the case study. Each class was asked for permission to archive a week-long online discussion for analysis, and a notice was posted in each class requesting student volunteers for an online focus group, and for individual interviews.

As a small-scale study, this "microethnography" incorporates case studies with small units of the organisation and very specific organisational activity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 66). Specifically, the cases studies involved teaching staff and students in Initial Teacher Education, and focused very specifically on the asynchronous online discussion as a learning and teaching activity. The in-depth work involved in an ethnographic case study design entails a small sample size (Cohen et al, 2000). A selective, non-probability sample is the usual strategy, where the sample "seeks only to represent itself or instances of itself in a similar population, rather than attempting to represent the whole, undifferentiated population" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 102). Convenience or opportunity sampling involved recruiting student and staff volunteers, and a degree of balance was achieved through negative case sampling by involving at least one student and staff member who claimed to dislike AOD. Focus groups (face-to-face and online) were used in part as recruitment tools, as a precursor to the case studies. An overview of the methods is shown in Table 2, to follow:

Table 2: Summary of data generation timetable

Participants	F2F Focus Groups	Online Focus Groups	Individual Interviews	Interview 1 Date (2008)	Interview 2 Date (2008)	Interview 3 Date (2008)
Staff	FG1 7 staff 68 mins 13/2	13/2 – 13/5 13 weeks 15 staff	Elizabeth Staff 1	10/3	13/5	6/6
	FG2 9 staff 73 mins 19/2		Maxine Staff 2	2/5	19/5	4/6
Students	NIL (students at a distance)	2/4 – 10/8 18 weeks 12 students	Jacqui Stu 1	22/4	15/5	26/6
			Sarah Stu 2	15/4	15/5	26/6
			Don Stu 3	21/4	16/5	9/6
			Dana Stu 4	1/5	15/5	16/6
			Nina Stu 5	22/4	19/5	17/6
			Tia Stu 6	21/4	16/5	23/6
			Tarryn Stu 7	18/4	16/5	16/6

Note – all names used are pseudonyms. Pseudonyms for case study staff and students are provided above. That is, the two staff members and seven students who were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Other staff and students who participated in focus groups, but not interviews, are referred to in this report of the data by an initial or other short confidential identifier. In terms of coding verbatim quotations from participants, the following examples are intended to clarify the identifiers used in this research report:

- Ji, staff, FG1 = pseudonym of a staff member in the first face-to-face focus group
- P, staff, FG2 = pseudonym of a staff member in the second face-to-face focus group
- W, staff OFG, week 3, ref 1 = pseudonym of a staff member in the staff online focus group, during the third week of discussion in the Moodle forum, at posting reference 1 in the forum.
- Mei, stu OFG, week 2, ref 2 = pseudonym of a student in the student online focus group, during the second week of discussion in the Moodle forum, at posting reference 2 in the forum.
- Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2 = the first case study staff member, during the second interview of three.
- Nina, stu 5, i/v 1 = case study student, as listed in the chart above, during the first interview of three.

Each of the data generation methods is now discussed in turn.

Face-to-face focus groups

Face-to-face (f2f) focus groups were used at the start of data generation, as a complementary method and precursor to semi-structured interviews with case study volunteers. According to Williams and Robson (2004):

> The main premise of the focus group, and what distinguishes it from other forms of qualitative interviewing, is its ability to tap into the meanings, processes, and normative understandings behind a group's assessments and collective judgments. Therefore, the method can be employed to gather data from most social groups in which there is a general understanding of a social issue or phenomenon that is under investigation (p. 26).

As Morgan (2004) notes, focus groups can be good for studying knowledge, attitudes and practices, while Punch (2009) finds they "can also stimulate people in making explicit their views, perceptions, motives and reasons" (p. 147). As such, the focus group method is compatible with the fundamental aims of this study, and with sociocultural recognition of the power of group experiences and the social dynamic in meaning making. That is, the focus group participants talked together, questioned each other and built upon one another's ideas. Since I used an interview guide

protocol to moderate the focus group, these group interviews piloted the interview schedule prior to individual semi-structured interviews. Beyond the planned direction, focus groups also served to open up new possibilities for discussion rather than constraining the agenda too tightly at the start of the data collection phase. This is because "the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge - the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 288).

These characteristics made focus groups useful for identifying initial perceptions about learning through asynchronous online discussion, and also served to generate sufficient staff interest in the research to elicit two staff case study volunteers for follow-up interviews. Two 90 minute focus group sessions were recorded using a digital voice recorder, accompanied by two microphones on tripods. Participants for the staff focus groups were 'shoulder-tapped'. I personally approached colleagues with a known interest in online teaching and learning, inviting them to take part in this. Staff were also invited more generally via an email around the School of Education. As a result, eighteen staff participants agreed to take part, necessitating two separate focus groups – seven staff participated in the first, and nine participated in the second. Only one staff member was absent in each focus group, so the response was high. Staff returned a consent form (Consent A, Appendix 4) to indicate their agreement to participate in the project, as part of either the f2f focus group, the online focus group (Consent B, Appendix 5), or both. There were no technical hitches, and staff talked freely, representing diversity in experience, backgrounds, programmes and views. The first focus group generated a 68 minute recording, while the second generated 73 minutes. Careful attention was given to recording, and backing up of files. Three of the participants registered to continue online. Thank you emails were sent to all participants in the focus groups.

Online Focus Groups (OFG)

While face-to-face focus group sessions were held with staff at the outset of data generation, this was followed by 13 weeks of online focus group discussions (OFG).

The use of "asynchronous online focus groups" is discussed by Williams and Robson (2004, p. 25), as well as by Mann and Stewart (2000, 2004), who note that their use in academic research has so far been limited, and that little has been written about the method. Research methods employed in the study of online phenomena have more commonly been computer-administered questionnaires, sometimes followed up with interviews, or covert observation of online interactions. In Williams and Robson's (2004) view, "the slow development of online focus groups in academic research has been a surprising missed opportunity" (p. 27).

I decided that combining both online and face-to-face interaction was useful for generating multiple perspectives (Hine, 2000). Beginning face-to-face with staff enabled them to express their initial views. To some extent, this provided a 'kick-start' to the continuing interaction online. Shifting the focus group online was intended to cater for their busy timetables and variable schedules, as well as their geographic dispersal at various times of the semester. In addition, the online focus group approach was intended to capitalise on the participants' familiarity with the processes and technologies involved in asynchronous online discussion, since these staff already taught online. So, with online focus groups for both staff and students, the intention was to capture the benefits of asynchronicity for reflective interaction, a key premise of this study. In effect, the asynchronous online focus groups constituted a meta-discussion: a discussion about discussion.

Staff Online Focus Group – 13 Feb-13 May (13 weeks)

The online staff focus group commenced the day after the first staff face-to-face (f2f) focus group. Having established the focus group space in Moodle, I gave staff access when they had filled in and returned a consent form (Consent B, Appendix 5). The Moodle space included a section with suggestions for managing discussion contributions, highlighting manageability and momentum. I used key themes from the first staff f2f focus group to generate an online discussion starter. I crafted a starter to function as an easy entry point to introduce the online FG (i.e. something everyone could comment on without putting themselves out there too much), but also contained a challenge with regard to outlining differences between online and f2f. This was intended to be a little more contentious, enabling those present at the f2f focus group

to subsequently build on ideas there. I hoped to balance ease of entry with stimulation in the first week. I then posted an introduction to the staff online focus group inviting them to 'talk' online. All received an email reminder because I had enforced their email subscriptions to this feature, hereafter referred to as NewsForum.

While 16 staff readily took part in the f2f focus groups, they were more reticent to do so online. For the most part, staff expressed a concern about lack of time. Many reported that they were struggling with workload, including for some, their own doctoral studies. In casual conversation, staff would apologise for their inability to contribute to the online focus group, and explain their concern that they would not be able to contribute regularly. Staff commented that they held back from joining the focus group as they felt they would not be able to do justice to this.

The online focus group commenced on the 13th of February (2008), and comments slowly started to appear. Eight staff joined by the second week of the online focus group, gradually rising to 15. I established a pattern of mediation whereby I entered the focus group at intervals to stimulate conversation, but resisted immediately responding directly to every participant to avoid dominating the exchanges. Instead, I attempted to encourage participants by sending out NewsForum announcements (with email subscriptions) inviting participation and summing up weekly. I also moved the discussion ahead to a new topic. A key intention here was to keep the online focus group at the forefront of peoples' minds. I hoped this would make it less overwhelming to participate. A summary may invite commentary without someone having to read all previous messages. I continued to make these NewsForum postings for the duration of the online focus group (13 weeks), and established a formula containing the following elements:

- Thank you – acknowledging lurkers too
- Summary
- Prompts/questions
- Reminder to deviate from the topic set and renewal of invitation
- Reminder re rights of withdrawal

I used the formula as a template and continued to communicate with staff on a weekly basis via the NewsForum/email subscription approach. Other key tasks in the weekly management of the focus group involved adjusting labels in Moodle to remind participants to join the correct week of discussion; posting the new prompts; and asking Moodle administrators to set the previous week's discussion forum to 'read only', as this privilege was not available to us at the time.

Overall, for the duration of the staff online focus group, I tried to encourage participation via lots of informal conversations in corridors and staffroom with staff. I also made personal invitations, followed up with staff that students recommended, and persisted with weekly summaries and prompts. I emailed controversial issues from students, and followed up authentic issues raised by colleagues. Despite these efforts, the staff online focus group was slow, with few messages and little momentum or depth to the discussion. It was clear that staff seemed to prefer to discuss their teaching and pedagogical content knowledge in person within a finite timeframe, rather than online in written form over a more extended period.

Several colleagues commented on the pressure of time and the juggle of workload, such as marking of student work at certain points in the semester. Nevertheless, the same colleagues also reported finding the discussion useful for their own professional learning, as they gained new ideas about discussion from colleagues and reportedly put some of these into action. So, they read others' posts, but often didn't contribute themselves.

Student Online Focus Group – 2 April-10 August (18 weeks)

Student online focus groups (OFG) were separate from their regular Moodle online classes. These OFGs were intended to mirror the staff online focus group, but keep them as a separate entity to distinguish them from coursework, and from the staff members involved in teaching the students. The student OFG was established with identical layout to the staff Moodle space. I also used the same approach to mediation, with weekly summaries and some direct moderation. By the end of April, the student online focus groups were active. Membership rose from seven to 12 students. Students quickly joined in and spread the word to their peers, encouraging

others to make contact and request access. I therefore received a number of emails from students requesting access to the group as they had been talking to participant friends. They were keen to join the discussions in the online focus group.

Overall, the student online focus remained active for 18 weeks (and student contributions did not dwindle even at the end). The group often made 30-40 posts each week. I eventually concluded the group when students embarked on their teaching practicum.

Interviews

In my study, data generation also involved *individual semi-structured interviews* with seven case study students and two staff participants. The interview is the most prominent data generation tool in qualitative research according to Punch (2009), and is regarded as a staple in ethnographic and case study research (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Brenner, 2006). Similarly, phenomenographic interviews are open, deep and exploratory (Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997), making use of open-ended questions to encourage participants to express their qualitative understanding. Interviews aim to gather, clarify and probe interviewee's ideas (Bowden, 2000a). Such open-ended interviews, employing semi-structured or interview guide protocols, are useful for enabling participants to express their own perspectives on specific situations (Brenner, 2006; Cohen et al, 2000). In keeping with the intent of my research, this style of interviewing "is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2009, p. 144). The method supports co-constructing research knowledge as researchers and interviewees interact, and this is a cornerstone of my method.

A fundamental advantage of a semi-structured style of interviewing lies with the way it provides what Freebody (2003) calls "something of the best of both worlds" (p. 133). This is because an interview protocol is written in advance, enabling the same general topics to be pursued with all interviewees, in keeping with the research purpose (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The core questions enable comparability across participants (Brenner, 2006). At the same time, however, the method allows

for the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on responses, to ask questions in any order and to pursue new directions as they arise (Brenner, 2006; Freebody, 2003; James & Busher, 2007). By implication, a semi-structured approach enhances the authenticity of the research process and findings by eliciting authentic voices, where participants share ownership of the direction of the narratives (James & Busher, 2007). Consequently, the participatory flavour of the interaction can be enriching for the interviewee who may obtain new insights into the situation (Kvale, 1996). This makes interviewing a potentially powerful, and indeed empowering opportunity.

In terms of specific techniques within interviews, there is often a "grand tour question" at the outset in order to open up a conversation (Brenner, 2006, p. 258). This is followed by the researcher probing topics identified by the participants. Probing encourages elaboration and clarification and sometimes leads to challenge (See interview guides, Appendices 12 and 14).

The intentions of the three interviews with 7 students and 2 staff case study volunteers were as follows:

Interview One – to generally initiate a meta-discussion; a discussion about discussion. To explore initial views about AOD and the participant's personal experience of AOD.

Interview Two – to co-analyse the nominated discussion/s occurring, delving into participants' thinking about the discussion, and intentions relating to their postings, while the discussion was in process.

Interview Three – the aims were three-fold: firstly, to complete co-analysis of the nominated discussion/s by reviewing the discussion once it had ended; secondly, to consider the key messages emailed to participants based on my hearing of their first two interviews, and to invite correction and expansion on these points; and finally, to revisit the general aspects of the first interview in order to consider views and reflections on AOD and individual participants' personal experiences in further depth.

All participants were provided with the above information and list of questions to guide the semi-structured interviews in advance. They were provided with all three

sets of questions at the outset of the data-generation phase, and were re-sent the questions shortly before each interview as a reminder.

Staff Case Study Volunteers

The first of the two case study staff members volunteered early in the data generation period, immediately after the face-to-face focus group. I asked her to nominate a class for the study as well as a specific online discussion by that class for closer analysis. It was necessary to obtain consent for the staff member's participation in the face-to-face focus group, online focus group, as a case study staff volunteer, and also obtained her permission to archive and analyse the nominated discussion in her class. We scheduled a first interview for the second week of semester, by which time classes would be underway. The second interview was scheduled to take place during the focus class online discussion topic; with a third interview at the end of semester. All interviews with the first case study staff member took place face-to-face, in my office at the university as this was the choice of the staff member involved. Each interview was planned for 45 minutes, and this time-frame was generally adhered to. The participants were provided with a set of open-ended questions for all three interviews, at the outset of the study, coinciding with the signing of consent forms. It was possible to provide the general plan for the interviews well in advance since these were very loosely structured, with plenty of leeway to follow up on the key ideas raised by each individual participant in the course of our communications. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed.

Timing was crucial here, as the staff member was asked to nominate a discussion within her paper that occurred around the half-way point in the semester, or later. This was an effort to ensure that students and staff would not be overwhelmed by thinking about the research project while they were all adjusting to their online class. This timing was also intended to allow time to set up interviews with student volunteers from the class, who might agree to me interviewing them individually before and during the focus discussion topic.

A second case study staff member also came forward, slightly later, as a result of participation in the f2f focus group. Both case study staff volunteers were female and taught core subjects in the Bachelor of Teaching degree, Mixed Media Programme (MMP). In each case, they worked with students in the second year of the degree.

Following consent procedures, the first interviews with staff case study volunteers took place in March and April 2008. In each case, the discussion nominated by the staff member was to take place in May, allowing time for students to focus on early assessment demands, and for me to invite student participation in the study. Coincidentally, the staff members both nominated discussions occurring in the same week of semester, which enabled easy comparison of the two discussions by students who were taking both classes simultaneously. The second interviews therefore took place in May, while the nominated discussions were open. The third interviews took place in June. All staff interviews took place in my office on campus, at the staff members' request.

Student Case Study Volunteers

In the class nominated by each case study staff volunteer, I elicited student involvement in the research by posting an invitation to students within Moodle. I requested student permission to archive the nominated discussion. I also invited students to register for the student online focus group. The invitation incorporated an information sheet (Appendix 3) and two consent forms (Appendices 6 and 7). The first student volunteered within 15 minutes and agreed to participate fully in all three aspects of the study: archiving, focus group, and case study interviews. Student case study volunteers were then sought via the student online focus group. Just as for the staff online focus group, a pattern of weekly management was established in the student online focus group (OFG), whereby a summary statement was posted in NewsForum, accompanied by email subscriptions. As part of this summary, students were reminded of the invitation to become case study volunteers. In time, seven students volunteered. Six had been the target, but the seventh student was openly anti-discussion. This helped the data have breadth in the perspectives it canvassed, promising divergence via negative case sampling.

I travelled to the homes of student volunteers in order to interview them in person where possible. The seven students participated in a series of three 45-minute semi-structured interviews, mirroring those planned for staff. That is, the first interview would take place prior to the nominated discussion; the second interview during the discussion for co-analysis; and the third interview would sum up and capture final insights. As for staff, all student case study volunteers were provided with the planned questions for the three interviews when they signed their consent form. For the first two interviews, I travelled to the students' location to interview them in a place of their choosing – usually in their home, but at the school of one student. This involved travelling distances around the Waikato and Bay of Plenty Region, round trips of up to three hours. In two cases students were interviewed via telephone, as the distance to travel was too great. The third interview for each student was scheduled to take place on campus as the timing coincided with an on campus contact time for the students. In one case, the third interview took place via telephone as the student had withdrawn from the programme and was no longer attending on campus. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Thank you emails were sent to students after each interview, valuing their participation.

Transcribing and checking

Funding was also sought to assist with transcribing of the resulting 27 interviews, based on three interviews with each of the two staff case study volunteers, and the seven student case study volunteers. The intention was that timely transcription of the initial interviews would enable checking back with the participants within the series of interviews. Following the first interview, I sent students and staff volunteers the transcript in raw form, inviting their modifications, additions or clarifications, either via return-email, or on reflection at our second interview. Following the second interviews with each participant (student or staff case study volunteer), I undertook preliminary analysis by reading through the transcripts, firstly to check the accuracy of the transcribing against the recording, and then to summarise and draw out key messages based on what I was hearing from the participants. I compiled a list of key messages in bullet form style for each participant and emailed this to them in advance of the third interview, along with the raw transcript of their second interview,

requesting that they consider the messages with a view to discussing, correcting and expanding them at our third interview. I consider this to be a successful aspect of the methodology in this study. I managed to check each transcript for accuracy while listening to the original recording, and emailed both transcripts and bullet points to each participant around three days before their final interview, while confirming the date/time of the scheduled interview. This led to some useful input, as staff and students used the bullet-pointed statements to probe meanings, provoking extension of thinking and explanation, correction or disagreement, in order to go deeper and arrive at a clearer encapsulation of the participants' views or thinking. Students were later emailed the transcript of their third interview and invited to make final comments.

Further analysis of data

The inductive approaches employed in phenomenographic analysis distinguish it from some qualitative methods, while aligning it with others. For example, pheomenographic analysis differs from content analysis in that categories in content analysis tend to be determined in advance (Bowden, 2000a). Phenomenography is more interactive with the data – categories emerge progressively and are tentatively defined and then tested against the data, then adjusted and retested until the meanings stabilise (Bowden, 2000a; Walsh, 2000). This occurs in a similar way to the constant comparative method drawn from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Roberts, 2003). This method of analysis suits my intention to document participants' perspectives and experiences on their own terms, striving to reflect the meanings intended by the participants.

Phenomenographic analysis is interpretative in character (Svensson, 1997) and occurs by reading transcripts, drafting categories of description emerging from the transcripts and then re-reading transcripts in order to allocate transcript portions/quotes to the categories. In this way, "categories of description are constructed by grouping parts of the transcripts together according to their similarities and differences" (Trigwell, 2000, p. 70). An iterative process produces final descriptions, reflecting similarity in understanding among transcripts allocated to

each category, and differences between categories. The whole process is open-ended, inductive and attentive to emergent themes. As Trigwell (2000) points out, this involves "looking for something that might be there rather than for the extent to which something which is hypothesised to be there" (p. 65). My analysis shares the inductive and iterative features of a phenomenographic approach, but is not restricted to tightly constrained categories. Co-analysis with participants is also a feature of my research design, representing a departure from phenomenography. That is, during the second interview with each of the staff and student case study volunteers, we looked together at a class discussion in progress and categorized the highlights and less useful aspects of the discussion from the interviewee's perspective. Co-analysis was also a feature of the third interview with each case study volunteer when I shared preliminary messages and themes and invited their thoughts.

There is a tendency of phenomenographic analysis to formulate results as simple and logical categories, usually arranged hierarchically or as a taxonomy. In my study, the qualitatively different ways of perceiving are less tidy than a neat set of phenomenographic categories because I have kept the analysis open in an attempt to stay true to the participants' meanings in all their complexity. A departure in my analysis is the use of key messages rather than categories of understanding, because the idea is not simply to learn about and change student misconceptions (e.g. of a physics understanding, like terminal velocity – Bowden, 2000b, p. 53; or recursion in computer programming – Booth, 1997), but rather to search for messages that students convey about their learning which may help lecturers to be better informed. To look mainly at student misconceptions as deficits in thinking would be to imply that lecturers know better than their students, and that students need correction. This is not necessarily the case and it is important to meet half way, understanding alternative conceptions rather than talking past each other (Metge & Kinloch, 1984).

This thesis aims to move beyond a third party analysis of the messages in asynchronous online discussion by involving discussion participants in coanalysis of the messages. A review of categories and generalisations occurred via participant coanalysis and consultation, and later with my supervisors. Coanalysis was the key aim of the second and third interviews with all case study participants. In those

interviews we discussed the nominated discussion in progress while referring to it on the computer screen together. Coanalysis of online discussion with participants is in keeping with a sociocultural emphasis on the importance of multiple perspectives as a way of looking at action in relation to meaning (Charmaz, 2004). In her case study of an online group, Kleinman (2004) also involved group members as coanalysts. Using a similar approach to Hine's (2000) discussion of interactions as they happen, my coanalysis occurred by probing the intentions and perceptions of those involved in the discussion, in relation to their own messages and those of fellow discussion group members, as the discussion unfolded and through hindsight. Coanalysing actual messages is used alongside a more general inquiry into the perspectives of the students and staff involved in online discussion. Therefore, a consideration of the messages on the electronic discussion board is a starting point. Once again, co-analysis supports co-construction of the research knowledge and is intended to strengthen the validity of the research through attempting to confirm the participants' intentions, and the meanings they themselves attach to their behaviours online, leading to interpretive validity.

Following the second interview with each participant, I engaged in open coding by generating a list of key messages stemming from the first two interviews with each participant (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). I emailed this list of initial codes or key messages to each participant, along with transcripts of their first two interviews. This was prior to their third and final interview and the email invited them to ponder feedback and adjustments. I then checked these key messages in the third individual interview. They commented on and appraised the bullet points drawn from their previous interview transcripts. Third interview transcripts were also emailed to participants for further checking and comment.

Following this series of interviews, I then put the data sets together by clustering the three interview transcripts for each participant, with an initial list of key messages from the open coding process. I treated the f2f focus group transcripts as a data set, and likewise the online focus group print outs from Moodle. I embarked on axial coding by developing the key messages into categories, building a cumulative list of categories with subthemes as I analysed each data set. Using the categories as a

tentative structure, I returned to each data set and transcript, extracting quotes from participants for illustrative purposes, and started to look for relationships (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). At this point, I sought feedback from supervisors and moved on to selective coding by reorganising the analysis to reflect the emerging storyline (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The resulting reports and analysis are presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Six: Report of Findings

This chapter reports the findings generated via the focus groups and interviews with staff and student participants. I have sorted the data into preliminary categories around expectations and roles, while keeping student and staff findings separate at this stage. The use of verbatim quotations is intended to respect the authenticity of participants' voices and to portray participant perspectives in rich detail.

Student findings

What the students expect of their lecturers

Data were categorised with respect to the students' expectations of their lecturers in asynchronous online discussions. A small selection of illustrative quotations from the data are given as the entire data set could not be documented due to space constraints.

Presence

The students expressed a clear preference for lecturers taking part in online discussions. They specifically characterised this as 'presence'. For example, in the online focus group, Nina wrote "we like our lecturers to have a presence online" (Nina, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 17) and reiterated in her individual interview that "it's about online presence, it's like you're actually in a classroom with them" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). The notion of lecturers being present in online discussion, actively monitoring and contributing to discussion on a regular basis, was mentioned by all seven students interviewed individually and rated at least five mentions in the student online focus group. For Nina, being present meant being around at key points in the discussion: "at least at the start, somewhere in the middle like we have to be and somewhere at the end just to wrap up" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). For other students, presence meant standing by for back up, with a contribution every two-to-three days or at least twice a week:

> "I would say every second day. I understand that people have other things going on as well, lecturers definitely have, we definitely have. … I think if the onus is going in every day and having a new thing every day to respond to we

would feel overwhelmed. So a new… direction every two or three days keeps us on track, extends us, makes us think more in depth" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

"Truly, I am an advocate of 'taking the initiative' and accepting peer support but I do expect my Lecturers to be visible during my discussions, more specifically, at least twice in one week" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 2).

Implicit in these quotes from students are the suggestions that lecturers' involvement mirror that expected of students (e.g., "…like we have to…", Nina, stu 5, i/v 1, above); and also that lecturers' involvement complement and reinforce additional support from peers in discussion, as Mei intimated above (Mei, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 2). The students interviewed indicated that they expected to know that lecturers were monitoring discussion, preferably daily, and they were ready to step in and help when the need arises. The students emphasized that they did not expect lecturers to contribute actively every day by posting in discussion, but that they expected lecturers to be on stand-by. As one student, in both the individual interview and the online focus group said:

"They don't need to be posting daily but just popping in and having a look because things can happen and if they're not there for three or four days or longer you know, the discussion is stalling for that long you know especially when you've got week-long discussions you're not getting a lot out of it" (Don, stu 3, i/v 3).

"I think the lecturer needs to be around, just in case. Some discussions will move along nicely without lecturer involvement. Others slow down quickly and sometimes need that involvement (which I think is a skill in itself) but if the lecturers aren't going online to check, a discussion can stagnate for a long time, and you can't pick which discussion will do either until the discussion is happening" (Don, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 13).

The students asserted that they felt disadvantaged by absentee lecturers, and said they were less motivated when the lecturer was absent. The students suggested that they were more active in discussions where the lecturer was also actively present. When lecturers did not interact in discussion, the students said their own engagement with discussion was minimal. The students claimed they struggled to see the point of discussion if the lecturer did not participate and specifically disclosed that they felt motivated by the lecturer's presence, and de-motivated by the lecturer's absence.

"I think it keeps you motivated if they are around" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

When the students perceived a lecturer to be absent, their comments were characterised by the following examples:

> "I was really finding it hard to be motivated because what's the point? The lecturer's not there, why should I bother?... I just thought well why should I bother? It's not like he's going to care" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

> "What is the point, you know what are we doing here? … We're not getting much direction" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

> "I feel like, well if they can't be bothered coming in and reading and commenting on what we are contributing, then why should we contribute?... when the lecturer isn't in this paper as well, then I just feel that if they are not here then why should I be" (Sharon, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 33).

> "X is a paper where I have yet to see the lecturer in discussion. I have no idea why he isn't online. My motivation for that paper is much lower than for the rest and I think lack of lecturer involvement is a reason why" (Don, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 13).

Overall, the students, whether interviewed individually or in the focus group, expressed a fundamental expectation that lecturers would be present in online discussion:

> "I just want them to be there, really. I want them to be there for me" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

Two of the seven students individually interviewed acknowledged the possibility that the lecturer may stand back from online discussion in order to promote greater space for the students' voices, expecting more independent discussion from adult learners:

> "some people say well maybe it's because he wants us to have discussion and he's probably lurking and we wouldn't know, which could be true" (Nina, stu 5, i/v1).

> "Often if the discussion is going really well the lecturer doesn't come in very often which I understand why, because they don't want to break the momentum and they do advise us that, they do tell us that" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

One student viewed this favourably, explaining in the focus group:

> "The way I see it, as adults we should be capable of studying/conversing by ourselves with our fellow students - if we have a problem then there is a place

to ask questions directly to the lecturer. I might be taking a hard-line but I don't have an issue with this as I was fore-warned and I was expecting it" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 7).

Tarryn suggested that lecturers' tactics could include deliberate wait-time as an instructional technique, advocating that teachers/lecturers pause to allow time for students to process and think:

> "In my opinion one of the great things about AOD is although answers aren't always obvious or instantaneous we have the luxury of finding them or thinking about them. As teachers I think we need to be aware that not all children can pull out an appropriate answer from their brain and 'wait time' whether it be AOD or in the classroom is invaluable" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 9, ref 2).

However, other students rejected the suggestion that standing back from discussion was a valid approach for a lecturer to adopt:

> "I don't see a lecturer's absence or non-appearance from discussions as an approach, even if they tell us this is what we should expect, that doesn't make it right. In fact, I think if that is the case, if a lecturer has the right to not be present at all - in discussions, then I should have the right to ask for a refund of my money, because I am not getting what I paid for. I didn't sign up to fund a lecturer's absence, I signed up to get educated, that means I have the right to expect some teacher input" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 13).

> "I have to agree with [Sarah], being told a lecturer isn't going to be online much doesn't really make it ok. I am definitely not expecting to be spoon fed or anything like that, but it would be like an on campus lecturer going into the lecture theatre to give a two hour lecture and saying "read Brown and Smith now, then discuss this question", then turning round and walking out and leaving the students to it until the following week. Which is how I feel it is when a lecturer is not around online" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 21).

> "although we are not first year students and don't need our hands held as much this year, I still think lecturers should be in discussions...it is a requirement that we should be in discussions, so, in my opinion, why aren't they? (Sharon, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 33).

Since particular subjects (and tertiary study in general) are about exploring and investigating, the students considered that the lecturer may be giving students free reign to do this through discussion. However, students communicated uncertainty about this approach, arguing that expectations were unclear when the lecturer was habitually absent. The students considered that lack of lecturer input caused

uncertainty even when the students said they understood the importance of independent exploration of the topic:

> "It just leaves the class hanging. The class, you know, we're never sure if we're on the right track, which is a bit unfortunate, well it is, it's pretty unfortunate" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 3).

The students indicated that they sought clarity and direction. Six out of seven were not convinced of the legitimacy of lecturers' taking a hands-off approach. They preferred some signal of lecturer presence as reassurance. The general standard here was one of reciprocity, with the students conveying an expectation that lecturers abide by similar rules of engagement as students.

Even when employing tactical wait-time, some lecturers signalled presence within discussion. Students noted this, reporting that one lecturer entered discussion to let students know she was there and reading, but waiting for others to post before moving the discussion on:

> "She'll say something like "this discussion's going really well but I can see there's more people to come so I'll give you another day and I'll come in and post again tomorrow", so you know that she's there and you know that she's reading it" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1).

While the students expressed a need to know that lecturers were reading/monitoring discussion and standing by, they also reported a need for active involvement in order to direct the discussion and 'move it along'.

Using questioning to create momentum in discussion

The students reported that they expected and appreciated lecturers who re-entered discussion around the halfway point, asking questions in order to sustain momentum, keeping the discussion fresh and inviting:

> "I think I'm learning a lot from it and she's steering us in the right direction. Because she moves the discussion along" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

The notion of movement or momentum in discussion was mentioned by all individually interviewed students, and within the online focus group.

The students suggested that momentum in discussion elevated their involvement beyond mere compliance. After all, as one student pointed out:

> "There's nothing harder than going into a discussion and knowing that you still have to do one more contribution to make up the week but there's really nothing to say" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v1).

Challenging

While students said they expected lecturers' questions to move the discussion along, they also reported that they sought an element of challenge in the questioning. They reported that they wanted lecturers to correct them or to disagree with them. For example:

> "I expect lecturers to correct me if they think I am wrong on a topic, and to explain their answer if needed" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 0).

> "I feel engaged and my learning is being supported by being corrected" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 15-16. Ref 19).

While the students welcomed a lecturer's genuine disagreement and correction, they also recognised that lecturers may incorporate an element of play when challenging in order to make a point. They may play 'Devil's Advocate' to highlight a wider range of viewpoints, prompting clarification and evidence-based discussion. For example:

> "She'll play devil's advocate she'll really test me if I've been too generalized… she'll play devil's advocate and ask me questions which will challenge my thinking " (Don, stu 3, i/v 1).

> "I also noted that [the lecturer] was like that as a facilitator. She almost seemed challenging with a hint of playfulness and mischievousness" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 13, ref 0).

In these ways, the students looked to lecturers to extend and deepen their thinking via challenging questioning, conveying an expectation that, for example, lecturers "extend my thinking and learning, by providing further discussion questions" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 0). Similarly:

> "… a lecturer who encourages me to think more by drawing out something I may have said and giving me another question is directing me to higher level thinking. I believe these are things that I will remember and use in my own classroom" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 9, ref 7).

"[The lecturer] did a good job in forcing/encouraging me (us) to delve deeper in our understanding of the theories that govern out teaching practice. … [Her] well placed questions throughout the discussions had me returning to 'course readings' I had already read to make sure I understood what was written in the text" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 13, ref 1).

Acknowledging

In association with questioning and challenging, the students indicated an expectation and appreciation for personal acknowledgement from lecturers within discussion, noting in particular when lecturers used students' names in online discussion. For example:

"saying your name, replying to your posts, you know just seeing your name crop up every now and again" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

"she always uses names which I, which I really, really like … she'll put our name and then she'll put a sentence in reply to what we've put. … and then sometimes she'll list say three of our names and say for example you've picked up on a really good thing" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1).

"a good lecturer will, it's just even just a mention of your name, it's just to say oh hey they do know I'm in this discussion" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

As Tia's comment suggests, some students indicated that they valued the lecturer's acknowledgement of their own presence. For example:

"when I go in and see that she's made a reference to me, it's partly because I sort of think good she knows I'm in the discussion, she knows I'm participating and she's seeing what I've written, but also it, it almost for me it's just like a wee boost like oh yeah the lecturer's there and she sees what I'm doing and now I want to go in and reply to her again" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 2).

Jacqui in particular admitted to being very motivated by the lecturers' acknowledgement, as she commented individually and in the focus group:

"I really appreciate lecturers who come in during discussions and reply to people by name with a comment relating to their discussion. It makes me feel that the endless postings ARE being noticed and I am receiving feedback from the lecturers about it. I fully appreciate that lecturers can't reply to each posting every time, and I don't expect them to. I know one lecturer who may group a few people together who have said similar things and reply that way, but she still mentions names separately and that shows me that she is taking a real interest in what we are saying" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 10).

Jacqui further explained that this acknowledgement was precious due to the connection with the lecturer:

> "I think it matters for me because I'm working really hard you know at home, I'm not on campus, I'm not visible to the lecturer. I want them to know how hard I'm working, like I want, I don't want acknowle- oh no maybe I do, I don't want acknowledgement in the form of 'oh you're such a good student, you're just fantastic' but it's like, I think it's that thing of when they mention me by name, she knows I'm there and she knows I'm working and for me I think that's just the same as when you're in class and a teacher might say [you don't go to] university but you know 'you're working so well, I'm really impressed with how you're going', I think that's what it feels like" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 3).

Other students also expressed a need to connect with lecturers through personal acknowledgement. For example, Dana explained:

> "you just want to feel like this you can sort of make a connection with them or they make a connection with us" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

Two other students, Sarah and Tarryn, indicated a downside to acknowledgement from lecturers. They cautioned that this could lead to unwanted attention, or the exclusion of others. For example, Tarryn said:

> "[The lecturer] didn't even follow what we were saying, he didn't acknowledge what we were saying at all … He did acknowledge two people out of the whole paper pretty much and their points of view throughout the discussion, same two people every time" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

This indicates her feelings of exclusion in this instance. Meanwhile, Sarah indicated discomfort at being singled out for a lecturer's praise:

> "I shouldn't take credit for it because … obviously she's given me a bit of praise here and like I said this has never happened before…. the next part of her comment "it would be good if others' posts could do the same". She's never, she's never ever said anything like that in class where she's singled out a student for the rest of the class to follow she's never, ever done that.… I felt like a phony .… I'm getting credit for something that I haven't really intended" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 2).

In this case, the acknowledgement had an unintended effect on the student.

Giving feedback (forward)

In an informal and formative sense, the students expected and recognised that they received feedback within discussion, as an inherent part of the discussion activity, linking to acknowledgement. For example:

> "Discussions are a form of assessment where feedback on your ideas or thoughts can be given fairly quickly, as opposed to assignments where feedback takes ages. … I think in discussions you can have lecturer, peer and self-assessments happening simultaneously. So I guess that makes for a good discussion also" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 15-16, ref 13).
>
> "I prefer immediate feedback in my discussions to move on with my work" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 14).
>
> "The feedback I am getting in discussions is timely and helpful" (Don, stu OFG, wk 3, ref 14).
>
> "The motivator for me would be feedback from the Lecturer to determine if I am on the right track or not" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 17-18, ref 21).

In terms of more formal assessment however, some of the students reported that they often did not know how they were doing in discussion until the end of the paper when they received a mark:

> "In the end unless the, to be honest unless the lecturers tell us that we're not doing enough discussing, we don't know until we get our marks" (Don, stu 3, i/v 1).

Sharing stories and opinions

With respect to students' expectations of lecturers, there was a perception among students that lecturers tended not to share many of their own opinions, but were distanced or disengaged from the discussion. For example, as Sarah noted, "they don't tend to bring across a lot of their own opinions or… It appears that they're just sort of sitting back not doing anything or engaging" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1).

In contrast, one particular paper was frequently held up as a model of excellent discussion by students. The students said the discussions were effective because of

the continual personal involvement of the lecturers who modeled reciprocity in sharing their stories and viewpoints. For example, two of the students had this to say:

> "The online discussions were absolutely fantastic. Why were they fantastic? Because, possibly because it actually dealt with the humanistic part of teaching and it was really relevant. She brought a lot of her real-life experiences into it and consequently we did as well which contrasted hugely with the heavy readings that we had to do" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

> "It was how the lecturer gave examples from her own life and experience, just as she wanted us to. How she fed back in comments that related to what others had shared" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 21).

Summing up

Summing up was another student expectation. The students noted that lecturers often summed up discussions with paragraphs on key concepts, occasionally posting additional questions to think about. Sometimes they foreshadowed upcoming discussions. For example:

> "She'll basically sort of sum up the concepts that we've talked about in that discussion. … she just picks out the most crucial points … sort of just like a summary paragraph, really, and then she might just sort of mention what we're going to be looking at in the next module and then she'll just close off the discussion and leave it at that" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1).

Some students made a point of reading lecturers' summaries, for example:

> "I find the lecturers coming in and doing the summing up really helpful. It, because we do go off on lots of different tangents, most of them are good, it actually helps by them coming back and making one or two statements whether they be questions or statements, it just grounds us" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 3).

One student cautioned that summaries should never be a substitute for regular input and clarification from lecturers during discussions:

> "A summation at the end of our discussion offers no help. If my interpretation of the topic was incorrect, I have gone through a week or 2 weeks not understanding, that's my worry" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 17, ref 3).

Other students deemed it more important that they knew whether to expect a summary or not. For example, "it would be good to know what the lecturer was going to do" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 3).

Transparency and guidance

The last data category of student expectations of their lecturers was that of transparency and guidance. Jacqui indicated in the focus group that "knowing exactly what I can expect from the lecturer makes a real difference in how I feel about the paper" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 17, ref 1).

In a similar vein, Nina indicated that she valued being kept informed:

> "set the expectations of when you will be online… just let us know when you're around… Then at least you know where you stand" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

Other students expressed a need for guidance and modeling in relation to discussion:

> "If lecturers could model what a good discussion is or show them, like if there were some past discussions that students have had, I don't know if you can archive them or whatever, but actually show them you know or give them an activity where they analyse an online discussion. You know, what are the good things about this discussion, what do you think aren't so good, so then it actually makes sense or it's something tangible rather than saying we want good discussions, well what is a good discussion? Or maybe talking about what is a good discussion like you've done in our focus group. What would it feel like, what would it look like" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 3).

> "You can go to all your lectures [when you are on campus] and sit there and take notes and go away from that week and you still don't really know what discussions are about. There's no discussion about discussions. They talk about your online requirements, they talk about what's expected from you, they teach you how to use Moodle, but no one actually talks to you about discussions… [It would be great if a lecturer would say] this is an example of what I'd like you to do" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

In summary, the students expected lecturers would be present, use questioning to create momentum in discussion, challenge, acknowledge, give feedback, share stories and opinions, sum up, and provide transparency and guidance in relation to asynchronous online discussion.

What the students expect of their peers

The data were analysed with respect to what students expect of their peers in AOD. Several themes emerged. These, dealt with in turn, are: participation; relevance;

acknowledgement and responsiveness; human connections and community; leaving space; free-flowing communication; and effective use of literature.

Participation

The students said they expected their peers to join the discussion promptly and to post regularly. They said they expected their peers to be experienced at managing their time in online discussion by their second year of study and said they were surprised by those who had to resort to double-posts due to time management issues:

> "What irks me is people who post but don't discuss. I know we have busy lives. But it irks me when fellow students haven't been in discussion all week, haven't bothered to read what has been discussed (I know they haven't when they repeat what has already been said without acknowledging this). Or they then post three posts in a row!! That frustrates me!" (Nina, stu OFG, wk 3, ref 0).

The students suggested that it could be challenging to have a flowing discussion when group members did not appear online until late in the week. Some students considered that late-week posters negatively impacted on the shape of discussion, disrupting continuity. According to those who criticized the late posts, these later comments didn't add anything new to the discussion but merely reviewed what others had said, making it difficult to move the discussion on. On the other hand, other students were more accepting of the late-posting phenomenon, empathizing with those who had busy lives:

> "3 postings in a row don't worry me. I am sympathetic and think 'you've had a busy week'. In saying that, I don't read them, as they are usually right before the discussion closes anyway" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 3, ref 9).

Relevance

The students expected their peers to ensure examples and anecdotes or illustrations were relevant to the discussion topic and the discussants:

> "In terms of the sharing of personal experience, I wonder if the key thing here is the relevance.
> - Is it relevant to what we are talking about? (does this personal experience relate directly to what we are discussing at the time)
> - Is it relevant to helping others learning? (i.e. if I share this, is it actually going to widen the thinking or challenge the other students in my group),

- Will it develop the discussion further? (are other students in the group going to be drawn to comment on it and move the discussion forward?)
- does it encourage others in my group to relate our readings to my experience? (are others going to read it and see connections to what we have been reading for that particular theme?)" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 11, ref 5).

> "One thing I thought I might add, is that when considering the relevance of your postings, it is a good idea to be aware of the discussion group you are in and adjust your discussion accordingly. Try to be aware of "where others are at". I think this helps in being relevant" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 11, ref 7).

However, the students said they found fixation on personal experience to be annoying. While they acknowledged that personal experience was a useful entry point and considered it worthy of exploring and sharing, one student explained that she found personal attitudes could negatively pervade the discussion if individuals continually covered old ground by revisiting childhood memories. For example, Sarah found it particularly irksome:

> "Every time we've gotten onto a discussion [it] has focused around how bad they were at maths when they were at school and so you know that seems to pervade the discussion and, so I get on there and try and politely change the tone of the discussion and say more or less you know you're not in primary anymore and I know those things can have some effect but trying to get them to see the positive side of those things instead of the negatives" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1).

> "…continually going on about your own experiences all the time, it's not enough" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 3).

On the other hand, the students did say they wanted to talk about their lives and experiences and to relate their parental experience to discussions where possible. For example:

> "A lot of us online students are older adults as in over 25 and most of us have children so you relate it to your own children as well so it makes for interesting discussions" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

> "[Discussion works for me] when I can talk about my life and my experiences. That's when it works for me" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

However, the students thought it annoying when peers used their own children as a sole point of reference. A wider, more diverse view of children in the school system was valued. Tarryn, for example, illustrated this point clearly:

> "One thing that's a huge turn-off to me is when people start talking about their personal experience in relation to their children and only their children. That's important but they need to bring it into the school system as well, they need to talk about their base school experiences and back up with their readings so it's sort of interweaving it… It is good when the discussion question, literature, classroom practice and personal experience (e.g. as parents) all link together, enabling students to engage in "interweaving" multiple sources of learning" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

The students not only valued links to classroom experience and to personal interests, but also unanimously appreciated opportunities to link theoretical concepts and understandings with classroom teaching incidents. Discussions that incorporated talk about learning in the classroom were considered superior to those perceived by students to be more readings-based and formal, without a practical element. When students related instances where discussions linked directly to classroom learning, they used words like "fantastic" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1) and "exciting" (ibid) to describe the learning links:

> "I always find that more useful when we can link it to what we're actually doing or what we've seen so I think I found the second week a lot more interesting because everyone sort of shared something that they had seen or noticed in their lessons" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 3).

> "What I have noticed is that real learning occurs when I can make a connection to what we have seen or experienced in the classroom to what we have been reading and discussing" (Nina, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 17).

In contrast, when links to school practice were not readily apparent, or when students hadn't yet observed a particular practice in schools, or when school practices seemed diametrically opposed to the ideas stemming from theoretical literature, they had trouble making connections between theory and practice:

> "This makes me disengage with the discussion, because I am left wondering is this academic BS, because the reality seems so different" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 8, ref 24).

The students also noted that some peers were better than others at making links to the classroom. The students indicated they appreciated links to past, present and future practice.

Acknowledgement and responsiveness

Another expectation of peers was that they would acknowledge and respond to others in discussion. The students said they found it annoying when someone came into discussion and repeated what has already been said (e.g. Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 2). The students indicated that they expected others to read what had been posted rather than ignore points made by earlier contributors. For example:

> "I think that's probably what annoys me the most is, is the fact that it's been said, but it hasn't even been acknowledged by this person" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

> "I find it really annoying when somebody comes in and does this whole spiel that the person on top of them or the person who came in before them has already said" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 2).

While the students deemed repetition to be annoying, they similarly thought that not responding to others in discussion was impolite. For example, it was:

> "rude because you know that would be like if I was face-to-face with you and you've come and said something to me and I've just walked away and started talking to somebody else" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 3).

Several students mentioned face-to-face etiquette regarding the impoliteness of ignoring others by repeating points already made online. For example:

> "I felt like I'd made a valid point but it was completely ignored and it's just like well if we were in a group discussion once again, face-to-face, it would be like they all just turned their back on me and carried on talking" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 2).

> "Same as in a classroom, someone's asked a question and then Johnny puts his hand up and says the same thing" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 3).

The students reported a tendency to post more often in discussion when peers responded to posts and questions. They said they found it frustrating being ignored in discussions, and this discouraged participation for some students:

"I had a little bit of a sulk. I thought well you know I've made an effort, I've gone out and found some stuff and I thought it would add something to our discussion. OK, I was way off-track here and to be honest I didn't get back into the discussion after that" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 2).

The students suggested that they would rather have their ideas actively challenged than ignored. For example:

"I have noticed in a few discussions this semester that when someone has a different opinion from the rest of the group that person's ideas are ignored and no one responds to their comment. I know in one particular paper we are encouraged to disagree with the lecturers or others in the group but when someone disagrees and is ignored for doing so I feel like that voice is not heard. To even agree to disagree is better than ignoring what that person has to say" (Nina, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 22).

In a similar vein, the students emphasized that acknowledgement should move beyond bland agreement. The stock standard phrase "Oh yes I agree with so and so" could be annoying, with one student describing this behaviour as "nauseating", "puppet"-like, and a hindrance to discussion as it lacked originality, adding little (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1 & 3). However, the students said they were cautious about expressing strong opinions online, lest this offend others or get them into trouble with the lecturer, opting instead to generally play it safe in discussion. For example:

"It's too safe. Very safe, very, very, very, very safe and you know there tends not to be debate…. I haven't really seen people stick their necks out a lot in discussions" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

The students attributed this caution in part to the lack of nonverbal expression in the text-based forum because it is more challenging to convey tone or soften it in a message. Students also said it was difficult to know how others received messages. At times, negativity can halt or stifle discussion and leave others unwilling to contribute.

Student interviewees indicated that they took care to engage with each discussion as it occurred. All of the students interviewed emphasized how important responsiveness to others was. In the focus group, this idea was mentioned at least three times. However, these students also noted that some peers evidently crafted their discussion contributions offline and then added comments regardless of whether it fitted the

discussion flow. They criticized this lack of fit as interfering with the conversation.
While the students recommended reflecting on discussion while offline, they
indicated that they frowned upon inserting prefabricated comments without regard for
the current discussion direction:

> "a lot of isolated postings when no one's connecting to one another" (Sarah,
> stu 2, i/v 2).

> "They don't build on anyone else's ideas. … they don't engage, they don't
> engage other people and their post makes it so that you can't engage" (Nina,
> stu 5, i/v 1).

Just as these two students emphasized the need to link to others and to avoid
repeating ideas, every interviewed student said similar things. Within the focus group,
the students indicated the need to read and build on the ideas of others, rather than
ignore or repeat earlier points. For example:

> "Try and read what other people have written at least what one other person
> has written and try and build on their ideas, add something new if you think it
> will add to the discussion whether you agree or disagree… at least read what
> everyone's written first before you write your post" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

> "reading what other people are saying and thinking 'oh yup' and processing it
> and maybe commenting, just for myself I'll just jot down so [when I] actually
> go back to post I can, I already have read that person's comment and jotted
> down something that yeah I thought oh you know I agree or I don't agree with
> that. I suppose by not doing that you're not actually engaging in the paper"
> (Tia, stu 6, i/v3).

Just as the students indicated they valued lecturers' use of their names in discussion,
so they appreciated names being used as part of peer-to-peer responsiveness. Focus
group members said:

> "Names are important. It gives the discussion that human face when we wish
> we had one to look at!!" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 4).

> "Make sure you read everyone's posting and like [Jacqui] said, make reference
> to others posting and use their name. It is nice to know that someone has read
> your comments and whether they agree or not doesn't really matter as you are
> engaged in a discussion and being part of a great COL [Community of
> Learners]" (Tia, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 6).

"The importance of a name cannot be overstated. Otherwise, is it really a discussion, even in a classroom, you are talking to someone. I agree that by naming the person online is equivalent to "looking" at that person in class" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 7).

Human connections and community

All of the students voiced an expectation of their peers connecting via AOD. They said that discussion provided a vital connection with their lecturers and peers. They had difficulty envisaging the Mixed Media Programme (MMP) without online discussion components. Notions of connection and community were mentioned by all students, whether interviewed or in the focus group:

 "being able to connect with other people is pretty important to online learning I would have thought" (Don, stu 3, i/v 1).

"I feel it reunites me with my fellow classmates" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 15, ref 8).

"The plus of discussions is it keeps me connected to others - this is a lifeline" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 18, ref 20).

"I participate in discussions because I like the connection it brings to others" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 18, ref 21).

"When I need my community of learners is when I don't understand the readings or things aren't falling into place, then I read the discussion word for word searching for someone who has done a good job of paraphrasing it or connecting the dots so to speak" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 4).

"To me, a community of learners is about being a part a community of like minded people with similar goals sharing experiences and knowledge. Some discussions are better than others, though I do learn from all of them, just some more than others. I see the community of learners as my network, just like tutorials on campus" (Tia, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 10).

Leaving space

Leaving space was an expectation voiced by students, and referred to the need to keep comments short so as to avoid dominating discussion. The students conveyed a preference for posts to be succinct, and reported that they:

113

"hate having to trawl through really long discussions" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v1).

"I won't read them if they're too big" (Don, stu 3, i/v2).

Five of the seven students interviewed specifically expressed a dislike of lengthy postings. They agreed that when posts were too long, they typically skimmed rather than reading thoroughly. Contributions without paragraph breaks were similarly skipped over. Lengthy posts that attempted to address every point in one hit were deemed a significant annoyance as these did not leave space for others to enter the discussion (Don, stu 3, i/v 2).

Some students noted that their own queries tended to be overlooked within discussions where others posted lengthy comments. One student also wondered whether long postings were intimidating, discouraging peers from contributing. This could exacerbate the difficulties with late-week postings when students left their posts to the discussion until the last minute. Focus group students, while favouring a 150 word limit to discussion posts, preferred this as a guideline rather than being strictly enforced. The students said they wanted leeway to go beyond 150 words when the need arose, rather than feeling they had been cut off in mid-speech, but also said they appreciated the value of keeping posts succinct.

Free-flowing communication

A sixth student expectation of each other related to the style of language used in AOD. It helped to write as they would talk, they said, putting things in their own words. They felt that discussion was better when people wrote honestly and sincerely ("being true to who you are" – Nina, stu 5, i/v 2; Tia, stu OFG, wk 1), rather than wallowing in academic jargon:

> "It was like we were actually talking to each other, that's when you know it's a good discussion… When it's free-flowing and you've got debate and it makes me look at things from a different perspective when someone's brought something up, something I wouldn't have considered … and I'm enjoying it and it's like you're not, it's not like you're posting because you're meeting your requirements, you're posting because you're really engaged in what you're actually talking about online and, and what you're actually doing and you're really interested in it" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

"I think discussion should be more of a free-flowing thing rather than an academic writing exercise and it's hard if you're pointed towards referencing and readings it almost makes you want to just take chunks and put it on there and talk about those rather than you know" (Don, stu 3, i/v 1).

Effective use of literature

The students expressed particular expectations regarding how literature was used by peers in asynchronous online discussion. Don's comment above also highlights their strong criticism of peers who copied and pasted material directly from set readings into the discussion. They perceived an absence of critical thinking or consideration of the place of their posting in the flow of discussion:

"I see a lot of quoting, retelling and reproducing rather than critical thinking in discussions, but I feel this is more because the onus on those particular discussions is on showing that literature has been read rather than making real connections to it through group discussion" (Don, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 23).

The students characterized this practice as false, pointless, irritating and confusing. The pointlessness of direct quotations from readings was emphasized by one student who remarked that:

"if everyone's just in there quoting the readings… I'm not learning anything because I've already done the readings. I'm just reading them all again… I mean, what is so interesting about going into a discussion and re-reading readings?" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

"when I read those postings, I sometimes feel like I'm repeating the readings" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22).

Many students were also critical of the need to explicitly reference readings in APA style. They felt this made discussion stilted and contrary to the free-flowing discussion described above. Students suggested that lecturers encouraged this by continually emphasizing the need to read, but this was considered by students to be detrimental to discussion:

"AOD is quite often not authentic. No-one goes around quoting references all the time in their conversations. …Authentic to me… means hearing "your" voice come through, more than the readings. Instead of pages of "copy and paste" verbatim. However, I think lecturers reinforce this, because they

always stress the importance of readings" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22 & 27).

The students recognised that overuse of direct quotations in discussion may be a smokescreen to mask a lack of true understanding. Many students interviewed admitted to skim-reading, "brushing over" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1) or completely ignoring postings based primarily on direct quotes from literature. As another student explained:

> "scrolling through all these discussion posts that are all direct quotes I don't read them I just skim through them until I get to really specific good points that you can follow on from" (Don, stu3, i/v1).

In particular, when students posted contributions that were largely comprised of a string of two or three quotations, this was regarded by fellow students as confusing and of little value for learning. Nevertheless, an interesting finding was that while students admitted a tendency to skip over or ignore posts that were heavily theoretical or based entirely on direct quotations, some students also admitted to ignoring those that had little to say in relation to readings, as well as those that were repetitive of what others had already said.

This complex interplay between reading literature and engaging in discussion was further underscored by Dana (stu 4), who professed to disliking discussion, but who recognised that online discussions forced her to read in order to make comments in discussions. The students did not question the value of reading academic literature and regarded it as fundamental to their learning. They appreciated that readings could help them understand what they may not be seeing in schools, represent expert opinion and enlarge their experiences vicariously. These help interpret their actual first-hand classroom experiences. They did not seem to privilege practice over theory in the main, but said they found classroom examples particularly relevant. For example:

> "I found although the readings are okay I enjoy it a bit more when we can use an example from what we have seen or done in the classroom" (Nina, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 7).

Students who had completed the readings and engaged in independent thinking said they found it difficult at times to see a purpose in discussing them:

> "I don't get a lot out of' readings based discussions. Generally I have worked things out already through readings and research, and by then I am a bit 'over it' by the time I get into the discussion" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 4).

However, when readings were more challenging, and guidance was deemed necessary in order to fully unpack the meanings, then discussions helped:

> "As a whole I like the readings and I find that my opinion is either consolidated or changed as I learn more" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 12).

> "Discussions and readings are a bit like the guided reading process, we talk our way through a text or experiences with the lecturer and each other" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 10, ref 6).

When asked to more fully explain the goal of unpacking, one student explained:

> "The readings are often written in academic speak and sometimes refer to small sample groups that research has taken place in. We unpack the readings by interpreting them into everyday language, and relating them to our classroom experiences, or predicting how they may be incorporated into future classrooms. That's my interpretation, and certainly how I approach the readings" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 8, ref 26).

Another student agreed:

> "The purpose of discussion connected to academic readings should be to make sense of the academic" (Don, stu OFG, wk 8, ref 27).

Many of the students thought that using readings in discussions was somewhat contrived:

> "I, also, find the discussions, although stimulating, unrealistic when we consider that an on-campus class discussion, would not have us quoting from readings. I realise that personal opinions, in discussions, must be justified with experts, but is this really a discussion? We quote from the same readings, unless we have ventured further, agreeing with each other. After all, who would dare disagree, with a book of readings supporting the current topics in our discussion groups!" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 14).

One student said that, having completed her reading (of set texts/literature), as long as she understood them, there seemed little to discuss:

> "I do understand the readings so I'm not in the discussion sort of searching for answers I suppose." (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

117

These students considered the readings to hold the knowledge, and expressed uncertainty as to the purpose of discussion in relation to the learning:

> "You've got all your readings, you've got all the knowledge so I wonder where discussion fits into that." (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

This student was not alone in concluding therefore that the purpose of discussion must be to show the lecturers that they have read, understood, covered content and are "attending" class.

In summary, the students' expectations of their peers in asynchronous online discussion were that peers participated, ensured anecdotes were relevant to the discussion, acknowledged and responded to others, made human connections, left space for others by being succinct, communicated in a clear and free-flowing manner, and used literature effectively.

Expectations of Self: How the students see their own roles

The third data set was that of students' own perceived roles in AOD.

The obligations of attendance and assessment

The students acknowledged that they had an obligation to contribute to AOD in order to meet assessment requirements. The students suggested that one reason for the prominence of online discussion in distance education programmes is the need to ensure that students are working, in lieu of any opportunity to check on this in person. Students therefore claimed they engaged in discussion because they "have to" (Jacqui, stu 1; Dana, stu 4). While students considered that some discussions enhance understanding, they completed other discussions because of accountability and compliance. Some discussions are therefore "just for the lecturer" (Jacqui stu 1, i/v3); "fulfilling obligations" (ibid), or as Jacqui admitted, "I'm posting for the lecturer to see me" (ibid).

Similarly, Dana remarked, "I've already done the learning then I'm just going online to prove that I have" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 3). Dana openly expressed a dislike of online discussion, regarding it as an obligation or "a necessary evil" (Dana, stu 4, i/v1). From Nina's perspective:

> "I see it as like our attendance on campus. Like it's instead of being in a class or in a tutorial or in a classroom face to face, this is our way of showing that we're actually doing the work, we're reading the readings, we're thinking about what we're discussing. I sort of see it yeah it's our way of … attendance" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

The notion of discussion as attendance was raised by 4/7 interviewed students and it also emerged in the focus group.

According to the students, criteria for assessing discussion varied between papers and lecturers within the same programme. However, they expected that contributions made links to each other and wove together theory/reading and practice/experience. Students were divided about the assessment weightings for discussions. Some wanted discussions to count for more in terms of formal assessment because the mark allocations did not often reflect the time spent in contributing to quality discussion. Others explained that they felt a greater sense of freedom to use discussion for learning when they did not have to adhere to specific criteria for summative assessment. Within the focus group, one student suggested that:

> "If lecturers are using discussion as an assessment tool then it definitely should have significant weighting of marks. But if discussion is a place for discussing and thinking around topics then a participation mark is all that is needed, and maybe not even that. Personally I am not a fan of discussions being used to assess. We need a place to test our ideas and theories with others, where we can make our mistakes with no pressure of marks being lost. Offline discussions or lectures aren't assessed apart from attendance, so why should our online equivalent be any different?" (Don, stu OFG, wk 5, ref 3).

Another student responded:

> "I'm all in total support of your comments about testing our ideas. I think this makes it a genuine discussion. When I'm having a coffee with a friend, we throw ideas around, discuss how all the bits of the puzzle fit together (literacy - in particular). We may not start out right, but after enough coffees I feel confident we are on the right track!!
> If it's assessed you do feel pressure to be right - or at least right according to the readings" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 5, ref 6).

"I personally don't understand why our contributions are weighted so high and that we have to reference and as B said on campus students don't have to do that. I get a lot out of the discussions, but would prefer them like D said (like having coffee with a friend). Why should I be penalised for not making appropriate contributions and linking to literature (and in some cases people fail papers due to this), when an on campus student can sit listen and informal discussion with lecturer and fellow students, not reference and still pass?" (Tia, stu OFG, wk 5, ref 13).

"Now, I could also advocate that discussions should be weighted heavily, simply because I am a regular participant and this would work in my favour, However since it is the equivalent of being in-class, I don't see that marks are even necessary. My reasoning for this is that I already have a reward. I save time and lots of money on petrol by not having to go on-campus everyday. Plus, I think in many ways by not extending yourself in whatever form that might be you are only "robbing" yourself" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 17-18, ref 12).

Overall, some students thought that discussion participation was under-rewarded while others admitted that they prioritised discussion in relation to the assessment weighting. However, others said they would always participate regardless of weighting due to the learning experienced and the habits formed, although some worried that others may not participate, making for weak connections.

Learners, teachers and leaders in a learning community

The students' expectations of themselves also highlighted learning, teaching, and leading. Some students explained that they viewed discussions as learning opportunities. For example:

"I actually go into the discussion saying I'm going to learn something and I do" (Sarah, stu2, i/v1).

This comment was echoed by Don, who stated:

"My personal goal is to get some learning from it but that doesn't always happen" (Don, stu3, i/v1).

He indicated that he strived to learn and balances "light bulb moments" with "going through the motions" in discussions. Nevertheless, Don said he viewed discussions as a daily habit, and part of the rhythm of online learning. A third student used

discussion as a sounding board to clarify her thinking, and "to grow our ideas" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1). She even copied parts of discussion for her own records, to preserve them for future reference (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 3).

The students described how they sometimes adopted a teaching or leadership role in discussions to move the discussion along. They helped others by encouraging, modeling and recognizing the learning of peers. The students realised that they shared a teaching role. For example, as Nina explained:

> "To me it's like we both have a responsibility to make it work I don't think it's fully the lecturer's responsibility because I definitely have a part to play in it so I think it's just being clear on what each other's expectations are" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

In terms of keeping the discussion moving, Sarah noted:

> "Even when discussions are dry I'm probably thinking well, how could I make this discussion better or what can we do about it… I'll just get in there and start something… steer the conversation" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1).

> "Someone a bit bolder they might come in and move it" (Tia, stu 6, i/v1).

> "I like to keep things moving" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

The students also aimed to help others through discussion. For example:

> "You actually end up being the teacher and giving them the scaffolding, trying to help them along" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1).

> "I think I added something new to the discussion and I think that post actually helped a lot of people get their head around the concept as well" (Don, stu 3, i/v 3).

> "I was able to share what I learnt and help" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 3).

As well as helping by clarifying concepts and sharing knowledge, Nina described modeling effective discussion to others. For example:

> "There are a lot more people in our discussion groups that haven't done this type of study before and they don't know what they're supposed to be doing so I'm trying to model what I want to see. And probably in our second-to-last discussion online I think a few of them got it because they started to build on

something that I had said, or someone else had said it's like oh great now we're having a discussion" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

Tarryn tried to reinforce and encourage those who she knew were struggling. For example:

"S struggles with these discussions, … she's not comfortable with them. And I really try and read hers and respond to hers for that reason… D's a wee bit down at the moment. D's almost thinking about not packing it in but I've heard through the grapevine that she's having huge trouble keeping up with class discussions and working so I just sort of put in a little bit to her you know I like hearing about your work" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 2).

Having mentored others, the students also indicated an appreciation for peers' achievement:

"**Magic** moments for me include, seeing people grow and develop through AOD. For example, there are some people who are the same, AOD, and f2f. And there are others who are talkative f2f, but quiet in AOD, and vice versa. But you can see the changes that are **occurring through their conversation**. It is also magic, when you see one of your peers in AOD, grappling with an issue (reading, statement, whatever...) then see them "get it". It is wonderful" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 10, emphasis in original posting).

In summary, the students had the following expectations of themselves: they expected to meet obligations related to attendance and assessment in AOD; they expected to learn, to teach, and to lead in discussion.

Staff findings

This section of the reports introduces the staff perspectives, again in light of roles and expectations.

How the lecturers view their roles

Data were also analysed with respect to the staff expectations of themselves.

Planning and designing for effective discussion

The staff indicated that they planned and designed discussion in order to cover necessary course content, while also promoting in-depth thinking and growth in students' perspectives. These intentions were encapsulated in Maxine's third interview:

> "It's trying to see that there's no one size fits all I guess. But it's high-stakes too from our perspective because we have to be able to say well these people have looked in depth at material covering this sort of thing to a greater or lesser degree for themselves….
> "It is a way of knowing whether the material is being covered and we do need to know that but it's also for their own benefit as well because if we don't share and look at those ideas, then how are they ever going to change or alter or develop and grow because if you stay with your own perspective then you are in danger I think of becoming quite sort of narrow in your thinking" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

In a similar vein, Elizabeth placed dual emphasis on content and deepening thinking. She explained that "my goal is partly to make sure the questions focus the learner and bring the learner through a range of progressive ideas" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

Elizabeth also indicated that when devising discussion topics, she aimed to stimulate interaction: "I would see them [discussions] as a tutorial situation. Therefore it's conversation, discussion, critique" (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1).

Preparing students for AOD

One staff member prepared students for online discussions by mediating face-to-face group work during initial on-campus sessions through modeling listening and cooperative problem solving:

> "When they're on campus I have them working together rather than individually and I try to model that process in terms of listening to each other and being in groups and trying to work together to form solutions and that sort of thing. I do use the term 'communities of learners' often if I'm sending messages out or trying to even in discussions saying well that's really nice seeing people not agreeing with each other and that but that we're bringing in sort of a rich range of ideas" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

The staff in both focus groups mentioned such on-campus preparation, and discussed the need to reinforce ideas around the formation of a community of learners, how to engage in critical discussion, and to clarify expectations about online presence:

> "We spend quite a bit of time, … when they are on campus, going through what it is to be part of a community of practice, as a community of learners so we do expect a certain amount of online presence" (Ji, staff, FG1).

Another in the second focus group explained that:

> "We begin that on campus with an hour and a half session on what is critical discussion, why do we engage in critical discussion, and what does it look like, and we practice the skills and then transfer that to the online environment and that's particularly successful" (J, staff, FG2).

In a postgraduate setting, one staff member provided effective discussion exemplars to students:

> "we used transcripts that we removed peoples' names from and where I had really good examples of what I would consider effective discussion, I actually made that available in the course as an example" (T, staff, FG1).

Encouraging community

Participant staff often mentioned that they used discussions to encourage communities who could learn from each other. This theme, concerning "learning communities" and "communities of learners" was mentioned in all one-to-one interviews with both staff case study volunteers (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1, 2, 3; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1, 2, 3):

"I do use the term communities of learners often…. I do quite strongly believe in this community idea and so I try to have similar but different discussions running, so I'll have six parallel discussions about a topic but they will all have a slightly different focus and then I can refer students to say hey have a look at what group B are thinking about this" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

"I've set up subtly different discussions all based around the same thing so that I'm not looking at the same thing over and over but my justification is for, that is, that you just never quite know what's going to take off and so if you get one that really goes then you can think ah that's good I'll bring in those elements into the next people's discussion to try and stimulate them and because there are quite a lot of groups, you find that if they are discussing slightly different tacks they will go into each others' groups as well because they know it's not the same discussion topic" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

"They are going to maximise their opportunities when they're in a supportive situation with their other students and how they can learn from them as well" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

Similarly, discussion dynamics in relation to community were raised:

"I think that really does come back to community of learners that's why some groups work particularly well and some don't because there are some quite willing to put forward their ideas and someone else pick on it, pick up on it and so on" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2).

Just as the community notion was highlighted throughout staff interviews, it was also frequently mentioned by the staff focus groups, both face-to-face and online. For example:

"a learning community, where people participate" (T, staff, FG1).

"a community of practice, or a community of inquiry" (Ji, staff, FG1).

"And my theoretical understandings come out of the work I've been doing for many years around communities of inquiry, communities of learners, communities of knowers, communities of practice" (P, staff, FG2).

"I think for me the community notion is really critical because if you want people to work together to support each other with… they need that ethos if you like and you have to work quite hard to develop that sometimes" (Maxine, staff 2, FG2).

As part of the emphasis on community, the staff emphasized relationships and learning and an obligation to play an active part in the community. One staff member acknowledged the students' networks, and "the relationship they are building with each other through those discussions" (Ji, staff, FG1).

The staff expected students to learn from each other in discussions. They saw this as a chief benefit of a community of learners:

> "I'm just fascinated by what students teach each other, the depth of knowledge that comes through in their stories is just amazing and they teach each other so much without realizing what they are doing" (R, staff, FG2).

> "Our learning community is one where ideas are critically examined, challenged, debated - advancing both their individual knowledge and understanding and the community's knowledge and understanding" (Ji, staff OFG, week 2, ref 4).

A staff member in the first face-to-face focus group referred to being an active member of the community, explaining:

> "If you are committed to learning community, if someone chooses to absent themselves from the community for whatever reason they can't blame the system for penalizing them" (T, staff, FG1).

Maxine in the second f2f focus group also highlighted an obligation to the online community:

> "You get people who are really into it, and if people are not then I will send them a private message saying … because we are a community you've got an obligation to your colleagues really. It doesn't matter to me but your colleagues need your input" (Maxine, staff 2, FG2).

Leading

Interviewed staff saw a role for themselves as leaders having expertise and seniority within class discussions. They saw their job as guiding and directing students' learning:

> "It's definitely a scaffolding position … there's a person of expertise to bring the others along with you in a learning community" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

> "I sometimes have to see myself as a senior partner in discussion because if I don't have a clear voice or a view about thinking about where this might go

126

then what am I doing here? As a teacher I have a responsibility to ensure that not everything goes, that there are standards and there are some ideas in there that are really worth discussing and I see that as if there's a really big point or idea that hasn't been hit, then my role is to go in there and ask that question or direct them to an alternative reading" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

Similarly, staff within the focus groups conceptualised their role as discussion leaders: facilitating, directing, providing expertise, and clarifying intent:

"my role is to facilitate that discussion, and directing it when need be" (Ji, staff, FG1).

"I think of my role in two broad categories: One is the content expert and the other is the discussion manager, teaching" (T, staff, FG1).

"There still needs to be a clarity of intent while engaging in discussion – what it is intended that you will get out of this. And I think just as we do with children in schools, we need to convey that and come back to it from time to time during discussions reminding people that we are engaged in discussion because… its very very helpful" (J, staff, FG2).

Moving

Elizabeth and Maxine, the two staff interviewed individually, explained their key intentions as "affirming what they've done and moving them along" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1); or similarly as to "support them [and] move them from where they're at" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2).

"When I'm posting, I'm usually trying to summarise or to identify the key threads and, and then I usually post another question so that if I think there's a direction that we could be going in and we haven't come up with that but sometimes I say well, we seem to have covered so many aspects here and say well I'm not sure where else can we, we could go has anybody got any ideas. I've done that occasionally as well… Sometimes I re-orient myself with the thrust of the readings that I know that they have, and sometimes I think oh yes, we haven't, we haven't covered that point or it might be a place I'll re-read the reading and think yeah that could be, that could give me the impetus to carry, to move on."
(Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

These comments illustrate frequent mention of movement when referring to staff intentions in online discussion. Both Elizabeth and Maxine frequently talked about moving and shifting. For example:

"You want to move them on" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

"I've tried to move them forward into other aspects and I've moved them a whole complete shift into another aspect… away we go again… we're moving on… I've shifted them…keep things going, keep the momentum" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

"Discussions are sometimes very surprising in a sense when they go, as I said before, into alternative directions" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

"Group A has taken off again… You look at a discussion and think yes they're ready to move into something else" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

The staff focus groups also mentioned terms like direction, thrust, impetus, movement, momentum, shifts, staying on-track, taking off, and pace:

"They can go in all kinds of directions and if you've got the knowledge you can actually take them on those journeys and bring them back to where you want them" (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1).

"redirect again" (Ji, staff, FG1).

"big shifts in their thinking and their beliefs" (J, staff, FG2).

"you need to do that because you know its not going anywhere" (C, staff, FG2).

"how to look critically at the discussion to move it on. So, looking at key words and ideas that have come through from the students, … and trying to encapsulate an idea in a sentence to move it on" (Maxine, staff, FG2).

But despite the intention to maintain momentum, the staff, like students, thought discussions were time-consuming. It takes time to mediate in-depth discussion and interruptions can make this very difficult. The staff mentioned time as a significant challenge and hindrance when other workload commitments make it difficult for staff to juggle regular browsing of discussion. When composing contributions to discussion, staff said they spent a great deal of time crafting and carefully phrasing their comments in order to thoughtfully move the discussion on. These staff said they did not feel able to respond quickly, having to take care with language to avoid misinterpretations:

"With my postings I have to be really careful about the language that I use. I find I can't do it off the top of my head. I have to really consider what's going to be said so that a discussion can then move forward because if I ever try to do it off the top of my head, it gets misinterpreted" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

According to Elizabeth and Maxine, summing up occurs at intervals during discussion, and also at the end of the topic. During discussion, they posed periodic summaries in order to maintain momentum and pace. They often completed a summary or stock-take at the end of discussion topics to indicate closure and to help "round off" the conversation, so that students are not left in a "sea of thinking" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

"Usually I try and end a discussion by saying well there are avenues that we could go to but this particular discussion's closed now and we will open up another one next week" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

The staff indicated that they were also pleased when students posted discussion summaries instead.

Modelling

The staff viewed one of their roles as modeling effective discussion practices for students. The staff indicated the intention to model participation in discussion. For example:

"I try to say if the students have to be in there twice a week so should I" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

"They have to contribute twice a week so feel I should be doing at least that… I tend to go in when it's really needed" (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1).

The staff also claimed that discussion was a way to model the use of terminology in their field. For example:

"You can greatly influence students by your actual language so I use a lot of academic terms but I explain them" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

Furthermore, Maxine indicated the need to model sharing of ideas:

"We've all got ideas but we need to be upfront about opening up those ideas and making them explicit and that's another thing about discussion is that when you do wholeheartedly enter into them then you do actually have to

make yourself sort of transparent in some ways don't you and some people
don't do it" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

Overall, the staff recognised that they set the tone for the type of discussion
generated:

> "I think, basically they take their cue from you. And more than anything, I
> think you are the most powerful model of the kind of interaction that you want
> to get. And if you want them to do spontaneous things, you do spontaneous
> things, and then they start picking up on it" (T, staff, FG1).

> "By the way I am and how I respond: this is the way we do it" (N, staff, FG2).

Standing back

The staff described one of their roles as standing back from discussion. Many
lecturers said they were careful to avoid dominating discussion, instead aiming to
'stand back' to allow space for students to think and converse:

> "If you're too dominant and become too much the expert and the person with
> all the content knowledge, that can just dry up the conversation like that. I've
> been in a situation working with someone who just came in straight away with
> all the knowledge and all the information. And that just, the students didn't
> feel safe enough to come in with their viewpoints because it had all been sort
> of said" (Ji, staff, FG1).

Some lecturers said they aimed to scaffold student contributions more intensively at
the beginning of a course, backing off a little and encouraging student independence,
interdependence and leadership as the semester progressed. For example, according
to one lecturer in the online focus group:

> "Feedback/feedforward for each individual is important to me in these initial
> stages - particularly for those who have taken time to arrive onscreen and are
> perhaps struggling with this new medium for learning. I see this an essential
> form of motivation for future participation" (W, staff OFG, week 3, ref 1).

Similarly, another lecturer in the f2f focus group said:

> "My teaching partner and I come in at various times and nearer the end of the
> seven weeks we are less obvious online because the students have taken
> responsibility for their own learning and are really motivating that
> themselves" (J, staff, FG2).

The lecturers explained that they valued discussions where students took the initiative and maintained the momentum. For example:

> "The best discussions onscreen follow the pattern when the lecturer might ask a lead question and then someone picks up on it, someone else, someone else, someone else, someone else and they go right through that question before you have to go in with another lead question. And that's when you see the magic when you're actually stepping out sometimes and then just going in at the right moment" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2).

The staff monitored discussion to judge whether and when to intervene. They noted this was a key skill that required experience to perfect. As one staff focus group participant commented:

> "I'm in there a lot, monitoring, because in some discussions if you don't redirect or just sort of handle a sensitive comment, the idea can be blown out of all proportion, and other people can come in. So for me it's really important whether I come in early, late or just observe and then just redirect, and I think it takes a bit of experience to do that" (Ji, staff, FG1).

> "Although I have been teaching online for a while, I still find discussion with each group a challenge - when to intervene, when to hold back, how to support yet extend and how to affirm" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3).

Elizabeth also referred to the skills involved in judging wait-time:

> "You have to be a skilled tutor in when you come in and when you won't so I was using wait-time because the discussion was going so well so I browsed through and everything was going very well indeed" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

Similarly, Maxine explained that if students were about to make a discovery through discussion, she exercised wait-time to enable that to happen:

> " If I comment in one group I try to do it in all six if I can but it will depend sometimes on what I see. Sometimes I think if they're on the cusp of something coming, I wait" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

Likewise, Elizabeth watched and waited for students to pick up on the intended direction of the discussion, ready to intervene if assertive direction was warranted:

> "I'll leave it one more day when I go back in I'm going to have to be assertive. I'm actually going to have to say we're now going off track, refer back to and I'll date it to my question"
> "that is an example where I can browse through it for a day and if it really is going off track I get in there" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2).

Assessing

The staff noted that assessment was a role for the teacher in AOD. Both Elizabeth and Maxine referred to monitoring discussions for formative purposes. They explained that participating with students in discussions identified students who were struggling with ideas and concepts. The staff noted that they could then follow up to address misconceptions or to extend ideas within discussions, or via private communication with students:

> "There's a formative element from my perspective because I think if they're not really hitting this idea and it's a big one, then I'll weave it back in again at some other point" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

> "Feed back and feed forward. So feedback telling them what they're doing, whether that's to the point or whether it isn't, and not just saying good or well done you actually have to say why so it's affirmation and your reasons why which is what I call quality feedback and then giving them [next] question or something to take them forward and sometimes that's individual and sometimes that's the group. You direct it at either or both or whatever. So they have to feel like they're a valued individual and they have to know [where they've come from and] where they're going" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2).

Part of formative assessment was the direct acknowledgement of students' contributions, since this entailed 'noticing' what the students brought to the discussion:

> "Initially make sure that you respond to everybody so that everybody gets their contributions valued" (W, staff, FG2).

Related to the notion of valuing students' contributions by responding directly to them, the lecturers conveyed a range of views about the use of acknowledgement, encouragement and praise for students within online discussion. For example, Maxine reiterated the importance of acknowledgement, just as Elizabeth and W did above:

> "I've found this discussion, well I'm finding discussions actually to be incredibly challenging just to know which way to go, which way to push it, which buttons to press, which ways to acknowledge people for what they're doing but to encourage them to think" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

> "You're trying to acknowledge that everybody's voice has got something to say and see where each person is coming from" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

While staff said they generally aimed to acknowledge students in discussion, there was also a place for tactical ignoring, when staff withdraw acknowledgement or avoid singling students out:

> "I have indirectly responded to D but I haven't named her because I hoped it might bring her in but I didn't want to name her because she had not been one of the best contributors and I thought you know you don't want to acknowledge her and not the others… I ignored K from all that rubbish she posted at the beginning" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

In a similar vein, while there is sometimes a place to praise students publicly within the discussion forum, there are other instances when the lecturers preferred to thank students privately. For example, Elizabeth mentioned public praise:

> "I have highlighted her so and I've also gone back to the analogy and praised them for that and added some information" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

> "I've praised C, P, T and others…" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

In contrast, Maxine preferred to thank students privately:

> "I just think that sometimes you can give accolades to people online but I think sometimes individually there's some real strong things but it's not appropriate to say how wonderful that is…. And sometimes I think it's if you're praised really publicly other people will think that they haven't done well" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

Privately, however:

> "I usually thank them for their thoughtful contributions and the way that they're linking to the literature and helping us all to think" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

In relation to assessment for summative purposes, the focus group staff also commented that they found assessing online discussion to be challenging and contentious. Lecturers reported difficulties with establishing criteria suited to this assessment, and wrestled with issues of weighting, objectivity, and manageability. The staff felt that analysing online discussions for assessment purposes was a time-consuming, labour-intensive task, ill supported by technical systems. They said it was extremely challenging to formulate useful and timely feedback for large numbers of students, with any level of individualization or personalization. Overall, lecturers were divided on the value of assessing discussion. Some provided a summative

weighting for discussion in order to motivate students, highlighting a perception among staff that if discussion were not assessed then students would not bother to take part. Allocating a summative weighting to discussion thus rewarded students for prioritizing this aspect of their work:

> "When you start to assess discussion that's all very well because there's a motivation there for students to actually come online and do their thing because if you don't have that then they don't do it, traditionally, in my experience, they don't bother" (G, staff, FG1).

> "If there's absolutely no assessment part in it, quite often they just won't come in. And how do we know if they're lurking behind? How do we know that… they've agreed to do this, to become a community, as part of a community, and a community responsibility is to have some sort of a presence" (Ji, staff, FG1).

> "I give them 10% to motivate them, I figure if I'm asking them to do quite a bit of discussion and to really think about the readings, I think I should give them some credit" (N, staff, FG2).

Other staff explicitly reacted against the notion that students participated purely for marks, or that they should be rewarded for meeting this basic expectation. For example:

> "I honestly do not believe that a student's engagement in a forum discussion has anything to do with a grade" (B, staff OFG, week 6-7. Ref 2).

> "It concerns me that you sort of slip into that performing monkey thing, and I'm sure that I'm seeing the impact of NCEA on some of our younger students where unless you're going to give me a reward I'm not going to do it, and that's really worrying. [Background voices: That's right!] Because of that whole perspective as well, we better give them rewards otherwise they're not going to do it. We don't get rewards in the real world and we have to do stuff!" (L, staff, FG2).

Several lecturers felt that discussions functioned as tutorials, supportive of and preparatory for other assignments, rather than as assessment tasks. In some cases discussions did not carry summative weightings, but were deemed both a compulsory requirement and a commitment to the community of learners. For example:

> "It's a compulsory component. But I have found that having no marks attached hasn't actually altered the quality of what you get. You get people who are really into it, and if people are not then and I will send them a private

message saying … because we are a community you've got an obligation to your colleagues really" (Maxine, staff, FG2).

"I tell them the discussions are not weighted but are attached to assignments, so if they do discussions these will help with assignments. I explain to them how the discussions link into the assignments, and of course the assignments have got weight but the discussions themselves don't. I say that the discussions aren't compulsory, but they help you with the assignments. I don't tell them not to do them. I reckon if they do the discussions online, this will come through in their assignments in terms of clarity and depth of thought" (N, staff, FG2).

Some staff supported student learning via prompt and regular feedback, creating a formative and summative dimension to assessment. For example:

"I think the assessed component supports the quality of discussion immensely because the students are continually aiming for the best grade. But really we treat it as a formative process as well so we are giving students feedback throughout, so out of those five assessed weeks, students are receiving a mark at the end of each week, and critical feedback which enables them to really improve the quality of their discussion" (J, staff, FG2).

Some staff stated a preference for student self-assessment of discussion, indicating that if criteria were shared then student judgements of their own performance was likely to be fairly accurate:

"What I do think however is that it is a good idea to get students to assess themselves, and give themselves a mark. I mean they know what the criteria are, they're given to them. If you used that totally, they'd probably end up with grades that were just a little tougher than if you'd given them yourself" (T, staff, FG1).

Some staff experimented with negotiating criteria with students, along with student self-assessment, moderated by the lecturer:

"There is a certain amount of self assessment and peer assessment, and so they set the criteria so as a group, as a class, we work through that. I do final sort of tweaking but they are in control of the assessment themselves" (Maxine, staff 2, FG2).

Some staff said they chose to select some discussions for formal assessment, while leaving other discussions unassessed. In some cases, students were asked to self-select discussions for assessment, inviting them to appraise and nominate their own best work. Overall, the staff regarded online discussion assessment as problematic

and some admitted to changing their approach each year and experimenting with ways around the issues:

> "Sometimes I've assessed online discussion and sometimes I haven't, and I'm not convinced that it makes much difference at all in terms of the amount of contribution and the quality of it. I've done various things, and if you're going to put a 10% weighting on discussion, I mean well does it really matter if they do or they don't? I know I've spoken to others who say you either put 25% on it or you don't bother. I've come round to thinking that yes, that's correct. 10% doesn't mean anything" (L, staff, FG2).

One lecturer shared a particular approach to assessing online discussion, combining elements of attendance and participation, preparation for assignments, and student reflections on discussion as an assessment task:

> "I share with you your concern about assessing discussions. And I, for me, what we've done is we've said 'discussion is your proof of participation and attendance', but beyond that, we're not assessing the quality of your discussion. So, we've got other assessments. However, one of those assessments is write up a discussion. Write up a discussion. In other words, canvas what was said in a discussion, summarise what was said, highlight the main points, show your own thinking and your own response to the points raised, etc, etc, etc. So, there is assessment ON the discussion rather than the discussion being the assessment and that has been extremely useful. We also use that as a catch-up assessment task for students who, for one reason or another, miss a discussion" (D, staff, FG1).

What the lecturers expect of students

The data were categorized with respect to staff expectations of students.

Participation

One expectation the lecturers voiced was that students were expected to contribute at least twice a week to discussion. The lecturers explicitly linked participation with attendance, learning, and students' professional obligations. For example, some staff equated discussion participation with required attendance, arguing that:

> "It's like your… attendance in class, that's their attendance on forum" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

And similarly:

> "It is an expectation, it's a course requirement similar really to the on-campus attendance" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

> "You are wanting people to come to class, essentially" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

Staff in the focus groups also equated participation in discussion with attending class. For example:

> "To me that's the attendance register as well. I know they're in class, they're there, participating" (D, staff, FG1).

> "Participation is like being in class so if you don't participate we say you can fail on attendance" (R, staff, FG2).

Maxine, in the online focus group, offered further insights when pondering the reasons for the priority placed on participation in discussion in lieu of attending class:

> "I have often wondered if this is about control - me needing to know what is happening as far as the students are concerned. If they are not there, what are they up to? To my way of thinking, however, it is more than that - there is accountability - mine and theirs. Not all that is covered goes towards the formal assessments, just as happens in a face to face situation, There is a professional need to consider different perspectives. I think there is also an ethic of care in here - I care about what they think, their educational spaces and places. I want them to feel strong and secure with their own knowledge, and with the collective understanding that can be generated through collegial discussion" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3).

Furthermore:

> "If you don't actually take part in discussions or regularly then you actually miss out on a whole lot of perspectives that other people bring" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

And conversely:

> "I think there's also a sense of in a way of obligation as well because if you don't participate then other people are not getting access to that" (ibid).

Staff within the first f2f focus group acknowledged the reluctance of some students to participate actively. They saw this as a lack of confidence and trust in their peer group. The 'lurking' phenomenon involves students who browse, read, and reflect on the contributions of others, without actively posting ideas of their own. Some

lecturers regarded lurking as a valid online behaviour, linking it to preferred learning styles:

> "Students learn in different ways and just because they are not contributing doesn't mean to say they're not learning. There's an assumption that you are contributing to discussions, therefore you are making explicit what you're thinking, therefore you must be rewarded" (G, staff, FG1).

Accordingly, some staff recognised that making thinking explicit via discussion should not be the only evidence of learning. However, others saw lurking as passive, parasitic and contrary to the principles of a professional community of learners. While likening lurking to 'legitimate peripheral participation' in Lave and Wenger's (1991) terms, one staff member (second f2f focus group) explained that this is not permitted in online discussions as students were required to actively participate and to put thoughts into writing within the forum:

> "The conflict between the kind of teaching that I'm doing for these online courses and Wenger's idea of legitimate peripheral participation is that I don't tolerate that [i.e. lurking] in a sense. Because I'm assessing requirements I don't tolerate peripheral participation, in the sense that he says is a good idea" (P, staff, FG2).

Staff expected students to interact and engage in debate, form conclusions and look ahead to the next steps in their learning:

> "If they've participated and if they can talk about with knowledge and reasonably convincingly then they've got to a particular level. Then they get to another level if they engage in agreeing and disagreeing with one another and asking questions of one another and so on, so that's another level up; and then the very top level which I don't expect of students necessarily, but what the best students do is they draw ideas together, they conclude, and they might say hey we're running out of steam in this thing here so what really is coming out of this is now we need to go here … so they've got that ability if you like to actually sum up, see what's happening and see where they're going next, so that's the top level. So I use those criteria for assessing the idea of what students have achieved in discussions" (P, staff, FG2).

As one other lecturer commented in this focus group:

> "There aren't many other ways we can see their level of engagement. We can't read their body language, we can't see whether they're engaged with us as we might do in a tutorial. I guess that's the main way, aside from their formal assessments, that we get to see that they are participating and engaging, not just participating but engaging in the reading, and engaging with what other people are saying… we're looking for that critical

engagement with the readings and with each other, so responding to other people is probably key in order to get that top level in terms of the assessment" (W, staff, FG2).

Interaction

The staff said that they expected to see students responding to each other in discussion:

> "If it's going well it's because people are actually responding to each other and to the threads that are coming up so they're not just posting but responding and if it's going well it's the dynamics somehow seem to fit together in that there's not only the readings coming out but there's perspectives and there's alternative sort of websites and things that people are offering to bring in to make it richer than I could manage on my own, really…. I'm interested in perspectives and ranges of ideas and opening them up and so the more that we get in terms of listening to each other and responding, the better it is for me rather than just agreeing, agreeing, agreeing" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

Elizabeth (staff 1, i/v 2) characterized desirable interaction as "a lovely to-ing and fro-ing atmosphere", contrasting this with disjointed postings where students did not engage with other discussants but merely posted without linking to other people or threads. Elizabeth described such an entry as "an independent posting" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3); and likened it to interrupting a conversation: "just an interrupting independent posting" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3). Elizabeth also linked the notion of a learning community to caring, responsiveness and student interaction, explaining that participants showed they cared by responding to each other:

> "The majority care about each other it's that real community of learners that has trust with each other and they spark off each other"
> "Researcher: So what tells you that they care for each other?
> Elizabeth: Well the way that they respond. They nearly all respond to each other…. Using each other's names or reiterating part of the message of ones who have previously spoken…. It's very interactive… I think they way they affirm each other is very powerful" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

On the other hand, the staff considered that discussion could be dull when characterized by bland/blind agreement. They expected students to present a range of viewpoints or perspectives:

> "when they've conformed too much, so there's not enough debate so everybody's agreeing with everybody and the discussion never really takes

139

off, I've put "conformity that nullifies discussion", that sometimes happens" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

However,

"An unsuccessful discussion can also be when you've got opinions that are just too divergent" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

While the staff explicitly linked responsiveness and caring, one focus group also described the flipside of this association. The staff (FG1) attributed students' reluctance to openly share ideas within discussion to "the AK47 factor". This "AK47 factor" occurs when students "shoot down" or harshly criticize each other's comments, rendering more vulnerable students reluctant to post. The staff instead sought to promote "politeness strategies … around situations of disagreement" (T, staff, FG1), so that students could express divergent viewpoints while maintaining positive relationships in the group:

"The term I use is divergence. Rather than conflict" (T, staff, FG1).

"You want respect and politeness… You also want students to feel safe enough to come in and actually say what they think in a respectful way, and that can be hard when you're dealing with sensitive issues too" (Ji, staff, FG1).

Reading

The staff said that they expected students to link to literature within online discussions. Staff, both within focus groups and interviews, mentioned readings as a basis or focus for the asynchronous online discussion:

"They're usually based on readings so the students have got readings to reflect on" (Joe, staff, FG1).

"Focus on questions that problemmatise the readings" (T, staff, FG1).

"Really encourage the students to engage in a critical review of their readings" (G, staff, FG1).

"The discussion is asking them to integrate what they read with their own thinking" (N, staff, FG2).

"It tends to be responses to readings with key questions trying to explore concepts" (L, staff, FG2).

The staff online focus group communicated similar messages about the centrality of readings as a stimulus for discussion:

"The students are encouraged to converse, inquire, critique and reflect, but they not only use their practical experiences, but also relate to prepared readings for each module. In addition, they are expected to bring new readings and references to the dialogue in order to move the conversations along" (H, staff OFG, week 1, ref 0).

"It [AOD] provides the platform for interaction and enables consolidation and clarification of their understanding from the readings etc as well as synthesis of ideas from this literature with their own background experiences and their experiences in their placement schools" (W, staff OFG, week 1, ref 1).

Interviewed staff deemed readings to be important as they exposed students to perspectives that may differ from their own experiences. Maxine, for example, said reading relevant literature supplemented and extended the students' classroom experiences:

"I love it when they give you anecdotes about what happens in a classroom but I want them to think or stand back from that a little bit and link it to what the literature is saying or how it might link or how it could connect or what the next step might be as far as the literature is concerned" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

She also explained that research evidence served to challenge students' thinking:

"My rationale is that the readings provide some sort of evidence for some of the statements and particularly if you get something which is quite controversial because for example many of my students think that calculators should not be used in a classroom so unless you refer them to references and research and get them to think about it, they're going to take that quite closed perspective with them, so you've got to challenge, so that's where I see the readings are important" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

Elizabeth explained that academic and professional literature exposed student teachers to the language of their discipline or field:

"The language of the field, the discipline they're working in. It's very important to pick up on the meta-language because all the handbooks, ministry handbooks, curriculum… they're walking the talk, they're talking about the words that they should be using. They seek to use the language of the readings" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

Like Maxine, Elizabeth also explained that literature opens up a range of perspectives for students, beyond what they might encounter through classroom/school experience alone:

> "Schools are very diverse in how they implement curriculum so in terms of curriculum I think you've got to get the breadth out there because the handbook will teach you five different ways to teach writing and if we've taken you through one article, one person's point of view, you might be strong in that but if you don't know the other four you're stuck" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

While the staff emphasized the need for students to draw upon and use readings within AOD, they also expected students to use proper referencing:

> "In the online discussion we require, not reference lists, but referencing in the context of online discussion and make it clear that one of the purposes is that you are preparing for your essay" (J, staff, FG2).

> "We suggest they use APA conventions in the body of the posting but if it's a set reading everyone has access to then a full reference at the bottom of the posting is unnecessary" (W, staff OFG, week 3, ref 1).

Reflection

The staff remarked that they had an expectation of quality discussion involving students building on each other's ideas, adding new thoughts, changing each other's thinking; and in revision and reflection:

> "They may be posting and someone else comes in and agrees with that but adds theirs, and then the first person comes in and says oh you added more to mine I didn't think of that but I'm thinking... They can go back and reflect which is the strength of the whole programme, it's not conversation that's been and gone and this is why I like it you can go back and actually reflect on what you've said, that's when you get the quality coming through... Revision and reflection is a key part" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

While the lecturers said that it was particularly promising when students expressed their personal thinking and wondering and when they made links with theory and literature. However, they also said it was less promising when a student's wondering led nowhere, or added little to discussions. One undesirable student behaviour was being "Glib" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2). For staff, glib comments

generally lacked depth, were without a theoretical basis, often based entirely on individual personal experience, loosely connected to the topic, and had little direction or relevance. It was difficult for others to respond to such postings. It was as though the students wanted to be part of the conversation, but didn't have anything much to say, and hadn't necessarily followed the previous conversation. This was perceived by the staff as an interruption to more productive conversation:

> "I call it mumble-jumble - because… she doesn't respond to others, it's just an individual response and usually has no depth to it at all and it's usually sort of an inane thing and the students tend to ignore her quite often. It's always close to being off-track but it's not quite. … she comes in with something glib that may or may not relate to the in-depth discussion that has just been occurring. … it doesn't add anything extra.... They don't have any theoretical basis for what they're going to say, they just pop in something that's kind of irrelevant and has a loose connection to the topic but it'll also be just mindless stuff they've observed or experienced that's not quite on point [so it's] around the point and you can't tell where they're going with it or where they're coming from so you can't respond to it very well as the next contributor and it's personal but it's too, it's too individually personal. It's not something the group can add to or pick up on. … it usually pops in, in the middle of a really good conversation so therefore it seems like it gives it more irrelevancy…. It's a straight interruption. So I don't know if they browsed or not but it doesn't seem like they have" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

Widening perspectives (Shifting ideas)

The staff indicated that they expected students to look more widely beyond their own experiences, to challenge their beliefs and widen perspectives: "to think outside the here and now" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2); "to look beyond their immediate situation" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3). While staff said they encouraged students to draw upon their experiences, they also urged students to view their own experiences as partial:

> "That experience as you are having it is not the definitive or the because it happened to me this is the way that it is, it's more to do with this is what's happened, how might I link that to what other people are saying" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

> "I'm often using discussion to really encourage students to feel confident about what they know and feel confident about what they're saying and where they came from, based on their own experience and then to integrate these other peoples' perspectives, such as from literature" (L, staff, FG2).

Staff considered that students have an obligation to participate in online discussion in order to attend and to learn, but also to give others access to a range of perspectives:

> "If not all students are coming to the party, that can hinder because you don't get that same sort of roundness if you like from the varying perspectives because our students are in all sorts of schools, deciles and places, and it's only by having all of that we can get a feel for what might be happening" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

> "That's where the community idea and the collaboration and the responsibility all comes into that because if you can't put yourself into someone else's shoes, then you're in strife because it means that you're only looking towards your own situation in a very narrow frame" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

While students bring a range of experiences to extend each other's perspectives, the staff also encouraged literature, research and theoretical models that extended students' thinking too:

> "I send them messages and say it would be good if you linked to readings or the wider view" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

Elizabeth observed that group dynamics could be problematic when students disliked being challenged, perhaps because they were too sensitive or dominant:

> "They fall flat when the group dynamics are that someone is super-sensitive and does not like to be challenged or the other way, very stroppy, very dominant and doesn't like to be challenged so they're people who are not prepared to shift their ideas are a stumbling block they can be very dominant and ruin the discussions because they're not going anywhere, so they're barriers" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

In contrast, Maxine described:

> "seeing how perspectives change because sometimes you know at the beginning somebody will say "well off the top of my head I will say…", then they come back in and their discussion and their thinking is a lot richer than it was initially and that's really exciting, when you see that happening" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

And in the second f2f focus group, two lecturers agreed:

> "**J:** When the students make significant, big shifts in their thinking and their beliefs that's quite exciting as well.
> **N:** Yes, the sort of entries that start with "I never thought of that before!"
> (J & N, staff, FG2).

Putting it all together

The staff expected students to put a range of ideas together into critical syntheses. Discussion worked best, staff agreed, when participants brought in their own personal opinions on theory, made reference to literature, critiqued, responded, argued and questioned. Ideally, then, discussion is about inquiry, critique and reflection. Elizabeth summed this up when she said:

> "Absolutely not just talking, not just dialogue, but inquiry, critique and reflection. That's the ultimate… They have personal experience plus readings but they have to make those readings active if you like, they have to interpret them, they have to bring them to the online forum and that's why some groups work well and some don't because the groups that do the readings and then put forward their own questions, their own ideas, really engage and they pick up on what, you know, what, what is really happening in terms of the topic but some groups never reach that in-depth level" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

Quality discussion was considered by staff to involve students building on each other's ideas, adding new thoughts, changing each other's thinking, revising and reflecting. At its best, staff viewed discussion as a rich community experience. Discussion was seen as positive when it was evident that people were making meaning out of content, viewing it from a range of perspectives, coalescing content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and reflecting on their own practice:

> "The good would be when the discussion is really active, and alive, and you see people's viewpoints being challenged, or you see a light flashing, or you've had someone with a polarized view of something who says now I can see it this way! And reflecting back to other people's contributions, that sort of dynamic to me is when I think oh! That gives me a real buzz " (Ji, staff, FG1).

> "I find it exciting too that they're able to link the theory to what they see happening in the classroom or other situations in life, but also when everybody is keen to participate and you go online and see all these contributions and see nice long and quality contributions in terms of not just linking to the readings but linking to each other… And the discussion is taking off on its own…Its got its own life. Really, perhaps you don't need to be there quite so much. But you're still monitoring" (W, staff, FG2).

For staff, therefore, key elements of good discussion were seen as active and interactive students, challenge, changing viewpoints, links to a variety of sources, and a certain intangible liveliness.

Chapter Seven: Synthesis and Discussion

The previous chapter reported the findings of this research, maintaining separation between student and staff voices, with initial categories based upon participants' expectations and perceived roles. In this chapter, data are revisited and reviewed with reference to wider literature in order to theorise the findings. My aim is to gather the participants' perspectives together, comparing and contrasting student and staff perspectives, and highlighting emergent themes. To do this, I revisited interview and focus group transcripts and highlighted both patterns and disruptions to patterns in the data. I developed key messages into categories, building a cumulative list with subthemes, and extracting quotes for illustrative purposes (see Methodology Chapter Five for further explanation of coding and analysis). My intention here was to move from reporting in Chapter Six, where participants' voices were presented in order to let the data speak as far as possible, to synthesise and develop emergent themes.

To inform pedagogy and actualise affordances of AOD, the findings of this study prompt consideration of three key ideas: the *purpose* of discussion; participants' *presence* in discussion; and the needs of *people* in discussion. These three elements or themes are illustrative of sociocultural theorising (Bell, 2011), premised on the functions of mind and action in context, since *purpose* is concerned with negotiating the intentions and expectations of AOD; while *presence* is the enaction of these intentions, as participants actively communicate and engage in the learning/teaching processes within AOD; and the human, social and relational elements underpin the work of *people* in AOD. Each key idea is in turn explored through three subthemes stemming from participants' perspectives. That is:

Purpose in discussion
- Purpose and metaphors of AOD
- Purpose and preparation via meta-discussion
- Purpose and weaving of personal, professional and scholarly sources

Presence in discussion
- Presence and participation in AOD
- Presence and communication
- Presence and formative interaction

People in discussion
- People and relational connections in AOD
- People and community
- People and leadership capacity

Each of these ideas is now more closely examined, and illustrated with participant quotations where appropriate, drawing upon and synthesising both staff and student data, alongside literature.

Purpose in discussion: AOD as an intentional practice

The first emergent theme from both student and staff perspectives concerns participants' expectations, intentions and purposes for AOD. When articulating the purposes of AOD, participants described a *tutorial*, a *community*, and a *journey*. Participants indicated a need to prepare for participation, by discussing discussion parameters (meta-discussion) in order to clarify purpose at the outset. In this teacher education context, there was a consensus that the purpose of AOD was to weave personal and professional experiences and literature in order to construct new understandings of pedagogy.

Purpose and metaphors of AOD

The purpose of AOD was usually discussed using metaphors. For both students and staff, there is a level of agreement about the purpose of online discussion, conceptualised as:

- akin to a face-to-face *tutorial*
    - a way to register attendance
    - a means to cover content
    - a space to develop thinking
- a *community* site for working together
- a *journey* characterised by movement

Both students and staff explicitly likened asynchronous online discussion to a *tutorial* class, "just like tutorials on campus" (Tia, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 10; cf. Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). Similarly, staff compared online discussions to "a tutorial situation" (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1; cf. W, staff, FG2). Accordingly, the first expectation was to join tutorials by attending. This fulfils course requirements and demonstrates that work is occurring:

> "I want them to know how hard I'm working… they know I am there and they are seeing the work that I'm doing" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 3).

While some students struggled to see a purpose for discussion beyond registering their attendance, most recognised a higher purpose beyond simple attendance. The following student quotes exemplify this contrast:

> "You've got all your readings, you've got all the knowledge so I wonder where discussion fits into that" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

> "When it's free-flowing and you've got debate and it makes me look at things from a different perspective when someone's brought something up, something I wouldn't have considered… and I'm enjoying it… it's not like you're posting because you're meeting your requirements, you're posting because you're really engaged in what you're actually talking about online" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

For staff too, gauging student attendance was deemed important, and perhaps fundamental to the higher purposes of discussion. Both Elizabeth and Maxine equated discussion participation with required "attendance" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1). After all, "you are wanting people to come to class, essentially" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).
"There is accountability, mine and theirs" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3).
Staff in both focus groups agreed.

Maxine also highlighted the need to ensure content coverage:

> "we have to be able to say these people have looked in depth at material" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3).

Meanwhile students also expected to access content of relevance to their chosen field of classroom teaching. Nina said that:

> "real learning occurs when I can make a connection to what we have seen or experienced in the classroom" (stu OFG, wk 2, ref 17).

Both students and staff regarded discussions as opportunities to develop in-depth thinking and wider perspectives, "to think outside the here and now" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2), or "to grow our ideas" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).
In these ways, participants regarded the purposes of AOD to be akin to a face-to-face tutorial: a way to register attendance, a means to cover content and a space to develop thinking.

A further purpose of AOD was as a site for working together: an interactive classroom *community*. Both students and staff valued the interactive potential of discussion, where community ideals entailed sharing and support. For staff, discussion "provides the platform for interaction" (W, staff OFG, week 1, ref 1). While all seven interviewed students emphasised the importance of being responsive to others in discussion, this was also mentioned at least three times in the student online focus group. Staff highlighted the use of discussion to encourage communities who can learn from each other. This "learning communities" and "communities of learners" theme was mentioned throughout staff interviews, and within both the online and face-to-face focus groups. Indeed, all interviewed students also mentioned connection and community. The online focus group students also mentioned this. Connection to the community was described as a key purpose of discussion. For example, Mei wrote:

> "I participate in discussions because I like the connection it brings to others" (Stu OFG, wk 18, ref 21).

Because this theme of connection and community was evident in both staff and student interviews, whether as focus groups, individual, face-to-face or online, it warrants closer attention. Further examination therefore follows in the section on people in discussion (People and relational connections in AOD; People and community. See pages 183ff).

While participants conceptualised AOD as a tutorial and a community, they also characterised its purpose as a *journey*. Staff and students employed language of movement, focused on moving participants, thinking and the discussion along. The students reported that they appreciated lecturers who re-entered discussion at strategic points in order to sustain momentum: to steer and to provide direction (e.g. Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1). The notion of movement or momentum in discussion was mentioned by all individually interviewed students, and those within the online focus group. Several students also described how they adopted a teaching or leadership role in discussion at times when they worked to move the discussion along, and again the notions of "steering the conversation" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1), and "moving" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1; Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1) were explicit in the student comments. This emphasis on

movement was also apparent in the language employed by staff, with numerous mentions of moving, shifting, momentum, impetus, direction and redirection, tracking ('off-track', 'on-track'), taking off, pace, and "journeys" (e.g. Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1). As to what or who is subject to movement, the staff focused on moving students, themselves, the thinking and ideas raised, and the discussion itself along.

The emphasis on movement is perhaps linked to notions of development as a forward-focused drive, where learners move from one zone to the next (Vygotsky, 1978). There is support in the literature for this notion of momentum, movement or progress in a forward direction (e.g., Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Collison et al, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). What is crucial is that the overall direction is agreed upon by staff and students, so that the movement works in favour of quality learning and teaching. This aspect of AOD is theorised in terms of formative assessment and formative interaction later in this chapter.

In summary, therefore, the students and staff conceived of discussion as a *tutorial*: a way to register attendance, a means to cover content, and a space to develop thinking; a *community* site for working together; and a *journey* characterised by movement. These findings are consistent with Jetton's (2003) analysis of the advantages of computer mediated discussion (CMD) in teacher education. In accordance with Jetton's findings, CMD/AOD constitutes an alternative learning environment, an additional way to communicate about content and experiences, and a tool for collaboration. Both groups of preservice teachers, in Jetton's (2003) study and in my study, shared conceptions of AOD as a space for learning, with both content and collaboration playing a part. My study builds upon Jetton's work by attending to the purposes ascribed to discussion by teacher education staff as well as by the preservice teacher education students.

Ascertaining the purpose of discussion for the participants alerts us to what they are striving for and how their intentions may be compatible or at cross-purposes to each other, illuminating the space of difference discussed in Chapter Three. Broadly speaking, staff and students in my study indicated that they held similar ideas about the purposes of discussion and there is no evidence of simple or clear-cut conflict

between staff and student views on the purpose of discussion. However, it is possible that some of the different conceptualisations may be in conflict, even when held by the same person. For example, the view of discussion as a means to cover content may clash with the notion that it should be a space to develop thinking or to work together. When too much focus is given to delivery of content, resulting overload of content can act as an impediment to developing thinking, and if content is provided to students, there may be less perceived need to work collaboratively. Indeed, AOD may not be the best avenue for coverage of content (Dennen, 2005), although arguably this is likely to depend on who provides the content since students can effectively share content through AOD and incorporate a range of perspectives at the same time (Jetton, 2003). Provision of content need not be the preserve of staff. Similarly, the drive to register attendance may not equate with quality participation that involves thinking and working together. Where students are focused on registering attendance by getting their comments noticed by the lecturer (e.g., Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 2, 3, stu OFG), the quality of thinking may be less in depth, and the attention to points made by others in the discussion may be less than is needed for collaborative learning. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) reinforce this concern and tackle it head-on by explicitly informing students that class discussion "should never be used to curry favour with the instructor… [thereby] deliberately destroying the link between student speech and teacher approval" (p. 66).

The findings indicate a need for staff and students to clarify what the purposes of discussion are or what these will be in any particular class (Kehrwald, 2008). The literature mentions the importance of establishing goals for discussion, incorporating clear, explicit learning objectives that are relevant and visible to students (e.g., Angeli, Valanides & Bonk, 2003; Dennen, 2005; Jetton, 2003, Kanuka, Collett & Caswell, 2002, Locke, 2007). However, the implication is still that the teacher by and large establishes the purpose and communicates this to the students. While the literature often refers to sharing learning objectives with the students, the possibility of sharing the *formulation* of the objectives for AOD is less often raised, indicating that the emphasis may be more on informing rather than consulting with students. Some authors link purpose to motivation, and argue that students must 'see the need for discussion' in order to attend or participate (such as Dennen, 2005; Hew, Cheung

151

& Ng, 2010). It seems to me that there is a place for greater input from students and for negotiating purposes for discussion. Instead of lecturers telling students that discussion is relevant and will help them to learn, it may be more valuable to seek students' input about what they need and how discussion might support particular learning needs. Students are more likely to 'see the need' when they identify what those needs are in the first instance. This entails co-constructing shared purposes, the subject of the next section.

Purpose and preparation: Meta-discussion

Preparing for AOD by establishing shared understandings of purpose necessitates discussion *about* AOD. This might be termed '*meta-discussion'*. The students in my study wished to have further specific discussions *about* AOD to clarify the purposes. While students were satisfied they had a general idea about online expectations, they perceived a lack of specific focus on online discussions. Tia said:

> "There's no discussion about discussions.... No one actually talks to you about discussions" (stu 6, i/v 1).

For this reason, the students welcomed opportunities for meta-discussion in the online focus group (e.g. Nina, stu 5, i/v 3).

According to staff, however, such preparation and clarification of expectations and purposes already occurs. Staff in both focus groups mentioned their on-campus preparation for online discussion:

> "We spend quite a bit of time, … when they are on campus, going through what it is to be part of a community of practice, as a community of learners so we do expect a certain amount of online presence" (Ji, staff, FG1).

And in the second focus group, one lecturer explained that:

> "we begin that on campus with an hour and a half session on what is critical discussion, why do we engage in critical discussion, and what does it look like, and we practice the skills and then transfer that to the online environment and that's particularly successful" (J, staff, FG2).

In a postgraduate setting, one staff member reported providing models to students, showing effective discussion exemplars:

> "we used transcripts that we removed peoples' names from and where I had really good examples of what I would consider effective discussion, I actually made that available in the course as an example" (T, staff, FG1).

According to staff, therefore, there is indeed discussion about AOD, encompassing guidance about how to engage in critical discussion within communities of learners. The discrepancy between what staff claim to mediate and what students claim to miss, may relate to the cohort of students. Staff referred to students either in the third year of their teaching degree, or postgraduate students. The students in this study were second year students. Perhaps this indicates that expectations for online discussions should be made explicit much earlier, to avoid such mismatches and confusions. The implication could be that more discussion about discussion is needed for students earlier in their degree, when commencing online learning.

Above all, it cannot be assumed that students will come to class prepared to learn effectively through AOD (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Kehrwald, 2008; Thomas, 2002). As Askell-Williams and Lawson (2005) point out, "If students come to a discussion without knowledge of how to act effectively in that situation, the potential benefits for learning are unlikely to be realised" (p. 86). Other studies make a similar point: Students need more initial preparation prior to engaging in discussion; criteria for participation need to be more transparent; and ongoing direct teaching and guidance about the processes of discussion is necessary (e.g. Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Ellis, Goodyear, Calvo & Prosser, 2008; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Hew & Cheung, 2003; Seddon et al, 2010).

I propose that guidance for students can be approached using a combination of reflection on prior experience of discussion, exemplars, consideration of advice from previous students, formulation of ground rules and guidelines, meeting with students face-to-face, and maintaining ongoing negotiations and guidance. While there is support for each of these suggestions in the literature, the combination proposed here represents more thorough consideration of the need to co-construct a systematic guidance programme with students, and to premise this upon shared understandings of purpose.

The students in this research explained that they sought exemplars and guidance from experienced online learners. The students needed to know what good discussion looks like (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Dennen, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2003). Sharing exemplary responses or vignettes from previous classes can assist to clarify expectations related to tone and content, and students can analyse samples in order to focus attention on how they want their own discussions to be (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Fauske & Wade, 2003). This is also an opportunity to surface and deal with students' own past experiences of discussion, including discussion experiences that may have been less than satisfactory. Along with consideration of effective discussion, students can also identify ineffective discussion behaviours so as to actively discourage these. For example, Jetton (2003) illustrates this suggestion with reference to belittling or ignoring others in discussion. In the current study, students in the online focus group offered a rich set of recommendations for 'newbies' based on their own experiences of discussion and their expectations of peers. Students interviewed also told of modeling/leading discussion for peers who were new to online option classes (e.g. Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). In light of the credibility of students' advice, Brookfield and Preskill's use of letters from previous students is compelling. Each cohort of students can be invited to produce "letters from online successors", where students write 'exit' letters at the end of their online class, making suggestions for how the next cohort of students might best contribute online (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 244).

The findings suggest there is a need to work with students to establish ground rules and guidelines, and to essentially clarify purpose in AOD. Ground rules can be regarded as firmly established fundamentals for AOD – related to respectful discourse; while guidelines can be a more flexible set of preferences to work with. In the spirit of attending to students' needs and to involving students in decision-making about their own learning processes, I contend that lecturers and students need to negotiate ground rules and guidelines for AOD, rather than advocating a top-down approach whereby lecturers tell students what discussion should be like (or merely share criteria for marking). In keeping with Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) emphasis on evolving ground rules based upon consideration of participants' prior experiences of discussion, this is an opportunity to co-construct purpose in AOD.

Clarification of purpose is crucial in the early stages of working with students online, as early intervention is likely to promote retention and keep the focus on learning (Boston et al, 2009). It is also wise to meet with students face-to-face to provide orientation and guidance about learning through online discussion. Just as focus group staff and students in this study noted the value of on campus sessions for setting students up for success with online discussion, so did other authors emphasise the usefulness of initial face-to-face meetings where practicable (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Guiller, Durndell & Ross, 2008; Hramiak, 2010). Meeting face-to-face enables students to engage in constructing understandings about online discussion in a more familiar classroom context before plunging into the online discussion process. Meeting face-to-face also promotes interpersonal connections – by establishing rapport, sewing seeds for social presence, and in turn for reduced transactional distance when discussion is transferred to the online environment (Collis & Moonen, 2007; Jetton, 2003).

Following this, there is a need for ongoing negotiation once the discussions are underway online, in order to "modify expectations collaboratively with students", as Fauske and Wade (2003, p. 148) suggest. Teachers need to attend to how students are experiencing discussion throughout their course, and communicate about problems that emerge along the way (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

To construct an approach to guidance based upon the above suggestions, the following six-step process is proposed:

- A productive starting point would be students' own prior experiences of discussion, including the purposes of AOD and the metaphors used to conceptualise it;
- Analysis of exemplars of previous discussion in order to tease out the characteristics of effective discussion;
- Consideration and critique of the ideas shared by previous students, treating the letter from online successors as a white paper or proposal for how discussion might operate;

- Negotiation to establish ground rules and guidelines for the current cohort's discussion;

- Ongoing consultation and feedback to be implemented formatively throughout the course;

- As the cycle ends, the current cohort needs to reflect on the utility of their ground rules and guidelines; and produce the next iteration of the letter from online successors (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). In this way, the knowledge constructed extends beyond any single class or single semester of study. Students carry through their own growth of experience related to discussion, while also leaving a legacy for the next class to use as a launching pad for a new set of protocols.

This approach is inspired by and builds upon Salmon's (2002) notion of 'footprints', leaving "a pathway for others taking future courses to find" (p. 43). In addition, inspiration stems from Scardamalia and Bereiter's (2003) concept of knowledge building, as well as from the work of Collis and Moonen (2007) in relation to "the contributing student" (p. 19), whereby students generate learning materials that are then used and updated by students in subsequent cycles of the course. Similarly, James' (2009) "online generational" approach (p. 94) involves classes sharing their work online each semester, and accessing the work of previous generations, while writing for future generations. Through these processes, knowledge creation and innovation become pervasive. Holmes and Gardner (2006, p. 11) characterize the approach as "communal constructivism", whereby "the learners involved deliberately contribute their own learning to a community resource base for the benefit of their peers and future learners" (ibid, p. 11). The attention to students' voices, perspectives and experiences is in keeping with a phenomenographic approach, supportive of a distributed leadership model, where students learn to lead by leading learning (Lambert, 1998; 2003). This is appealing in a teacher education context in particular, since the opportunity to influence the learning of others is compatible with the space the students seek to move to as teachers in their own right (Ellsworth, 1997).

In terms of establishing expectations with respect to purpose and vision, this section has argued the need for negotiating shared purposes in AOD. A six-step process is proposed as an approach to guidance, utilising participants' prior experiences as a starting point, and culminating in a legacy of protocols that can be passed on to subsequent cohorts.

Purpose and weaving: Personal, professional and scholarly sources

In a teacher education context, a key purpose in AOD is to learn through discussion of diverse sources and multiple perspectives. There was a consensus among participants that effective discussion arises from weaving together aspects of personal experience, classroom experience and insights from literature. Tarryn articulated this effectively:

> "It is good when the discussion question, literature, classroom practice and personal experience (e.g. as parents) all link together, enabling students to engage in interweaving multiple sources of learning" (stu 7, i/v 1).

The staff comments were also compatible with this synthesis of literature, life and school experiences (e.g. W, staff FG2 & staff OFG, wk 1, ref 1). Weaving these three sources together challenges the dichotomy of theory on one hand and practice on the other. Instead, participants engage in theorising practice. To do so is in keeping with a a sociocultural perspective as prior experience is woven with newly acquired knowledge and practices in new professional contexts, and extended further with wider perspectives stemming from scholarly literature. Meaning evolves from linkages or connections between multiple knowledge sources.

As mentioned, the students appreciated lecturers sharing their own life experiences in discussion (e.g., Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1; Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1). The students also mentioned that they enjoyed discussing their own lives and experiences, particularly related to family (e.g., Tia, stu 6, i/v 1; Dana, stu 4, i/v 1). However, the students cautioned that it is crucial that personal anecdotes are relevant, and that fixation on personal experience can be problematic. In terms of relevance, Jacqui emphasised that personal experience should be relevant to the discussion theme and to the learning occurring (stu OFG, wk 11, ref 5). Building upon this point, Sarah also emphasised

157

that the personal experience should be relevant to the concerns of the group (stu OFG, wk 11, ref 7). The students considered relevant personal experience to be a useful entry point or a place to start. However, the students deemed 'fixation' on personal experience to be inadequate. According to the students, over-focusing on negative personal experiences could be detrimental to "the tone of the discussion" (Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1), while focusing solely on one's own children can overlook the diversity and need for a wider view of children's needs in "the school system" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1). Overall, the students considered use of personal experience to be insufficient as a sole point of reference, summed up by Sarah's comment: "continually going on about your own experiences all the time, it's not enough" (stu 2, i/v 3). These student views were very much in keeping with the staff's emphasis on widening perspectives and extending thinking. For example, Maxine made numerous references to looking and thinking "outside the here and now" (staff 2, i/v 2); "beyond their immediate situation" (i/v 3); and to "the wider view" (i/v 3).

To complement personal experience, the students welcomed the opportunity to make links to classroom practice, in order to enhance the relevance and interest of discussion, and to juxtapose theory and practice (e.g. Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1; Nina, stu 5; i/v 3). The staff too, valued the range of perspectives that students bring due to experience in a variety of schools and classroom settings. As Maxine explained:

> "our students are in all sorts of schools, deciles and places, and it's only by having all of that we can get a feel for what might be happening" (stu 2, i/v 1).

The students recognised the need to refer to literature pertaining to their field of study, within online discussion. According to the students, staff expected particular 'readings' to be completed, and used discussion as a means to check that students were indeed reading the set literature. The staff confirmed that this was indeed the case, in that readings were most often a basis or focus for discussion (e.g. Joe & Ji, staff, FG1), and the staff did indeed look to the discussion as evidence that students were reading, making sense of and engaging critically with the set literature (e.g. W, staff, FG2). The students indicated that discussion could be useful for 'unpacking' the meaning of complex theoretical reading (e.g. Dana, stu OFG, wk 8, ref 26), by talking through a text with the lecturer and discussion group (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 10, ref 6).

The students suggested that reading could help them to understand what they may or may not experience in schools. These uses of discussion in relation to literature were compatible with staff intentions in that staff hoped that students would think critically about the literature and the implications for practice (e.g. T & G, staff, FG1). The staff said that they intended the literature to add to and extend the range of viewpoints and challenge the students' perspectives (e.g. T, staff, FG1; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1&2).

The students voiced a number of key criticisms or concerns about how literature was used within online discussion. That is, the students:

- criticised the overuse of direct quotations from literature
- expressed confusion regarding the referencing of literary sources within online discussion
- questioned the purpose and authenticity of discussions focused on literature
- admitted to not reading peers' contributions when these did not make effective use of literature.

Dealing with each of these criticisms in turn, firstly, the students expressed dislike of the practice of copying and pasting material directly from set literature into the discussion. The students regarded the practice of "quoting, retelling and reproducing" literature (Don, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 23) as pointless and repetitive of what they had already read first-hand (e.g. Dana, stu 4, i/v 1; Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22). Reproduction of literature is not what the staff had in mind with respect to effective use in literature, as the staff emphasised the integration of the students' own thinking. That is, "the discussion is asking them to integrate what they read with their own thinking" (N, staff, FG2). As Elizabeth explained, "they have to make those readings active if you like, they have to interpret them" (staff 1, i/v 1).

Secondly, the students were critical of the need to explicitly reference readings, in APA style, as they considered this hindered the flow of discussion. However, the staff denied that they required reference lists for discussion (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2; J, staff, FG2). Rather, the staff asked for an in-text citation "in the body of the posting" (W,

staff OFG, wk 3, ref 1), and require full APA referencing only if the material is new to the group.

Thirdly, the students considered that quoting and referencing reduced the authenticity and learning potential of the online discussion. As Sarah asserted:

> "AOD is often not authentic. No-one goes around quoting references all the time in their conversations. … Authentic to me… means hearing "your" voice come through, more than the readings. Instead of pages of "copy and paste" verbatim. However, I think lecturers reinforce this, because they always stress the importance of readings" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22 & 27).

The staff did indeed stress the importance of readings, but also argued that discussing literature was part of any tutorial, and that the intention was for students to subject the readings to critical scrutiny.

Finally, the students admitted to skim-reading, "brushing over" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1), or completely ignoring postings that were comprised primarily of direct quotes from literature (cf. Don, stu 3, i/v 1).

It would seem that there is a need for clarification of the purpose of literature in online discussion. When negotiating ground rules and guidelines for AOD, staff and students need to give consideration to how personal experience, classroom/professional experience, and learning from literature can best be incorporated into the online discussion. Looking at each of these three elements in turn, it is apparent from the staff and student comments that personal experience is a valid starting point, but needs to be extended in the pursuit of learning. Valuing personal prior knowledge as a point of entry is a basic tenet of constructivist learning, and attention to students' personal stories is in keeping with respect for students' voices (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). In order to learn however, it is necessary to move beyond one's initial starting point (AOD as a journey). Learning entails enlargement of experience, and higher order or critical thinking involves thinking beyond the limitations of one's own personal experience to achieve greater awareness of multiple perspectives and viewpoints. Reviewing the purposes of AOD in a learning context such as teacher education serves as a reminder that care must be

taken that discussion is not limited to swapping anecdotes (Angeli et al, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). Nevertheless, it is useful for students (and staff) to articulate and share their personal experience, and when this occurs in a group discussion, the range of personal experiences begins to enlarge the perspectives to be considered (Dennen, 2005; Jetton, 2003). In the process, sharing promotes empathy, rapport and social presence, laying foundations for deeper learning through discussion.

In addition to personal experience, teacher education discussions also involve sharing of classroom and professional experience, enabling students to theorise practice within the field of study. Opportunities for situated learning and apprenticeship and enculturation into the profession are promoted, and the range of perspectives is again extended, since students and teachers have a variety of professional experiences to draw upon. Again, however, the caution regarding uncritical use of experiences holds. Just as students can become 'stuck in the here and now' of personal experience, so can practical knowledge grounded in a local setting become a fixation in the absence of theoretical understanding or awareness of broader contexts (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007). For this reason, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) recommend that teachers model critical processes when "telling tales from the trenches", by subjecting their own teaching errors to scrutiny (p. 76). If staff share stories of mistakes made while teaching, this provides an opportunity to model reflective practice, along with qualities of humility and resilience.

The staff in the current study expected that discussion would have a strong literature base, so that students engaged in reading in order to prepare for discussion of key professional ideas (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). The lecturers did expect students to read the literature associated with their field of study, and in turn expected discussion to reflect this reading. Taking a closer look at the place and purpose of the text, the lecturers explained that they regarded reading as a way of enlarging students' awareness of wider perspectives, since they expected engagement with literature to generate new insights and ways of interpreting the phenomenon of study. Literature provides theoretical grounding, and key conceptual understandings, couched in the language and terminology of the profession. For these reasons, the staff did look to

AOD for evidence that students were reading. In turn, the students in this study felt compelled to show they were reading and to cite/reference literature in their discussion posts, but complained that this constrained the discussion and promoted excessive use of verbatim quotes. The students regarded this use of literature as detrimental to discussion.

Students require clear guidance about how to effectively incorporate literature in their discussion. If AOD is a *tutorial*, students could be encouraged to talk about ideas from reading rather than compose reviews and analyses of literature. If AOD is a *community*, there seems little point in quoting literature to those who have already read the same material. Rather, students might treat common material 'as read', and focus on generating deeper discussion. They could also share wider reading beyond the prescribed course texts. If AOD is a *journey*, students could demonstrate how their reading moved their thinking along. With this in mind, I favour a focus on weaving as intertexuality (between texts/sources) within AOD. The concept of 'weaving' in this context is traditionally applied to the role of the moderator as s/he pulls together threads of discussion in order to synthesise themes and suggest implications (e.g. Feenberg, 1989; Salmon, 2003; Jacques & Salmon, 2007). It is useful to extend the concept to focus on weaving by students in discussion, as well as staff, and to refine the term to encapsulate the weaving of personal, professional and scholarly texts and examples (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003). This is in keeping with Hartman's (1995) work whereby learners build understanding on the basis of "a mosaic of intersecting texts" (p. 521). Meaning evolves from linkages or connections between multiple knowledge sources. In the context of AOD within teacher education, students require guidance to weave personal and professional experience with literature in meaningful ways that move beyond strings of verbatim quotations.

Section one of this chapter has argued the need to establish expectations and negotiate shared purposes in AOD. In a teacher education context, a key purpose in AOD is to weave together aspects of personal and professional experience, along with scholarly sources. The latter present the most significant challenge, suggesting a need for guidance particularly in relation to weaving literature with discussion. That is, to theorise classroom practice, drawing upon the scholarly literature.

Presence in discussion: AOD as a communicative practice

The second emergent theme relates to presence in AOD, in terms of participation, communication and formative interaction.

Presence and participation

The students clearly expected lecturers to "have a presence online" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). While this presence entails standing by, and monitoring discussion, the students did not know when lecturers were lurking unless their overt presence was actively signalled and made "visible" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 2) through participation. The students made analogies to face-to-face learning environments to illustrate their need for lecturers to be present and participate, as they would "in a classroom with them" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1), or "in a lecture theatre" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 21). The students denied dependency or over-reliance on the lecturers, rejecting any need for 'spoon-feeding' or 'hand-holding' (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 21; Sharon, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 33), instead asserting independence and initiative as adult learners, and recognising the need for time to think. There are indications that the students valued reciprocity in participation, expecting lecturers to contribute 2-3 times a week to discussion because this mirrors expectations of students' own participation. In a similar vein, students described reciprocal levels of activity, motivation and engagement, claiming their own participation was stimulated when lecturers were likewise actively present and involved.

The students also expected peers to participate, and to manage time in order to be both prompt and regular with postings. Prompt meant contributing to discussion near the start of the week or topic; while regularity entailed contributions throughout the discussion period, as opposed to consecutive postings at the very end of the discussion.

For staff, presence as participation was also a significant theme. Both staff case study volunteers articulated the intention to model participation by joining students in discussion at least twice a week (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

While the need for staff participation was readily acknowledged by staff, there was also a tension evident between 'standing back' to allow space for students to express their viewpoints, and more intensive scaffolding of student contributions. Some staff articulated a strategy whereby intensive scaffolding occurred at the beginning of a course, followed by more use of 'wait time' and promotion of student interdependence and leadership over time. This strategic moderation of discussion required a great deal of monitoring and judgement on the lecturers' part in order to determine "the right moment" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 2); or "when to intervene, when to hold back, how to support yet extend and how to affirm" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3). The matter of staff participation in online discussion is therefore complex and challenging.

Finally, in relation to participation, staff agreed that students were expected to contribute at least twice a week to discussion, in order to demonstrate attendance, learning and commitment. Beyond the basic accountability of 'coming to class', one case study staff member (Maxine, staff 2) highlighted that students should participate in discussion to consider different perspectives, and provide a perspective for others to consider in pursuit of "the collective understanding that can be generated through collegial discussion" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3). While a minority of lecturers in this study (two of the 16 focus group staff) condoned lurking as a valid learning behaviour, most required active participation in order to promote critical engagement. This is in contrast to the argument that students should exercise choice in relation to whether they contribute by posting in discussion, and may instead choose "to learn in silence" (Gulati, 2008, p. 183), or to participate as "readers" (Seddon et al, 2010). Gulati and Seddon view peripheral participation or lurking as a valid choice for students, reflecting a learning style or preference. Contrary to this position, while acknowledging the right to silence, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) reinforce the need to empower students by encouraging active contribution to discussion. The latter view is compatible with participant perspectives in my study. In a teacher education context, there may be less tolerance of silence and students are expected to extend their approaches to both learning and teaching by challenging their preferred learning styles where necessary. When one is learning to be a teacher, there is an expectation of active participation in the learning/teaching processes

within AOD. In terms of sociocultural theorising, this is action in context – ITE participants need to actively participate in order to convey presence in AOD.

Likewise, in terms of staff presence, students in this study expected staff to be visible in online discussion. There is substantial support for this preference in the literature, although not all studies are supportive of staff presence, as noted in Chapter Two. High instructor participation in AOD is advocated by Blignaut & Trollip (2003); Brookfield & Preskill (2005); Garrison & Anderson (2003); Kehrwald (2008); Lim & Cheah (2003); Palloff & Pratt (2001, 2005), and the importance of instructor presence was supported by multiple studies in the review of literature carried out by Tallent-Runnels et al (2006). In short, these studies indicate that students are more active when staff reciprocate (Dennen, 2005); and the ongoing visibility of the lecturer in AOD is positively associated with student satisfaction (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Bischoff, 2000; Kehrwald, 2008; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Lynch, 2004; Visser, 2007). Brookfield and Preskill (2005) neatly capture and replicate the flavour of students' comments in my study:

> When instructors are relatively absent from discussion, students begin to wonder: Why aren't I hearing more from the teacher? What is she doing as I slog my way through these learning modules? What does she think about the quality of my work? Why should I be taking so much time to express my ideas when she takes so little time to acknowledge them? (p. 224)

This corresponds closely to the comments from students in my study, as they wondered where the teacher was; doubted the teacher's commitment to the class and their work; longed for feedback and reassurance; struggled to see the point of discussion; and resented any perceived lack of reciprocity.

Although the students in this study valued and expected active staff involvement in AOD, a different perspective on the presence and participation of teachers in AOD is also evident in the literature. At the other extreme is a school of thought advocating a hands-off approach to AOD from staff, in favour of student-led discussion, where students can exercise more freedom, away from staff surveillance (e.g. Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Hew, Cheung & Ng, 2010). Contrary to Dennen's findings, and the preferences of students in the current study, Durrington & Chien (2004) found

that students participated more when peers moderated discussion, rather than when instructors did so. Some students experience lecturer presence as oppressive (Fauske & Wade, 2003). This begs the question of whether the style of teacher intervention in the forum is problematic (e.g. perhaps authoritarian and dominant, as in the case described by Jetton, 2003). Whereas students in other studies preferred to engage in AOD independently of lecturer involvement, so that they could freely express their ideas, the students in my study were adamant that lecturers should be active and visible in discussion. The students in this study did seek freedom to express their ideas, but considered there were more constraints imposed by language, literature, and assessment, than by the presence of the lecturer in AOD. While requirements around language, literature, and assessment are obviously linked to the presence of the lecturer who imposes these requirements, students still preferred the lecturer to be present, but to adjust the conditions around language, literature and assessment. There would seem to be an inherent contradiction in studies like that of Ben-Peretz and Kupferberg (2007) who describe the "mentorless forum" without the intervention of lecturers, but who then examine how the student teachers in the forum mentored each other, and who conclude by proclaiming "It is the role of tutors to provide the necessary theoretical background and to link the experiences of the forum to the wider, theoretical world of teaching and learning" (p. 140). I contend that it is possible for teacher educators to make these links more effectively if they engage in AOD with the student teachers, and that in doing so, they need to model effective rather than oppressive pedagogy, while leaving room for peer moderation.

In order to make 'space' for students to contribute their viewpoints, it will therefore be necessary for teachers to periodically stand back or to exercise 'wait-time' in discussion, as teachers pause to allow students time to think (Rowe, 1986). The staff in my study, and one student explicitly mentioned wait-time (e.g., Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 9, ref 2; Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2). It is significant, however, that this tactic was mentioned more by staff than students, as the students tended to 'read' lack of staff contribution as absence rather than as strategic. It is also significant that this mirrors staff attitudes toward student peripheral participation. The staff members interviewed in my study articulated a tension between standing back and signaling presence in AOD, and this tension is also highlighted in the literature.

166

Salmon (2000) refers to this challenge as "the skill of e-moderating by silence" (p.15), explaining that when the lecturer "holds back", the students learn from one another (p.53). It is therefore important that the lecturer knows when to "intervene at the right point in time in the debate and appreciate the delicate balance between 'holding back' and intervening" (Salmon, 2000, p.141; also Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Clegg & Heap, 2006; Collison et al, 2000; Kanuka, Collett & Caswell, 2002). In an online context, it is particularly challenging to strike the optimal balance, as silence can be perceived as absence. For this reason, it is necessary for teachers to actively signal wait-time by making listening online transparent, while taking care to avoid authoritarian statements that risk bringing discussion to a premature conclusion (Jetton, 2003). Signalling wait-time can occur in several ways, according to suggestions made by staff and students in this study, and supported by the literature on AOD. For example, participants can signal wait-time firstly by posting responses designed to convey listening. For example, inviting students with contrasting views to contribute in order to enlarge perspectives, or asking a question in connection with what students have contributed (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

Secondly, wait-time is conveyed by using minimal encouragers online, in order to signal active listening and proxemics without interrupting the flow of discussion. Drawing on attending or listening skills from counselling, some of these can be applied to online pedagogy (Forbes, in press; Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Downing, 1987). This is known as "positive back-channeling" (Harms et al, 2010, p. 77). For example, encouraging, or restating what a person has said involves directly repeating their comments, or making short statements like "tell me more…" (Ivey et al, 1987, p. 72).

Thirdly, the teachers made the tacit more explicit "through the use of metacommunication: describing the communication that appears to be taking place" (Jacques & Salmon, 2007, p. 71). For example, this approach was described by Jacqui (stu 1, i/v 1) when commenting on her lecturer's tendency to enter discussion to let students know she is there and reading, but is waiting for others to post before she moves the discussion on. In this way, staff can signal wait-time to students by openly explaining that they are present but standing back, so that wait-time is not mistaken for absence and disinterest. This strategy differentiates a productive pause in

167

discussion, from discussion that has stalled or derailed. In the process, the pedagogical strategy is communicated and modelled for the student teachers, which may lead to its incorporation in subsequent student leadership initiatives.

This consideration of students' perceptions of absence, juxtaposed with lecturers' struggles to balance wait-time and avoid dominance of discussion is an illustration of how insight into the participants' perspectives can inform decision-making about teaching and learning through AOD. In theoretical terms, this is also an illustration of how the space of difference between students and lecturers can be leveraged as a pedagogical space.

It is likely that staff would be relieved to learn that students, in this study at least, are satisfied with 2-3 contributions per week from their teacher in AOD. Staff interviewed in this study independently articulated their aim to join students in discussion at least twice a week, however the staff communicated some concern that students may expect a far greater level of input than this (Elizabeth, staff 1, FG1; Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1). Despite these concerns, the findings show that just as staff view two entries per week as suitable, so are the students in this study satisfied with this level of contribution from their lecturers. This finding is contrary to suggestions from earlier studies, where it was considered that student expectations could be unrealistic and perhaps excessively demanding of staff involvement (Donaghy, McGee, Ussher & Yates, 2003; Forsyth, 1998; Salmon, 2003, 2011). Few studies specifically ask students about their expectations of staff participation – for example, Bignaut and Trollip (2003) surveyed senior faculty and decision makers about ideal participation in an attempt to benchmark faculty participation in AOD, but they did not survey students. A key message here concerns the need to overtly elicit students' views, rather than relying on assumptions about student expectations. Actively accessing students' views paves the way for open negotiation and clarification between staff and students. If we want to know what students want, we need to ask them; and if we consider their expectations to be unreasonable, we need to explain our points of view – in relation to the purposes of discussion, the learning intentions and processes, and what is manageable. The standard here could be reciprocity, since this is compatible with students' expectations: the students in my study expected their

168

teachers to maintain a similar level of input to that expected of each student in the class.

Taking students' preferences for active staff input at face value, one might assume that students are lacking in autonomy, since more autonomous learners are often more comfortable with less dialogue (Kanuka, Collett & Caswell, 2002; Moore, 1993). Accordingly, the students' preference for lecturer presence could be regarded as evidence that the students are not sufficiently self-directed as mature learners, that they are dependent and reliant on their lecturers to provide content and praise (Goodyear & Ellis, 2010). However, the students themselves in this study spontaneously denied and challenged this notion in their online focus group discussions, rejecting any need for what they termed 'spoon-feeding' or 'hand-holding' (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 21; Sharon, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 33). Instead, the students asserted independence and claimed a right to reciprocity from staff, making strong links to motivation and fundamentally to the purpose of discussion. With reference to section one, where discussion was conceived of as a tutorial session, attendance of both staff and students was expected by participants in this study, incorporating collaborative input around content and thinking. There is support in the literature for this notion of teaching and learning as "reciprocal activities requiring openness, communication, inquiry, and reflection by all participants" (e.g., McGrath, Mackey & Davis, 2008, p. 616). Furthermore, a standard of reciprocity is in keeping with a view of teacher education students as colleagues. These expectations of reciprocity will be theorised further in the section to follow on 'People in discussion', in terms of relational connections, community and student leadership capacity as social aspects of AOD.

Summing up, for participants in my study, presence in AOD means active participation, overtly signalled by all parties. Presence in this teacher education context is thus performative, as Kehrwald (2008) suggested (see Chapter Three). The following section explores *how* this presence can be communicated.

Presence and communication

In AOD, presence means expressing oneself clearly and receiving a response. This necessitates communication that is overt, skilful and reciprocated.

In my study, students and staff discussed their preferences and their struggles with communicating presence in AOD. The students in particular, referred to the use of 'voice' in online discussions, saying they wanted their own voices to be heard, and to hear the voices of their peers. As Sarah explained, "Authentic to me… means hearing "your" voice come through" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22 & 27; cf. Nina, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 22). The staff referred to the need to have "a clear voice" as a discussion leader (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1). Maxine also emphasised acknowledging students' voices (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3). In this way, the students, and perhaps to a lesser extent the staff, used an oral metaphor to conceptualise online discussions as speech or talk, rather than as pure written language. For example, as Mei and Nina explained, "you are talking to someone" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 7).

> "it was like we were actually talking to each other, that's when you know it's a good discussion" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

The students and staff referred to "talking" when characterizing comments made in AOD, and emphasised the importance of replying to each other as people do in face-to-face conversation. For example, according to staff:

> "responding to other people is probably key" (W, staff, FG2).

> "If it's going well it's because people are actually responding to each other" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1).

While students highlighted the centrality of replying or responding:

> "it's not a discussion…. [if] there's been no expectation to reply to each other" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1).

Indeed, responsiveness was a key consideration for both students and staff. In effect, the students sought acknowledgment and direct responses from others, and regarded this as evidence of "listening" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1), or of being listened to in the online discussion, as opposed to being ignored (e.g. Nina, stu 5, i/v 1), or interrupted (e.g. Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3). Accordingly, both students and staff referred to

"courtesy" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 3) and "politeness" (e.g. T & Ji, staff, FG1) in this environment. Specific aspects of netiquette and responsiveness highlighted by participants in my study were acknowledgment by name and sharing conversational space.

The students appreciated the use of names as part of peer-to-peer responsiveness, as discussed in the focus group:

> "Make an effort with other people in your groups. Reply to them by name, engage with what they are talking about" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 3).

> "engage! Names are important. It gives the discussion that human face when we wish we had one to look at!!" (Tarryn, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 4).

> "Make sure you read everyone's posting and like [Jacqui] said, make reference to others posting and use their name. It is nice to know that someone has read your comments and whether they agree or not doesn't really matter as you are engaged in a discussion and being part of a great COL [Community of Learners]" (Tia, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 6).

> "The importance of a name cannot be overstated. Otherwise, is it really a discussion, even in a classroom, you are talking to someone. I agree that by naming the person online is equivalent to "looking" at that person in class" (Mei, stu OFG, wk 7, ref 7).

The students also conveyed a preference for posts to be succinct, and reported that they:

> "hate having to trawl through really long discussions" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v1).

> "I won't read them if they're too big" (Don, stu 3, i/v2).

Five of the seven students interviewed specifically expressed a dislike of lengthy postings. The students agreed that when posts are too long, it is very typical to skim through rather than reading more thoroughly. Contributions without paragraph breaks were similarly skipped over. Lengthy posts that attempt to address every point in one hit were deemed a significant annoyance as these did not leave space for others to enter the discussion (Don, stu 3, i/v 2).

Some students noted that their own queries tended to be overlooked within discussions where fellow group members posted lengthy comments. One student also wondered whether long postings may be intimidating for some students, discouraging them from adding to the discussion and thereby exacerbating the difficulties with late-week postings when students left discussion until the last minute. Students in the focus group favoured a 150 word limit to discussion, preferring this to be a guideline rather than strictly enforced. The students said they wanted leeway to go beyond 150 words when the need arose, rather than feeling they had been cutoff in mid-speech, but also said they appreciated the value of keeping posts succinct.

Although the students in this study offered a range of advice, they placed a great deal of emphasis on these two simple behaviours:

- **Addressivity with vocatives**: Use people's names when responding, as this direct social acknowledgement communicates social presence by personalising the interaction, signalling active listening. The importance of personal acknowledgement as part of the relational character of communication is reinforced by Dennen and Wieland (2007), Fauske and Wade (2003), Lehman and Conceicao (2010), and Rourke et al (1999), among others. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that personalisation doesn't lead to exclusion of others who are not named in a specific exchange (Hewitt, 2005). Exclusion can be avoided by incorporating acknowledgement of more than one class member in a single message, weaving and synthesising, and concluding a message with an invitation to the wider group to respond. A theoretical basis can be found in Bakhtin's work on addressivity, whereby every utterance anticipates a response and implicitly replies to an earlier thought (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Herring, 1999; Locke, 2007).

- **Brevity, allowing space for other voices**: A succinct response is less dominant in the conversational space of the forum, allowing room for others' interpretations of the topic, and inviting others' responses in turn. The literature occasionally makes mention of brevity as part of netiquette (e.g. Lehman & Conciecao, 2010), and Wegerif (1998) provides useful insight into the reluctance of participants to follow lengthy messages, since a long and

carefully prepared posting invites a similarly crafted and considered response, which can discourage respondents due to time constraints. More complex issues related to power and voice are also of relevance here, and will be explored shortly (see page 176).

Underpinning both pieces of advice from the students in the current study is the core value placed on responsiveness. Using people's names signals a direct response, and in turn perpetuates responsiveness since a student is likely to respond in turn to a peer who offered an initial personalised response (e.g., as noted by Sarah, stu 2, i/v 1). Being brief invites others to respond, without exhausting the topic or forcing peers into an unresponsive situation – e.g. where they are unable to find something to say without repeating what has already been said; or when a long posting intimidates and paralyses others, rather than inviting a response. This advice could easily be incorporated into a set of ground rules/guidelines for consideration by a class.

Students preferred what they called "free-flowing" language in online discussion (e.g. Don, stu 3, i/v 1; Nina, stu 5, i/v 1), and described this as similar to "everyday language" as opposed to "academic speak" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 8, ref 26; Don, stu 3, i/v 2). They also emphasised "authenticity" (e.g. Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22 & 27), or being true to who you are (e.g. Nina, stu 5, i/v 2; Tia, stu OFG, wk 1), and clarity. In particular, students appreciated peers in discussion who could simplify, explain and clarify difficult academic concepts:

> "someone who has done a good job of paraphrasing it or connecting the dots so to speak" (Dana, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 4).

Staff also emphasised clarity in online discussion, and described their own struggles in painstakingly crafting discussion entries to ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings:

> "With my postings I have to be really careful about the language that I use. I find I can't do it off the top of my head. I have to really consider what's going to be said so that a discussion can then move forward because if I ever try to do it off the top of my head, it gets misinterpreted" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2).

The staff found AOD useful for introducing students to specialist terminology in their field. Online discussion offered opportunities to use the terminology in context while carefully explaining and clarifying meaning:

> "You can greatly influence students by your actual language so I use a lot of academic terms but I explain them" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

The staff recognised that they set the tone by modelling specific language in discussion: using appropriate terminology and signalling spontaneity in some cases. One focus group lecturer challenged the need for careful crafting of manicured responses in favour of the free-flowing style preferred by students:

> "I think, basically they take their cue from you. And more than anything, I think you are the most powerful model of the kind of interaction that you want to get. And if you want them to do spontaneous things, you do spontaneous things, and then they start picking up on it" (T, staff, FG1).

It would seem that students and staff in this study needed to clarify the hybrid character of the language of AOD, in order to more fully understand how to learn and teach in this environment. The expressive and receptive aspects of language are both important, as participants learn to give voice to their thinking, and to read the cues of other participants in AOD. Literature characterises the language of AOD as neither spoken nor written but somewhere in between, like "say-writing" (Wegerif, 1998, p. 40) or "written talk" (Locke & Daly, 2007, p. 122). To be sure, this is a frequently mentioned point with respect to the language of AOD (e.g., Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Collis & Moonen, 2007; Collot & Belmore, 1996; Herring, 1999; Jacques & Salmon, 2007; Locke & Daly, 2007; Yates, 1996). AOD has some of the informality of speech, and indeed participants in AOD frequently refer to 'hearing voices' and 'talking' despite the text medium (evident in interviews by Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; as well as the current study). Of course AOD is not speech since it cannot be heard and does not include volume, pitch and intonation in the ways that oral language does (Collis & Moonen, 2007; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003; Hewitt, 2005). Rather, AOD is objectively type-written text, and much is made in the literature of the affordance of time to reflect and compose due to asynchronicity and the persistent record enabling revisiting of contributions (e.g. Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Herring, 1999; Jacques & Salmon, 2007: Laurillard, 2002). However, in most cases, the language of AOD is less formal than

an essay or professional written communication (Collis & Moonen, 2007), and is characterised by Wegerif (1998) as "a casual and spoken style using the written medium" (p. 40).

That the linguistic style of AOD is neither oral nor written, while reflecting aspects of both, has led some commentators, notably Thomas (2002) to dismiss it as "incoherent" (p. 351) due to "conflict between form and function" (p. 363). Contrary to this view, other commentators suggest that the language of AOD constitutes a new genre with its own unique form and function or purpose: a Cybergenre (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003). This is not to imply that all Cybergenres are uniform, since the language of synchronous chat (Netspeak, Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004), or that of social networking (Netlingo, Thurlow et al, 2004) also differs markedly from AOD in an academic context. Taking this further, I contend that AOD is not merely an oral/written hybrid, but also visual and "embodied" or shaped by our lived, bodily experiences of communication, as Bell (2011, p. 93) explains. As embodied knowers, participants in AOD learn with their bodies as well as their minds and hearts (Bell, 2011). This necessitates balance between the voices and actions of students and academia. With this in mind, it could be helpful for students to conceptualise their language in AOD as a hybrid genre so that they can incorporate tone as they compose. In the current study, one student said that a lecturer advised her to write her discussion contributions as though she were speaking out loud, and that this had helped her to get through a time of writers' block. Another student explained that she smiled while typing in the hope that the pleasant tone would be transmitted through the message. These potentially useful pieces of practical advice could be shared with subsequent cohorts of students.

It is important that participants understand how to communicate using the language of AOD, in order to make best use of the discussion for learning and teaching. If participants imagine they can see or hear others in the forum, they are closer to a more authentic co-presence (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003). Analogies with oral and visual language are linked to theories of social presence (Short, Williams & Christie, 1976; Rourke et al, 1999; Preece, 2000; Thurlow et al, 2004), social, psychological or emotional distance (Kanuka, Collett, & Caswell, 2002; Kehrwald,

175

2008; Rutter, 1987; Thurlow et al, 2004), transactional distance (Moore, 1993), and to the creation of a vibrant learning environment. Participants have to figure out the language in order to express themselves and work effectively with others – possibly what Pegrum (2009) refers to as "participatory literacy" (p. 38), knowing how to contribute. Rather than condemning the medium as lean and impoverished, a *relational* view of social presence looks to the ways human participants can act to enrich their online communication (Kehrwald, 2008).

This tension between two apparently opposing styles of language can be analysed in terms of power and voice, as indicated when staff references to the meta-language of the discipline (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3) are juxtaposed with the students' emphasis on authentic voice (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 1, ref 22 & 27). It is necessary to consider how the styles can be reconciled in a way that respects participants' knowledge while enhancing learning potential. When the emphasis is on formal, academic language, it may be seen as promoting "displays of rhetorical power" (Collison et al, 2000, p. 25). Teachers who use formal language may reinforce hierarchy, accrual of power, and a shift to centre stage as authoritarian figures (Collison et al, 2000; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Jetton, 2003). This language can serve to intimidate and discourage students, by associating AOD with "an exercise in status-building, rather than a free exchange of ideas" (Jetton, 2003, p. 181). As mentioned, the students in the current study, and also in Jetton's (2003) work with pre-service teachers, preferred free-flowing, accessible language. The core issues are summed up effectively by Brookfield & Preskill (2005) in terms of "how we privilege certain ways of speaking and conveying knowledge and ideas, who has the power to define appropriate forms and patterns of communication, and whose interests these forms and patterns serve" (p. 146).

On the one hand, a consistent emphasis on student voice values the language that students bring to class. However, in the spirit of education, on the other hand the goal may also be seen as enabling students to develop more complex thinking, with the language that accompanies greater depth and complexity. Respect for student voice is necessarily balanced with the need to induct and enculturate student teachers into the teaching profession – employing an apprenticeship model, whereby language is

176

needed to internalise models of teaching and learning in order to become a member of the profession (Rogoff, 1995; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003), and is also a part of the professional identity teacher education students seek (Ellsworth, 1997).

Overall, the staff and student comments suggested that there is a need for balance. This can be interpreted as a balancing of the benefits of oral (visual, embodied) and written language, recognizing that AOD is a distinct (Cyber)genre; balance the need to craft and compose in a way that strives for clarity and is appropriate to an academic context; while maintaining the value of student voice and retaining the spark of spontaneity. Although daunting, balance is arguably illustrated by the lecturer (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1) who introduced academic terms by explaining them carefully to her class, using the authentic language of everyday, and demonstrating the ability to switch back and forth between these language forms in the interests of clarity, once again highlighting the hybrid character of AOD language. Balance is also called for in relation to power, so that the privilege of determining the language to be used is shared, in order to serve both students' interests and the interests of the profession. Balance is best achieved with preparation and flexibility.

In summary, presence in AOD means direct communication – clear and overt expression of meaning. Presence is affirmed when reciprocated, highlighting the centrality of responsiveness in AOD. Communicating presence and meaning takes considerable skill and communicative competencies suited to the genre.

Presence and formative interaction

Students and staff regarded presence in AOD to be intimately connected with giving and receiving feedback and feedforward. Several online focus group students commented on the immediacy or timeliness of AOD feedback received, and recognised that lecturers were not the only source of such feedback:

> "Discussions are a form of assessment where feedback on your ideas or thoughts can be given fairly quickly, as opposed to assignments where feedback takes ages. … I think in discussions you can have lecturer, peer and self-assessments happening simultaneously" (Sarah, stu OFG, wk 15-16, ref 13).

The students in this study indicated their expectation that lecturers would challenge them in online discussion, while moving the discussion along and providing feedback. This student preference is supported by literature that in turn suggests sound pedagogical reasons for staff presence and participation in AOD, enabling structure and dialogue as mediation (Vygotsky, 1978) of and scaffolding (Bruner, 1990) for student learning (Moore, 1993; Tallent-Runnels et al, 2006). Without scaffolding provided by "active teaching presence", students may remain in "continuous exploration mode" without progressing to more advanced stages of critical thinking and cognitive development (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001, p. 10). A similar point is made by Ferdig and Roehler (2003) who emphasise the need for students to be extended to the upper end of their zones of proximal development. In most cases, a teacher's input is needed to extend depth and higher order learning (Bates, 2005; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Jacques & Salmon, 2007).

Staff made explicit references to feedback and feed-forward in relation to online discussion, and described how they monitored discussions for formative purposes in order to identify and address misconceptions and to extend ideas. There is, however, a level of caution around public praise and correction: at least one lecturer preferred to give such feedback privately (Maxine, staff 2). This is a reminder of the need to consider how one's feedback is received, so as not to talk past each other, and to be responsive to participants' cultures.

Elsewhere, I have argued that formative interaction, as it occurs in AOD, is an essential component of effective teaching and learning (Forbes, 2005). This view of AOD for formative purposes is also supported by Gikandi, Morrow and Davis (2011). The concept of formative interaction is based on formative assessment, which is defined as "the process used by teachers and students to recognise and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning" (Bell & Cowie, 2001, p. 8). Through formative assessment, learners receive feedback about their learning and teachers receive feedback about their teaching. The use of the term 'formative interaction' focuses attention on the interactive nature of the process, and emphasises that both teachers and students are actively involved. By interacting through AOD, opportunities are generated for enhancing students' understanding. I

contend that three essential elements of formative interaction are feedback, open-ended tasks and interpersonal interaction (Forbes, 2005). In AOD, participants receive feedback when another person responds to their contribution within the discussion, and particularly when the response serves to affirm, challenge, or build on the earlier posting. Creating conditions conducive to formative interaction entails designing tasks that are higher order, open-ended challenges offering multiple possibilities for student action (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Harris, 2000; Salmon, 2000). The third essential element of formative interaction is that of human interaction (Forbes, 2005; Salmon, 2000), where participants communicate as part of the teaching/learning relationship. Putting these together in AOD:

> For the purpose of formative interaction, a student may post a series of thoughts within a discussion, and receive responses to their thoughts from other students, and from the lecturer, as these parties also take part in the discussion. The lecturer and students may give the first student feedback on their thinking. When the student reads the feedback, this can trigger reflection on their part, over a period of time. When this student re-enters the discussion to post another contribution, they may show that they have been thinking about the feedback received, and that this is influential in their ongoing thinking and learning (Forbes, 2005, p. 89).

Where teaching and learning through AOD is characterised by formative interaction, it rests fundamentally on constructivist theorising. At an individual level, cognitive constructivism applies to students' construction of their own knowledge as they engage in the processes of interpreting and making sense. As discussed in Chapter Three, social orientations of constructivism are commonly linked to Vygotsky (1978) whose theory emphasises interaction with people as necessary for cognitive development. A key tenet of Vygotskian social constructivism is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept that can in turn be linked with the notions of scaffolding and apprenticeship or guided participation (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff et al, 1996), in order to provide a theoretical explanation of formative interaction (Forbes, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as the distinction between the individual's independent problem-solving level, and the level of potential development when that individual collaborates with others who are capable of providing guidance or help. The ZPD operates in AOD, where help is provided and acted on in the process of formative interaction. Similarly, in terms of Rogoff's (1990) guided participation, the social interactions that learners have provide guidance, support, direction, challenge

179

and impetus for development, as formative interaction (Forbes, 2005). However, this formative view of discussion can be problematic due to tensions around assessment of discussion.

That is, some students preferred the online discussion component of a paper to carry a summative weighting, so that they could prioritise this work in relation to other course commitments. The students contended that discussion was a great deal of work and should be rewarded accordingly with a grade. For example, Jacqui explained that in her first year of study, she spent a great deal of time on online discussion, and felt this time could have been spent on other assessment tasks. As she explained:

> "the amount of time I spent was just completely unrealistic to the percentage of the mark that it was affecting so that made a really big difference for me" (stu 1, i/v 1).

This is in keeping with the views expressed by some staff who agreed that a summative weighting is needed to motivate and reward students in relation to discussion. For example, according to staff in the first focus group:

> "if there's absolutely no assessment part in it, quite often they just won't come in" (Ji, staff, FG1); "they don't do it, traditionally, in my experience, they don't bother" (G, staff, FG1).

The participants were divided on this issue, however, with some students disagreeing that discussion should carry a summative weighting, and instead expressing a preference for freedom to discuss in order to test ideas without fear of losing marks. For example, Don asserted:

> "We need a place to test our ideas and theories with others, where we can make our mistakes with no pressure of marks being lost" (stu OFG, wk 5, ref 3).

Like other students, Don went on to compare discussion to a tutorial on campus, which is not assessed summatively (cf. Tia, stu OFG, wk 5, ref 13). In Sarah's words:

> "since it is the equivalent of being in-class, I don't see that marks are even necessary" (stu OFG, wk 17-18, ref 12).

Similarly, some staff explained that they preferred to make discussion a compulsory task without any summative weighting, thus conveying an expectation that participation in online discussion was required, but not graded. Staff reacted against the notion that students should be rewarded for meeting a basic expectation (e.g. L, staff, FG2). And some staff too, preferred that the discussion be regarded as a site for preparation of other assignments in a paper, akin to a tutorial (e.g. N, staff, FG2).

In summary, the students and staff in this study reported some confusion about the balance between learning through discussion, and the use of discussion as a summative assessment task. Some students prioritised learning and testing of ideas, while other students regarded discussion as an assessment task and sought to allocate their time in accordance with the summative weighting of the task. While staff highlighted the learning and formative potential of discussion, some considered it necessary to summatively assess discussion in order to motivate and reward students for the time and effort involved in contributing. However, other staff and some students reiterated the notion of online discussion as a tutorial and argued that participation should be required and directed toward preparation for other assigned tasks, along with wider learning, exploration and professional preparation.

Within the literature, one strand of thought assumes that there is little choice but to grade student discussion in a university context (e.g. Arend, 2007; Dennen, 2005; Earl & Cong, 2011). For the most part, this is because the grading of discussion is deemed necessary in order to motivate students to participate. There is a need for further research to verify whether this is indeed the case. The assignment of grades to discussion is questioned by key commentators like Jacques and Salmon (2007), and Brookfield and Preskill (2005), with the former regarding this grading as a concern due to the attempt to "force" motivation or participation (Jacques & Salmon, 2007, p. 217). While in agreement with these concerns about debasing the quality of contributions, and promoting individual credit over the development of shared understandings, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) acknowledge the tension between grading discussion and shifting rewards away from discussion altogether. It is unrealistic and arguably unfair to expect participants to devote time and energy to discussion, if they are instead rewarded for work undertaken elsewhere while

discussion is marginalised (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; LaPointe, 2007). However, Askell-Williams and Lawson (2005) acknowledge that the assessment of discussion can constrain students' participation and enjoyment of discussion, as the findings of my study indicate to some extent.

A dilemma here concerns how to encourage time-poor students (and staff) to accord sufficient priority to learning through AOD, while promoting higher order thinking, deep learning and community; and discouraging a purely instrumental approach to summative assessment. This calls for a strategic approach to the motivation and assessment of discussion.

Philosophically, I argue that extrinsic motivation via grading is not the best model for teacher education students; and that the notion of discussion as a tutorial is more in keeping with the deep approach to learning we should strive for in higher education. Although extrinsic motivation may work in terms of getting students to attend or participate in discussion, it is not going to be effective in helping them to engage in anything beyond surface learning, and it will not promote commitment to their professional and learning communities.
Strategically, discussion needs to be:

- an expectation and requirement, in keeping with the students' obligation to the learning community;
- subject to student reflection and self assessment, in order to promote meta-cognition and deep approaches to learning;
- closely linked to other assessed work, complementing the discussion. In effect, the summative assessment tasks should be contingent upon commitment to AOD.

The participants in this study described discussion as a tutorial, characterised by formative interaction. Summing up and building upon their learning through AOD, students can present their work for summative assessment in another format – essay, presentation, or portfolio. Discussion is a process, and a secondary artifact should be submitted for summative assessment purposes (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003). This

approach is supported by Garrison and Anderson (2003), who suggest that students produce a reflection piece incorporating illustrative quotations from discussion. Brookfield and Preskill (2005, p. 277) also advocate a "discussion audit" process whereby students analyse and summarise discussion to create a portfolio submission. In this way, students are empowered to produce their own evidence of learning, and assessment is congruent with the deep learning intended.

In summary, section two of this discussion chapter has considered key findings around presence for learning, with emphasis on participants' expectations of active participation and responsive communication, characterised by formative interaction. At issue in this section is the tension between assessment for summative and formative purposes. Ways of managing this tension are suggested, and the details of these approaches could be negotiated in the establishment of purpose and expectations as per section one.

People in discussion: AOD as a relational practice

The third emergent theme concerns people working together within AOD, and examines caring and connections between people, the notion of community, and sharing of leadership.

People and relational connections

The related themes of connections and perceptions of caring were interspersed throughout the comments from students and staff. The students indicated that they valued connections with their lecturers and wanted to feel that the lecturers cared about them, their learning, their field and professional practice. Students suggested that lecturers make connections and show they care in three key ways: through presence, which motivates; by directly acknowledging students; and by sharing personal stories.

The students explicitly linked lecturer presence to motivation and caring:

> "The lecturer's not there, why should I bother?... It's not like he's going to care" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1).

Similarly, Dana remarked:

> "I just want them to be there, really. I want them to be there for me" (stu 4, i/v 1).

As well as showing they care by 'being there', students also said they liked lecturers to personally acknowledge them in online discussion, and viewed this as evidence of 'taking an interest' and caring. This had motivational associations. Jacqui in particular admitted to being very motivated by lecturers' acknowledgements:

> "And then I got my name mentioned by [the lecturer] which I always love" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 2).

> "I really appreciate lecturers who come in during discussions and reply to people by name with a comment relating to their discussion. … I know one lecturer who may group a few people together who have said similar things and reply that way, but she still mentions names separately and that shows me that she is taking a real interest in what we are saying" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 10).

Jacqui further explained that this acknowledgement is precious due to the connection with the lecturer:

> ".,. yeah that's definitely one of the big things for me, that connection with the lecturer…. It always just gives me a boost" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 3).

Other students also expressed a need for connection with lecturers through personal acknowledgement. Dana explained that:

> "you just want to feel like you can make a connection with them or they make a connection with us" (Dana, stu 4, i/v 1).

Alongside presence and acknowledgment, students indicated that lecturers make connections by sharing their own personal experiences in online discussion. The students talked about particular lecturers who modeled reciprocity in their sharing of stories and viewpoints:

> "the online discussions were absolutely fantastic. Why were they fantastic? Because, possibly because it actually dealt with the humanistic part of teaching and it was really relevant. She brought a lot of her real-life experiences into it and consequently we did as well which contrasted hugely with the heavy readings that we had to do" (Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

"I thought it worked really well because [the lecturer] gave just as much as all the other students. So she came in and she actually said her experiences from her own life as well" (Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1).

Overall, the students indicated that relational connections were forged with lecturers through presence, acknowledgment and sharing in online discussion, and students associated these connections with reciprocal motivation, taking an interest, and caring. Many of these ideas were encapsulated in a staff response when Maxine (staff 2, i/v 1) referred to Nel Noddings' (1984) ethic of caring, and further explained,

"I think there is also an ethic of care in here - I care about what they think, their educational spaces and places. I want them to feel strong and secure with their own knowledge, and with the collective understanding that can be generated through collegial discussion" (Maxine, staff OFG, week 2, ref 3).

Elsewhere, some of the staff commented on relational connections and caring among students when they acknowledged "the relationship they are building with each other through those discussions" (Ji, staff, FG1).

Echoing earlier points made by the students, Elizabeth also linked caring to personal acknowledgment:

"the majority care about each other it's that real community of learners that has trust with each other and they spark off each other"
"D: So what tells you that they care for each other?
Elizabeth: Well the way that they respond. They nearly all respond to each other…. Using each other's names or reiterating part of the message of ones who have previously spoken…. It's very interactive" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 3).

The students expressed a preference for similar behaviours by peers, but the association with caring was less evident when referring to peers' presence, acknowledgment, and sharing. Indeed, students seemed more critical of their peers' efforts and more prescriptive about expectations. Although they purported to be motivated by the presence of their peers, they were more scathing about being ignored by peers, and were adamant that personal stories shared by peers must be strictly relevant.

The value participants place on connecting and caring is in keeping with a sociocultural orientation situating learning and teaching through AOD as an emotional and caring practice, as well as a social and relational practice (Bell, 2011). There are also links with notions of teacher immediacy, as certain behaviours bring teachers and students closer together, reducing emotional and transactional distance (Rourke et al, 1999; Jackson, Jones & Rodriquez, 2010). The expectation that staff connect and care online challenges lecturers to think of AOD as more than a site for instruction or for rather cold and sterile exchanges (Kanuka et al, 2002; Zimmerman & Mulligan, 2007). The students in this study have contributed potentially valuable insights to guide staff in how to connect and care while building relationships. That is:

- **Be present**: It is clear that the teacher education students in this study desired and expected that staff would be present and actively involved in AOD. This finding challenges some of the literature, where authors report that students prefer to discuss without their lecturers' involvement (e.g., Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Durrington & Chien, 2004; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Hew, Cheung & Ng, 2010). Of course, this finding is not generalisable to diverse populations of students, so the implication is that staff should ascertain whether the students we work with want us to join in discussion or not, and what they base their preferences on. This can be established as staff and students negotiate their visions for discussion and the ground rules and guidelines they wish to proceed with (section one).

- **Directly acknowledge students**: To do so is polite, communicates interest, and fosters connections with the learners. In this way, lecturers contribute to social presence, reducing emotional and transactional distance. The use of students' names when referring to their contributions is a simple move, but is often overlooked by commentators in the field.

- **Share personal stories**: Linking of experience is important for learning, in keeping with constructivist ideas about building on prior knowledge, and it is unfair and unwise of lecturers to expect students to make these links and

openly share experience if the lecturers are unprepared to do likewise (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). When teachers share personal experiences, this can contribute to building a caring environment (Harms et al, 2010). For the sake of modelling, connecting, and fostering open communication, lecturers are urged to share relevant personal/professional stories in AOD, with appropriate levels of self-disclosure, as a part of enculturation.

As connections are formed and relationships are built, the group consider themselves a community.

People and community

The theme of community was strong across all data-sets. Staff explicitly used the term 'community' when guiding students in their online classes. For example, as Maxine stated, "I do use the term 'communities of learners' often" (staff 2, i/v 1). Students also referred to the concept of community. For example, Jacqui asserted, "I definitely see us as a community of learners" (stu OFG, wk 6, ref 0). There is tremendous support for the ideal of the community within the literature, to a point where the notion of community risks becoming something of a cliché, due to being co-opted for many purposes (Somekh, 2007). The elearning literature is awash with references to "virtual community" (Collison et al, 2000, p. 7); "online, distributed learning community" (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003, p. 117); "critical community of inquiry" (Garrison et al, 2001, p. 7); and of course the 'Community of Practice', drawing upon the work of Lave & Wenger (1991). Indeed, a review of research on online teaching identified "the importance of creating a learning community in an online class" as one of the key findings supported by multiple studies (Tallent-Runnels et al, 2006, p. 104). While some students in this study mentioned feeling jaded by overuse of the term "Community of Learners" (stu OFG), and critiqued community as an idealistic notion, they nevertheless concluded that several aspects were in play, and did indeed contribute to a sense of community in their online class. Specifically, six key elements are apparent in the ways that students and staff in this study conceptualised learning communities operating through online discussion:

1. Support between students

2. Peer-to-peer learning

3. Building on ideas

4. Responsiveness

5. Divergence of perspectives

6. The obligation to contribute actively

Quotes from staff and student participants are used to illustrate each of the above elements in turn, and each is briefly examined in light of the literature.

Support between students

Both students and staff highlighted group cohesion, collegial nurturing, student-to-student connections and caring as key aspects of the community as "a supportive situation" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 2). The notion of social presence has been mentioned already, and is a key concept within community, encapsulating the sense of belonging and acceptance in a group with similar interests and goals (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). This social support among students generates a "congenial space" (Locke & Daly, 2007, p. 121), characterised by mutual support (Hramiak, 2010) and camaraderie (Prestridge, 2010). There are links here with the notion of 'strong ties' identified in the literature, as students develop close relationships with those they interact with on a regular basis, and these ties are useful for encouragement, morale, and as a foundation for constructing knowledge (Haythornthwaite, 2000; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011).

Peer learning

Whereas students and staff in this study valued the social aspects of community, they also emphasised task-focused and cognitive aspects of learning, as students clarified concepts for others and contributed viewpoints that others had not considered, "scaffolding each other all the time through discussions" (Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 0). For these purposes, weaker ties can be sufficient as acquaintances bring fresh information from wider networks (Haythornthwaite, 2000). Combinations of weak and strong ties within the online class are seen to provide affective and cognitive support within the student group (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007).

Building on ideas

Both the students and staff described classic constructivist views of learning, through spiralling, and productive argumentation, as students "build on their ideas" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 1). Through processes aligned with formative interaction, students and staff co-construct new learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen, 2005; Fauske & Wade, 2003; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003). The processes described here are akin to those outlined in relation to formative interaction in the previous section.

Responsiveness

A key issue relating to conceptions of community in this study, responsiveness was characterised as "not just posting but responding" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1). Responding was seen to occur when students avoided ignoring or repeating what others had posted and instead explicitly acknowledged, connected and built on previous utterances. This is in keeping with the recognition within the literature that posting messages does not equate with discussion, and that a direct reference to previous comments is needed to sustain community (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen, 2005; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Kehrwald, 2008). Indeed, in Markel's (2001) terms, the online response is social currency, or in Yates' (1996) terms, the online equivalent to "gaining the floor" (p. 208), as without a response participants can feel excluded, inadequate, and as though they are speaking into a vacuum (Hew & Cheung, 2003; Murphy & Coleman, 2004). To reiterate an earlier theme, the response signals listening, which is a sign of respect, regard, and an incentive to continue to contribute to the discussion and in turn to the community.

Divergence

Students and staff expressed appreciation for alternative viewpoints, multiple perspectives, and sharing of a range of sources and ideas. Participants valued disagreement, challenge, critique, and debate. By implication, they also valued risk-taking, in terms of feeling safe enough to move beyond the constraints of bland/blind agreement. The value of these elements associated with divergence is supported in the literature, as the emergence of controversy and expressions of disagreement are an indicator that trust has developed within a community (Dennen, 2005; Markel, 2001). Tension, argument and dissonance make for compelling discussion and clarification

189

of viewpoints (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Collison et al, 2000; Lu & Jeng, 2006). Commentators suggest that teachers work to model and set the stage for disagreement, by disagreeing with findings from research for example, and by inviting variety in student perspectives (e.g. Fauske & Wade, 2003; Markel, 2001).

Obligation

Participants in the study recognised that the community simply cannot be sustained without active involvement from a core group of people. Staff characterised this in terms of "responsibility" Ji, staff, FG1), "commitment" (T, staff, FG1), and "obligation" (Maxine, staff 2, FG2); whilst students talked in terms of "courtesy" (Nina, stu 5, i/v 3) and "expectation" (Tia, stu 6, i/v 1). These findings challenge the work of a small number of studies defending students' rights to read discussion without contributing actively (e.g. Gulati, 2008; Seddon et al, 2010). Another section of literature reinforces the sense of mutual obligation that holds community together due to generalised reciprocity – where students respond to others because those others will also in turn respond (e.g., Hew et al, 2010; McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Taking a step beyond this, Brookfield and Preskill (2005) suggest that students and teachers share responsibility for the group's learning, so that students should regard their contributions as necessary for the sake of the group as a whole. This notion of sharing the teaching needs to be cultivated, particularly in teacher education, where student teachers can teach, lead and move toward their role as teachers.

In summary, the participants in this study considered working together as a community to involve support between students, peer learning, building on ideas, responsiveness, divergence and obligation in terms of shared responsibility for learning and teaching in the group. Community building relies on aspects mentioned in previous sections, such as a shared purpose and active presence in AOD.

People and leadership capacity

The final theme stemming from participant perspectives informing pedagogy is that of leadership. The students suggested that staff should be leaders in online discussion.

190

Leadership is a broad role, encompassing the following elements, many of which have already been examined above. A leadership role includes being:

- A presence

That is, an active contributor in the online discussion (e.g. Nina, stu 5, i/v 1; Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1; Mei, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 2).

- A driving force

That is, a leader who "moves the discussion along" (e.g. Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1).

- A cheer-leader or caregiver

That is, a leader who acknowledges students by name and takes an interest in their learning (e.g. Jacqui, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 10).

- An assessor

That is, leader who provides feedback and correction within discussion (e.g. Sarah, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 0; Mei. Stu OFG, wk 17-18, ref 21).

- A model

That is, a leader who shows how to contribute to effective discussion, by giving explicit guidance (meta-discussion, e.g. Nina, stu 5; i/v 3; Tia, stu 6, i/v 1); and by demonstrating implicitly through their own input (reciprocity, e.g. Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1; Jacqui, stu 1, i/v 1).

- A challenger, and sometimes the 'Devil's Advocate'

That is, a 'playful' leader who challenges in order to make a point; to highlight a wider range of viewpoints; to prompt clarification and evidence-based discussion. For example, as Don explained:

> "She'll play devil's advocate she'll really test me if I've been too generalized…, she'll play devil's advocate and ask me questions which will challenge my thinking " (stu 3, i/v 1; cf. Nina, stu 5, i/v 1; Sarah, stu OFG, wk 13, ref 0).

The staff also mentioned all of the above aspects of leadership, but also regarded themselves as planners and designers of effective online discussion, setting the scene in order to initiate leadership (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 3; Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1). The staff mentioned their roles as teachers and leaders of the community of learners, and sometimes learners too. For example, "a person of expertise" (Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1) or "a senior partner in discussion" (Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1); and "a teacher" (e.g.

Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1); but also a learner, as noted by Maxine who explained "I've often learnt so many valuable things from the students' perspectives" (staff 2, i/v 1).

Staff positioned students in online discussion as community members and co-leaders, learners, readers and reflective practitioners. That is,

- Community members who attend, participate and interact, as reinforced in previous sections;
- Co-leaders, directing the discussion (e.g. Maxine, staff 2, i/v 1);
- Learners, developing their thinking (e.g. J, staff, FG2);
- Readers, as all the staff expected students to link literature to discussion;
- Reflective practitioners (e.g. Elizabeth, staff 1, i/v 1).

Students' perceptions were very much in keeping with these roles, as they looked to each other as companions or community members, co-leaders, and learners. That is,

- Companions who join in, contributing promptly and regularly, as discussed elsewhere;
- Community members who engage with other members of the community, in keeping with the principles of netiquette, discussed above;
- Co-leaders who challenge (e.g. Nina, stu OFG, wk 2, ref 22); who clarify ideas for others (e.g. Dana, stu OFG, wk 6, ref 4); and who help to keep the discussion moving (e.g. Tia, stu 6, i/v 1; Tarryn, stu 7, i/v 1);
- Intentional learners. For example, as Sarah explained, "I actually go into the discussion saying I'm going to learn something and I do" (stu 2, i/v 1).

The participants' expectations of each other suggest how the lecturers and students position each other in the relationship, in keeping with theories of teaching as a relational practice (Bell, 2011). Surfacing and working with these expectations generates an opportunity to reposition and clarify the essence of a teacher,

demystifying the teaching roles (Loughran, 2006). When students and staff share and negotiate purposes related to AOD, this should entail meeting some expectations while necessarily challenging others. The negotiation processes allow for clarifying and re-establishing roles in order to redesign the learning relationship. The pedagogy works by offering students the position they desire to move to (Ellsworth, 1997) – that is, students become apprentices, teachers and colleagues as they progressively adopt leadership roles in AOD.

Leadership roles available include the often-used roles of discussion moderator, summariser, and Devil's Advocate. For example, students can be assigned moderator roles to promote leadership of the online discussion, thereby distributing teaching presence (e.g. Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Dennen, 2005; Durrington & Chien, 2004; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). The summariser role is a useful approach to focus students on linking apparently unconnected insights; deriving emerging themes and detecting similarities of reasoning (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Hew et al, 2010). The role of Devil's Advocate or challenger can be theorized as a pedagogical frame as the teacher offers a different way of understanding, a discourse to scaffold and prompt alternative interpretations (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). When students are also encouraged to adopt the Devil's Advocate role, the range of alternative interpretations is further extended, and students play a part in scaffolding the understandings of their peers, stepping into a teaching role. Role assignments can generate a sense of "playfulness" that invigorates discussion and encourages risk-taking in the pursuit of learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 28).

Staff participants in my study also emphasised the importance of roles played 'behind the scenes', as they worked to plan and design discussion, and adopted a learner's role during discussion by learning from students (instructor roles also noted by Harms et al, 2010; and by Lehman & Conciecao, 2010). I contend that there needs to be more transparency around these backstage roles which should be shared with students proactively in order to make the teaching explicit (Loughran, 2006). Furthermore, students could take part in planning and designing AOD (e.g., as described by Visser, 2007); and students need to know that staff are expecting to learn through AOD so that students can adopt a teaching role. For example, in addition to adopting the

193

overtly assigned roles described above, students teach and lead discussion when they initiate new threads, share new resources, question, and contribute to formative interaction and community processes.

Leadership in AOD can thus be shared and distributed, incorporating student leadership, in keeping with the notion of leadership as capacity building (Forbes, 2004). As Lambert (1998, p.75) points out, "increasing leadership capacity over time is the most productive way to bring about improvements that can be sustained".

Lambert's work redefines leadership as constructivist learning. When leadership is viewed as constructivist learning, it is about supporting others' learning, and about learning together. As such, "Learning and leadership are deeply intertwined… Indeed, leadership can be understood as reciprocal, purposeful learning in a community" (Lambert, 2003, p. 2). By defining leadership as constructivist learning, Lambert (1998, pp. 5-6) emphasises that leadership is about:

> …constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of leadership.

While staff need to be leaders of learning, leadership is also the domain of students. If we view leading as a shared endeavour, capacity building aligns with democratic ideals, involving shared purpose (refer to section one), responsibility, and a realignment of power and authority (Apple & Beane, 1999; Frost & Durrant, 2003; Fullan, 2002; Lambert, 1998). Leadership practices include inquiry, collaboration and reflection (Forbes, 2004). Leadership as capacity building can be regarded as a form of distributed leadership, which is closely aligned with distributed learning. There is more than one source of leadership and learning. The goal of building leadership capacity is to enable more individuals to build their own informal authority and demonstrate leadership behaviours (Lambert, 1998). Building leadership capacity in online discussion is a way to build "a momentum for self-renewal" (Lambert, 1998, p. 3). With this leadership, improvement can be sustained over time, even as staff and students move on. This can occur by preserving an artifact each semester/year,

representing the guidelines/ground rules for online discussion derived by previous cohorts.

In summary then, leadership as capacity building requires leadership to be distributed among students and staff, and is closely aligned with constructivist and collaborative forms of learning. A key message is that students need to be involved in learning and leading together in order to sustain improvement. There is a need for shared vision; a need to collaborate and to build "a sense of collective responsibility" (Lambert, 2002, p. 40); balancing individualism with collectivism, so that the community and shared purpose are sustained, while leaving room for individual dissonance and diversity (Wenger, 1999). Leadership therefore incorporates purpose, presence and people in the sociocultural context of online teaching and learning.

Summary

In conclusion, this discussion chapter has highlighted three key research themes emerging from the data analysis, those being the aspects of: *purpose, presence and people.* These findings provide new knowledge to inform pedagogy for AOD in ITE.

The findings support the need to establish a shared purpose in AOD, given that AOD can be conceptualised in a variety of ways by participants. For example, as a tutorial, a community, or a journey. Ascertaining participants' perspectives on the purposes of AOD is important as a starting point for negotiating and evolving groundrules and guidelines. In a teacher education context, a key purpose in AOD is to weave multiple sources of knowledge. A concern highlighted is the need to clarify the purpose of literature in AOD.

The second key finding generated by this study of participants' perspectives of AOD relates to presence in terms of active participation and communication. Effectively communicating presence in AOD necessitates clarity, skill and responsiveness to build up the relationships. This is realised as formative interaction within AOD. The findings also indicate a tension between formative and summative assessment of AOD.

The third key finding generated by this study gives priority to people in AOD, with participants placing emphasis on caring and relational connections as well as community. In particular, participants identified six aspects of community as being central to their lived experiences of AOD, valuing support between students alongside peer learning, building on ideas, responsiveness, divergence and obligation to the community. Finally, the theme of people working together culminates in the notion of leadership as a collective responsibility.

It is helpful and explanatory to theorise AOD as a sociocultural practice, and in particular as an intentional, communicative and relational practice for learning. These understandings around purpose, presence and people can inform pedagogy and actualise affordances of AOD.

The significance and implications of these findings will be further examined in the following and final chapter.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this final chapter, the intent is to review this study in light of the bigger picture and wider implications. To begin with, I return to the purpose of the research, and follow with a brief recount of the fieldwork. Key findings are then summarised, and conclusions proposed, with implications for pedagogical strategies and conceptual tools. Finally, I re-establish the parameters of the study, acknowledging limitations and offering suggestions as to where related research may go in future. This concluding chapter draws upon data generated with study participants, literature, and my personal insights based upon experience in AOD.

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of staff and student participants in AOD within a teacher education programme, with the aim to investigate how students and teachers experience AOD and to probe the underlying hidden complexities of their experiences, including their expectations of fellow participants. I argue that insight into the participants' perspectives can inform decision-making about teaching and learning through AOD.

The rationale for connecting participant perspectives with pedagogical improvement is founded upon sociocultural theorising and phenomenographic intent. That is, human understandings – thinking, emotions, and intentions, are at the centre of learning and teaching (Loughran, 2006; Marton & Booth, 1997). Only through greater awareness of human experience – in all its multiplicity and complexity – can we move closer to seeing things as they are and suggest how they might be. Students' and teachers' perspectives on practice highlight points of agreement, miscommunication, and areas of contention, which can be interpreted to inform practice by suggesting pedagogical strategies and conceptual tools. In this way, participant perspectives can inform pedagogy and actualise affordances of AOD.

The purpose of exploring participant perspectives was therefore to generate new knowledge to inform pedagogical practice, suggest specific pedagogical strategies for

teachers and students in given situations, and provide conceptual tools for teachers and students when thinking about teaching and learning through AOD. As such, the study is developmental in intent, as it strives to represent the complexity of AOD in order to derive useful, practically relevant conclusions for participants.

Accordingly, the research questions driving this study have been:

- How do teacher educators and students in ITE experience AOD?
- What do the participants expect of each other?
- How can these participant perspectives inform pedagogy?

In pursuit of insight relating to these questions, fieldwork involved eliciting the perspectives of staff and student participants with respect to AOD, via focus groups and individual interviews. As explained in Chapter Five, staff participated in two face-to-face focus groups, and to a limited extent in an online focus group as a follow-up. Student participants engaged in an extended online focus group discussion, which proved more successful than the staff focus group with regard to longevity, level of activity and data generated. Two staff and seven students were interviewed on three occasions each, in order to establish general views about discussion; to co-analyse a discussion in progress; and to reflect, sum up and check on key messages. In these ways, the methods used in the study have been congruent with the value accorded to meaning making and lived experiences of participants, co-constructed through active participation. The ethnographic and phenomenographic basis for the study has enabled a fuller picture of localised experience.

In relation to the first research question enquiring as to how teacher educators and students in ITE experience AOD, these findings suggest that fundamentally teacher educators and students in ITE experience AOD as a tutorial, a community and a journey. Each of these metaphors has implications for practice in terms of the expectations of participants. For example, when AOD is conceptualised as a tutorial, there is an expectation that all participants attend class, participate and focus on the in-class tasks. When AOD is viewed as a community, the relational connectedness of

members is highlighted and it is expected that participants will support each other, work together, share and show commitment to the community. When AOD is regarded as a journey, there is an expectation of movement, direction and progress to new positions. The implication here is that it is vital for teachers and students to surface and negotiate their visions of AOD, since how the participants see the activity will influence their approach to it, which may or may not be compatible with expectations of others.

The methodology of this study enabled the identification of key issues, differences and compatibilities in the discussion experiences of the participant students and staff. For example, key issues in students' experiences of AOD included a preference for free-flowing, spontaneous language, and a dislike of direct quotations from literature. Key issues in teacher educators' experience included a tension between standing back to allow space for student voice while ensuring more intensive scaffolding of student learning. The experiences of teacher educators and students differed in terms of the style of language deemed most productive for learning. That is, the teachers aimed to model specialist terminology of relevance to the professional and subject discipline, and crafted reflective compositions. Meanwhile, as noted, the students found discussion most relevant when it was characterised by plain language, practical insight and free-flowing authenticity. There was however commonality in the reported experiences of teacher educators and students in that both parties appreciated the value of weaving classroom and professional practice with the personal and the theoretical. Both students and teachers valued the sharing of multiple perspectives. An area of contention for both students and teachers concerned the balance between learning through discussion and the use of discussion as a summative assessment task. Identifying these issues and comparative viewpoints suggests areas for negotiation between students and staff in my context, and may also highlight pertinent questions to raise in other contexts.

In relation to the second research question concerning what the participants in AOD expect of each other, overall participants expected presence, politeness, feedback and opportunities for student leadership in AOD. Students expected guidance and preparation for discussion, including provision of exemplars. Students considered it

199

vital that participants in AOD addressed each other by name and kept messages brief to allow space for responsiveness. Students expected reciprocity and connections with teachers, and expected their teachers to share personal stories. In turn, teacher education staff expected participation, interaction, reading and reflection, leading to widening perspectives. Ascertaining what participants expect is of significance because it determines that space of difference, or how participants in AOD may be talking past each other. By opening a space for negotiation of expectations it may be possible to reconcile expectations so that AOD can promote deep learning. Where expectations are unclear, the space between participants is arguably akin to a **_void_**, a mere distance or divide, characterised by persistent misunderstanding. However, where the expectations are disclosed, negotiated and shared, the space might be converted to a **_zone_** (for proximal development, Vygotsky, 1978), a pedagogical space, promoting growth in understanding (Ellsworth, 1997).

With respect to the third research question concerning how these participant perspectives might inform pedagogy, the findings suggest that key aspects to attend to are purpose, presence and people. It is useful and explanatory to theorise AOD as a sociocultural practice for learning, and in particular as: an intentional practice; a communicative practice and a relational practice.

I derive a number of specific pedagogical strategies from participant perspectives in relation to purpose, presence and people: I am mindful that students need guidance and preparation for discussion and that providing exemplars from other cohorts is likely to be a useful approach to this. I am reminded to be present in discussion, contributing at least twice a week in order to actively signal presence. Other specific implications for my teaching are suggested below, and these could be regarded as principles for practice. However, I am also cautious about generalizing the findings of this study as there may be limited transferability between the experiences and expectations of these participants, and those of any other population. Nevertheless, as Wenger (1999) reminds us:

> A perspective is not a recipe; it does not tell you what to do. Rather, it acts as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect, and how to approach problems (p. 9).

Thus, while the perspectives themselves may be illustrative, this study has identified concerns that may be applicable to others. For example, I contend that there is a need to negotiate language conventions and to clarify how literature should be used in AOD with diverse student groups. In addition to what may be common concerns, the study also highlights questions to be raised in other contexts. For example, what metaphors, visions and values do other groups of students and teachers use to conceptualise learning and teaching through AOD?

Implications – Suggested pedagogical strategies

Implications for teaching

This study has alerted me to new possibilities for teaching through AOD. The following strategies are fairly specific actions that I can implement in order to test these research findings. On the basis of this study, as a teacher I will:

- Work with students in each of my classes to co-construct a vision for our work in discussion, formulating the learning intentions and purposes for discussion in association with the students. I will avoid assuming what students want and why and will instead ask directly and negotiate openly, in order to establish shared understandings and explicit expectations.
- Work through the six step guidance programme proposed, incorporating students' prior experiences; analysis of exemplars; consideration and critique of the ideas shared by previous students; negotiation of ground rules and guidelines; and ongoing consultation and reflection, leading to the next iteration of the letter from online successors (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). One set of guidelines negotiated with students is included in Appendix 15.
- Clarify expectations around language, and in particular, how to integrate academic literature into discussion – by weaving meaning and paraphrasing with appropriate citation, but avoiding overuse of verbatim quotations.
- Ensure that ground rules stipulate netiquette and lay a foundation for respectful and responsive communication. Fundamentals here are likely to

involve the obligation to be actively involved in discussion; to strive for co-construction; and to respond respectfully.

- Ensure that guidelines take into account suggestions from students in previous cohorts, for example with respect to addressivity, brevity, tone and composition of messages.

- For my own part in discussion, I will strive to be actively present (at least twice a week) and to connect with students by following the same ground rules and guidelines established above, e.g. in terms of addressivity. I will also share personal stories and generally reciprocate: demonstrating that I am prepared to do as I ask of students.

- When monitoring discussion, I will signal presence through metacommunicative cues.

- Through AOD, I will emphasise formative interaction, giving feedback and encouraging students to do likewise. I will be receptive to and actively elicit student feedback.

- I will design summative assessment so that it is contingent upon the discussion, and contains a component that requires students to audit their own discussion, producing a reflection and illustrating it with samples from their own discussion entries.

- I will nurture community by making opportunities for students to cultivate strong and weak ties with peers, and inviting variety in student perspectives.

- I will promote student leadership by assigning leadership roles and by encouraging leadership behaviours. I will strive to make the tacit explicit so that the work of teaching and discussion is demystified as far as possible, and students are involved in decision-making.

Implications for learning

On the basis of this study, I will recommend that the students I work with:

- Work with me to co-construct a vision for our work in discussion, taking an active interest and role in formulating the learning intentions and purposes for discussion.

202

- Work through the six step guidance programme, reflecting on prior experiences; undertaking analysis of exemplars; negotiating ground rules and guidelines; and sharing ongoing feedback.

- Clarify expectations around language, and in particular, how to integrate academic literature into discussion – by weaving meaning and paraphrasing with appropriate citation, but avoiding verbatim quotations.

- Adhere to ground rules, netiquette and the fundamentals of respectful and responsive communication. Be actively involved in discussion, recognizing that contributions are vital to the community; strive for co-construction; and to respond respectfully.

- Contribute to shaping guidelines, and work with these in mind.

- Give feedback and seek to build on the ideas of others in discussion; learning with peers and in turn contributing to the learning of others.

- Appreciate diverse perspectives, and aim to think outside of the square and to share alternative viewpoints in the recognition that these will enhance discussion and deepen learning potential.

- Support peers in discussion, and in turn seek support when it is needed.

- Reflect upon discussion and learning through discussion.

- Look for opportunities to exercise leadership by adopting leadership roles, and by experimenting with leadership behaviours. Think as a teacher as well as a student.

Implications for learning about teaching and learning

While conducting this research, the conversations I have had with teachers and students about AOD have helped to make the tacit more explicit by highlighting common approaches, uncovering reasoning and strategy, and unpacking the views of discussion. Listening to and comparing the perspectives of students and teachers working within the same programme has led to identification of points of similarity and agreement, as well as points of contrast and instances where it seems the students and staff may be talking past each other. As such, the methodology has enabled new learning about teaching and learning. The methods are congruent with the overall aims of the study in that there is a clear emphasis on participant perspectives,

including a valuing of students' voices, and recognition of the place of meta-discussion (discussing discussion). This methodology reinforces the value of consulting with participants, in order to shape our learning and teaching endeavours.

Conceptual tools or principles to inform practice

While the implications for teaching and learning are numerous and specific in relation to my context, in terms of the bigger picture the key insights from this study boil down to three sociocultural themes and five questions that could prompt reflection in any context:

The themes are:

- Purpose: AOD as an intentional practice
- Presence: AOD as a communicative practice
- People: AOD as a relational practice

Reflective questions are:

- How do participants view and experience AOD?
- What style of language is best suited to the context?
- What degree of active presence is best suited to the learning and teaching context?
- What is the purpose of assessment of AOD?
- How will the participants work together?

In addition to the above questions, this study suggests there are also a number of tensions to be balanced or negotiated. These include but may not be limited to the following:

- Tensions between expectations of diverse parties
- Establishing ground rules vs. evolving guidelines
- Active presence vs. wait time
- Obligation to community vs. agency
- Formative vs. Summative assessment
- Balancing teacher and student leadership

- Affordances vs. actualities
- Humanity vs. technology
- Experiential vs. theoretical knowledge
- Language tensions: free-flowing, spontaneous conversation vs. crafted academic text
- The space of difference: as a divide, characterised by misunderstanding vs. a zone for growth in understanding.

These questions and tensions could be raised with future cohorts and in diverse contexts, suggesting new possibilities for research and scholarship.

Parameters of the study

It is important to acknowledge the parameters of the study when reflecting on the research design. Firstly, this research has focused on participant perspectives, in accordance with self-reported data. If we want to know what participants expect we need to ask them. While this assumes honesty on the part of participants, there is no reason to assume anything other, and sincerity is the foundation for ethical behaviour as a professional, a teacher and a researcher. It is also important to be clear that my position is not that we should ascertain what students want in order to give it to them. Neither is the purpose of ascertaining student understandings directed simply at identifying misconceptions in order to change student thinking to a current authoritative view. Rather, the situation is more complex and negotiable than either of these extreme positions. Where students and staff disagree, it does not follow that either party is wrong. When students state a preference for a certain set of conditions, it does not follow that they should receive whatever they desire. Rather, an understanding of preferences is but a first step toward negotiating a mutually agreeable compromise. Some preferences should be challenged, some misconceptions corrected, some positions clarified, and some wishes satisfied, in order to arrive at shared understandings based upon common pursuit of deep learning.

This study has prioritised perspectives. That is, it is how the participants view the asynchronous online discussion that matters. Justification for this stance is argued

elsewhere, in terms of phenomenography, and the need to look beyond third-party analysis of message board postings. During focus groups and interviews, participants were reassured that it was their perspective that was of interest.

The values driving this research have included honesty, sincerity and reciprocity. For example, it is assumed that when I asked participants how they see discussion and what they expect, they answered honestly and sincerely, so that the findings communicated are as true a reflection of the participants' perspectives as possible. While seemingly naïve, this stance is adopted in good faith and in keeping with the following parameter, reciprocity.

That is, in reciprocal terms, by being open and honest in my own approach, I hoped to encourage honesty and sincerity on the part of participants. That is, I have been sincere in my wish to find out about participants' perspectives so that understanding can inform and enhance pedagogy in AOD. I therefore hope and trust that participants reciprocated with honesty and sincerity.

A second limitation or parameter is that the study does not conclusively establish or prove a causal link between participants' perspectives of discussion, and actual learning occurring. This study does not purport to evaluate AOD in terms of learning. However, it is noteworthy that student comments relate to characteristics associated with deep learning in the literature. Future research could explore this association by seeking further evidence of student learning through AOD.

A third limitation is that associated with the situated nature of the study, in a specific context – one cohort of students and one teacher education programme in one university. Recommendations made by these participants, and how they view discussion, are not directly generalisable to other cohorts or populations. All of the knowledge is partial, provisional, and open to revision in new contexts. However, the suggestions made here do raise questions for others, in terms of the extent to which these findings may or may not have wider application. This is open for testing, and these findings might be regarded as a 'letter from online successors' (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005), or as footprints picking out a pathway for others to find as they make

their own way through AOD (Salmon, 2002). While the findings themselves may be replicated or challenged with diverse cohorts of students and teachers, the questions asked of participants are themselves relevant for researchers wishing to examine online teaching and learning more closely. Those who seek to engage with and test the ideas offered here will determine the extent to which the findings apply to others.

Future research should therefore raise the recommendations in wider contexts, with diverse groups of students, in other academic fields, and in other universities and nations. Further study could verify whether deeper learning is associated with the recommendations made in this study. That is, when students and teachers co-construct shared understandings and work through the six-step programme; when formative interaction is facilitated and community is nurtured; and when leadership is shared, to what extent is there an impact on deeper learning?

Alongside the specific recommendations made by these teacher education staff and students, is the methodology employed in order to delve deeper into participants' understandings of AOD. Future research can replicate this approach with diverse groups of students and teachers, to negotiate the function and form of AOD with these groups.

Finally, the significance of the new knowledge created by this research is that this thesis has argued that asynchronous online discussion has enduring value for initial teacher education, as AOD affords inclusivity, flexibility, benefits associated with textual communication, and deep learning. However, it is apparent that the potential may not be realised without consideration of the sociocultural complexities of AOD, including insight into participants' personal lived experiences of online discussion. Greater awareness of how participants experience AOD, and the expectations of participants can inform pedagogy and suggest conditions under which quality discussion is likely to occur. These conditions can be enhanced where AOD is viewed as an intentional, communicative and relational practice. While existing literature, reviewed in Chapter Two, suggests teaching responsibilities in relation to establishing a purpose for discussion, maintaining appropriate presence, and mediating discussion in a manner that promotes participation and learning, this study has identified a need

for closer consultation with participants, students and teachers, actually involved in AOD. Participant perspectives are important because different people experience AOD differently. As such, this study draws upon sociocultural theorising and a phenomenographic approach to explore AOD through the eyes of teacher educators and teacher education students in a local context. In doing so, this thesis adds to the limited research literature on teacher perceptions about online teaching (Spector, 2007), and makes a contribution to addressing the neglect of student approaches to study in higher education using eLearning technologies for discussion (Ellis et al, 2008; Jackson et al, 2010; Sharpe et al, 2010).

By attending to student and staff experiences and expectations, this study lends more holistic insight into AOD, as compared to studies confined to analysis of postings or brief surveys of either students or tutors. The generation of data along with both students and teachers within the same programme has enabled comparison of views, highlighting areas of shared understanding and aspects of divergence, and leading to practical implications for engagement with AOD in the local ITE context.

It is significant that this study has focused on teacher education, due to the relative rarity of earlier studies of phenomeonographic intent in the area of online pedagogy in initial teacher education. Nevertheless, seminal research related to AOD (e.g., Preece, 2000; Salmon, 2003; 2011) has inspired exploration of human and social dimensions of AOD, valuing the perspectives of students and teachers as participants in AOD, and seeking a basis for evolving policy and guidelines to inform pedagogy.

Key themes emerging from the data revolve around purpose, presence, and people in AOD. Specific teaching strategies and conceptual tools are offered, affirming the need for guidance for participants in AOD, for negotiation, and presence, and for shared leadership. This is significant in terms of suggesting a way forward that continues to value participant perspectives.

Ultimately, this study reveals a little of the participant experiences and expectations of AOD in initial teacher education. Highlighting these participant perspectives enables us to engage with them in order to generate possibilities for negotiation,

change and improvement. That is, by making the perspectives, experiences and expectations visible, we render them revisible (Halse & Honey, 2010), inviting critical consideration of how to interact effectively within AOD in wider contexts.

References

Akyol, Z., & Garrison, D.R. (2008). The development of a community of inquiry over time in an online course: Understanding the progression and integration of social, cognitive and teaching presence. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 12*(3/4), 3-22.

Ally, M. (2008). Foundations of educational theory for online learning. In T. Anderson (Ed.), *The theory and practice of online learning* (2nd ed., pp. 15-44). Alberta, Canada: Athabasca University Press.

Anderson, T., & Kanuka, H. (2003). *e-Research: Methods, strategies and issues.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Anderson-Levitt, K.M. (2006). Ethnography. In J.L. Green, G. Camilli, & P.B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 279-295). Washington, WA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Angeli, C., Valanides, N., & Bonk, C.J. (2003). Communication in a web-based conferencing system: The quality of computer-mediated interactions. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 34*(1), 31-43.

Apple, M.W., & Beane, J.A. (1999). *Democratic schools: Lessons from the chalk face.* Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Arend, B.D. (2007). Course assessment practices and student learning strategies in online courses. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 11*(4), 3-17.

Arlidge, J. (2000). Constructivism: Is anyone making meaning in New Zealand adult and vocational education? *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning, 28*(1), 32-49.

Askell-Williams, H., & Lawson, M.J. (2005). Students' knowledge about the value of discussions for teaching and learning. *Social Psychology of Education, 8*(1), 83-115.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). The problem with speech genres. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), Speech genres and other late essays: MM Bakhtin, trans. V. MGee (pp. 60-102). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bates, A.W. (Tony). (2005). *Technology, e-learning and distance education.* (2nd ed.). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Beetham, H. (2007). An approach to learning activity design. In H. Beetham, & R. Sharpe (Eds.), *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing and delivering e-learning* (pp. 26-40). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bell, B. (2003). Theorising pedagogy. *Waikato Journal of Education, 9*, 3-9.

Bell, B. (2010). Theorising teaching. *Waikato Journal of Education*, *15*(2), 21-40.

Bell, B. (2011). *Theorising teaching in secondary classrooms: Understanding our practice from a sociocultural perspective.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bell, B., & Cowie, B. (2001). *Formative Assessment and Science Education* (Vol. 12). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Bender, T. (2003). *Discussion-based online teaching to enhance student learning: Theory, practice and assessment.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Ben-Peretz, M., & Kupferberg, I. (2007). Does teachers' negotiation of personal cases in an interactive cyber forum contribute to their professional learning? *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 13*(2), 125-143.

Bischoff, A. (2000). The elements of effective online teaching: Overcoming the barriers to success. In K.W. White & B.H. Weight (Eds.), *The online teaching guide: A handbook of attitudes, strategies, and techniques for the virtual classroom* (pp. 57-72). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bishop, A. (2002). Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly: Critical reflections of web-based education from a student's perspective. *Distance Education*, *23*(2), 231-236.

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education*, *5*(1), 7-74.

Blignaut, A.S., & Trollip, S.R. (2003). Measuring faculty participation in asynchronous discussion forums. *Journal of Education for Business, 78*(6), 347-353.

Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bonk, C. (2004). I should have known this was coming: Computer-mediated discussions in teacher education. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 36*(2), 95-102.

Bonk, C.J., & Cummings, J.A. (1998). A dozen recommendations for placing the student at the centre of web-based learning. *Educational Media International*, *35*(2), 82-89.

Bonk, C.J., & Cunningham, D.J. (1998). Searching for learner-centred, constructivist, and sociocultural components of collaborative educational learning tools. In C.J. Bonk & K.S. King (Eds.), *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered*

technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse (pp. 25-50). New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bonk, C.J., & Dennen, V. (2003). Frameworks for research, design, benchmarks, training, and pedagogy in web-based distance education. In M.G. Moore & W.G. Anderson (Eds.), *Handbook of distance education* (pp. 331-348*).* New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bonk, C.J., Hansen, E.J., Grabner-Hagen, M.M., Lazar, S.A., & Mirabelli, C. (1998). Time to connect: Synchronous and asynchronous case-based dialogue among preservice teachers. In C.J. Bonk & K.S. King (Eds.), *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse* (pp. 289-314). New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bonk, C.J., Kim, K-J, & Zeng, T. (2006). Future directions of blended learning in higher education and workplace learning settings. In C.J. Bonk & C.R. Graham (Eds.), *The handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs* (pp. 550-567). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Bonk, C.J., & King, KS. (1998a). *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse.* New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Introduction to electronic collaborators. pp. xxv-xxxv).

Bonk, C.J., & King, K.S. (1998b). *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse.* New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Chapter 1: Computer conferencing and collaborative writing tools: Starting a dialogue about student dialogue. pp. 3-23).

Bonk, C.J., Kirkley, J., Hara, N., & Dennen, V.P. (2001). Finding the instructor in post-secondary online learning: Pedagogical, social, managerial and technological locations. In J. Stephenson (Ed.), *Teaching and learning online: Pedagogies for new technologies* (pp. 76-97). London, England: Kogan Page.

Bonk, C.J., & Zhang, K. (2008). *Empowering online learning: 100+ activities for reading, reflecting, displaying, and doing.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Booth, S. (1997). On phenomenography, learning and teaching. *Higher Education Research & Development, 16(*2), 135-158.

Booth, S., & Hulten, M. (2003). Opening dimensions of variation: An empirical study of learning in a Web-based discussion. *Instructional Science, 31,* 65-86.

Boston, W., Diaz, S.R., Gibson, A.M., Ice, P., Richardson, J., & Swan, K. (2009). An exploration of the relationship between indicators of the community of inquiry framework and retention in online programs. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 13*(3), 67-83.

Bowden, J. (2000a). The nature of phenomenographic research. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds)., *Phenomenography* (pp. 1-18). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Bowden, J.A. (2000b). Experience of phenomenographic research: A personal account. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 47-61). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Bregman, A., & Haythorthwaite, C. (2003). Radicals of presentation: Visibility, relation, and co-presence in persistent conversation. *New Media & Society, 5*(1), 117-140.

Brenner, M.E. (2006). Interviewing in educational research. In J.L. Green, G. Camilli, & P.B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 357-370).Washington, WA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brookfield, S., & Preskill, S. (2005). *Discussions as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bruner, J.S. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Campbell, N. (1997). Learning to teach online: An investigation of practice in teacher education (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Carliner, S. (1999). *Overview of online learning.* Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods* (pp. 81-110). London, England: Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2004). Grounded theory. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 496-521). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Charmaz, K. (2010). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 183-207). New Jersey, NJ: Routledge.

Chen, S.S., Hall, G.J., & Johns, M.D. (2004). Research paparazzi in cyberspace: Voices of the researched. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues, and ethics* (pp. 157-175). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Clark, R.C., & Mayer, R.E. (2003). *e-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Clegg, P., & Heap, J. (2006). Facing the challenge of e-learning: Reflections on teaching evidence-based practice through online discussion groups. *Innovate, 2*(6). Avail: http://innovateonline.info/

Clegg Smith, K.M. (2004). "Electronic eavesdropping": The ethical issues involved in conducting a virtual ethnography. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues, and ethics* (pp. 223-238). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London, England: Routledge Falmer.

Collis, B., & Moonen, J. (2007). The contributing student: Philosophy, technology and strategy. In J.M. Spector (Ed.), *Finding your voice online: Stories told by experienced online educators* (pp. 19-31). London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Collison, G., Elbaum, B., Haavind, S., & Tinker, R. (2000). *Facilitating online learning: Effective strategies for moderators.* Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

Collot, M., & Belmore, N. (1996). Electronic language: A new variety of English. In S. Herring (Ed.), *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 13-28). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Conrad, R., and Donaldson, J.A. (2004). E*ngaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cook, D., & Ralston, J. (2003). Sharpening the focus: Methodological issues in analysing on-line conferences. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 12*(3), 361-376.

Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). New Jersey, NJ: Pearson.

Cummings, J. A., Bonk, C.J., & Jacobs, F.R. (2002). Twenty-first century college syllabi options for online communication and interactivity. *The Internet and Higher Education, 5*(2002), 1-19.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). *Good business: Leadership, flow and making of meaning.* New York, NY: Viking.

Dall'Alba, G. (2000). Reflections on some faces of phenomenography. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 83-101). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Dawson, K. M., Mason, C.L., & Molebash, P. (2000). Results of a telecollaborative activity involving geographically disparate preservice teachers. *Educational Technology and Society*, *3*(3), 1-18.

Dennen, V.P. (2005). From message posting to learning dialogues: Factors affecting learner participation in asynchronous discussion. *Distance Education, 26*(1), 127-148.

Dennen, V.P., & Wieland, K. (2007). From interaction to intersubjectivity: Facilitating online group discourse processes. *Distance Education, 28*(3), 281-297.

Devine, N. (2003). Pedagogy and subjectivity: Creating our own students. *Waikato Journal of Education, 9*, 29-37.

Dewstow, R.A. (2006). Using the Internet to enhance teaching at the University of Waikato. (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Donaghy, A., & McGee, C. (2003). *E-education: Case studies of university teachers' experiences.* Hamilton, New Zealand: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.

Donaghy, A., McGee, C., Ussher, B., & Yates, R. (2003). *Online teaching and learning: A study of teacher education students' experiences.* Hamilton, New Zealand: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.

Duffy, T.M., Dueber, B., Hawley, C.L. (1998). Critical thinking in a distributed environment: A pedagogical base for the design of conferencing systems. In C.J. Bonk & K.S. King, (Eds.*), Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse* (pp. 51-78). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Durrington, V.A., & Chien, Y. (2004). It's the same only different. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 5*(2), 89-100.

Dysthe, O. (2002). The learning potential of a web-mediated discussion in a university course. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*(3), 339–352.

Dziuban, C.D., Moskal, P.D., Bradford, G.R., Brophy-Ellison, J., & Groff, A.T. (2010). Constructs that impact the net generation's satisfaction with online learning. In R. Sharpe, H. Beetham, & S. de Freitas (Eds.), *Rethinking*

learning for a digital age: How learners are shaping their own experiences (pp. 56-71). New York, NY: Routledge.

Earl, K., & Cong, Y. (2011). Chinese international students' experience of studying online in New Zealand. *Waikato Journal of Education, 16*(1), 93-105.

Eggins, S., & Slade, D. (1997). *Analyzing casual conversation*. Washington, WA: Cassell.

Ellis, R. A., Calvo, R., Levy, D., & Tan, K. (2004) Learning through discussions. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *23*(1), 73-93.

Ellis, R.A., Goodyear, P., Calvo, R.A., & Prosser, M. (2008). Engineering students' conceptions of and approaches to learning through discussion in face-to-face and online contexts. *Learning and Instruction, 18*(3), 267-282.

Ellis, R. A., Goodyear, P., Prosser, M., O'Hara, A. *(2006).* How and what university students learn through online and face-to-face discussion: conceptions, intentions and approaches. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *22*(4), 244-256.

Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Entwistle, N. (1997). Introduction: Phenomenography in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *16*(2), 127-134.

Entwistle, N. (2001). Promoting deep learning through teaching and assessment. In L. Suskie (Ed.), *Assessment to promote deep learning.* Washington, WA: American Association for Higher Education.

Fauske, J., & Wade, S.E. (2003). Research to practice online: Conditions that foster democracy, community, and critical thinking in computer-mediated discussions. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, *36*(2), 137-153.

Feenberg, A. (1989). The written world: On the theory and practice of computer conferencing. In R. Mason & A. Kaye (Eds.), *Mindweave: Communication, computers and distance education.* Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Felman, S. (1987). *Jacques Lacan and the adventure of insight: Psychoanalysis in contemporary culture.* London, England: Harvard University Press.

Ferdig, R.E., & Roehler, L.R. (2003). Student uptake in electronic discussions: Examining online discourse in literacy preservice classrooms. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 26*(2), 119-136.

Ferry, B., Kiggins, J., Hoban, G., & Lockyer, L. (2000). Using computer-mediated communication to form a knowledge-building community with beginning teachers. *Educational Technology and Society*, *3*(3), 496-505.

Frank, F.W. (1995). Lecturing and transference: The undercover work of pedagogy. In J. Gallop (Ed.), *Pedagogy: The question of impersonation* (pp. 28-35). Indianapolis, IA: Indiana University Press.

Forbes, D. (2004). Leadership as capacity building in online teaching and learning: The obligation to collaborate. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Leadership*, *19*(2), 57-70.

Forbes, D. (2005). Formative interaction in online classes. *International Journal of Design Sciences and Technology (Revue des Science et Techniques de la Conception)*. Special issue: eLearning Challenge, *12*(2), 83-93.

Forbes, D. (in press). Listening and learning through ICT with Digital Kids: Dynamics of interaction, power and mutual learning between student teachers and children in online discussion. In K. Sullivan, P. Czigler, & J.S. Hellgren (Eds.), *Cases on Professional Distance Education Degree Programs: Successes, challenges and issues.* Sweden: IGI Global.

Forbes, D., and Ipsen, S. (2004). 'It's like something in my pencilcase': Student teachers learning through ICT with digital kids. *Computers in New Zealand Schools*, *16*(3), 49-53.

Forsyth, I. (1998). *Teaching and learning materials and the Internet.* London, England: Kogan Page Ltd.

Freebody, P. (2003). *Qualitative research in education: Interaction and practice.* London, England: Sage.

Frost, D., & Durrant, J. (2003). Teacher leadership: Rationale, strategy and impact. *School Leadership and Management, 23*(2), 173-186.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8), 16-20.

Gallop, J. (1995). (Ed.). *Pedagogy: The question of impersonation.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, IA: Indiana University Press.

Garrison, D.R., & Anderson, T. (2003). *E-learning in the 21st century*. London, England: Routledge Falmer.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2-3), 1-19.

Garrison, D.R, Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 7-23.

Gerbic, P. (2010). Getting the blend right in new learning environments: A complementary approach to online discussions. *Education and Information Technologies, 15,* 125-137.

Gikandi, J.W., Morrow, D. and Davis, N.E. (2011) Online formative assessment in higher education: A review of the literature. *Computers & Education, 57*(4), 2333-2351. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.06.004.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative Research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Goodyear, P. (2002). Psychological foundations for networked learning. In C. Steeples & C. Jones (Eds.), *Networked learning: Perspectives and issues* (pp. 49-75). London, England: Springer.

Goodyear, P., & Ellis, R.A. (2010). Expanding conceptions of study, context and educational design. In R. Sharpe, H. Beetham, & S. de Freitas (Eds.), *Rethinking learning for a digital age: How learners are shaping their own experiences* (pp.100-113). New York, NY: Routledge.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Guiller, J., Durndell, A., & Ross, A. (2008). Peer interaction and critical thinking: Face-to-face or online discussion? *Learning and Instruction, 18*(2), 187-200.

Gulati, S. (2008). Compulsory participation in online discussions: Is this constructivism or normalization of learning? *Innovations in Education & Teaching International, 45*(2), 183-192.

Gunawardena, C., & Zittle, F.J. (1997). Social presence as a predictor of satisfaction within a computer-mediated conferencing environment. *American Journal of Distance Education, 11*(3), 8-26.

Halse, C., & Honey, A. (2010). Unraveling ethics: Illuminating the moral dilemmas of research ethics. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 123-138). New Jersey, NJ: Routledge.

Hammond, M. (2005). A review of recent papers on online discussion in teaching and learning in higher education. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *9*(3). Retrieved September 21, 2006, from http://www.sloan-c.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz:2048/publications/jaln/v9n3/v9n3_hammond.asp

218

Hardie, A. (2002). Online learning: A review of some key aspects. *Computers in New Zealand Schools, 14*(2), 10-17.

Harms, C., Niederhauser, D.S.N., Davis, N.E., Roblyer, M.D. and Gilbert, S.B. (2010). Educating Educators for Virtual Schooling: Communicating Roles and Responsibilities. In C.M. Stewart, C.C. Schifter and M.E. Markaridian (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning with Technology: Beyond Constructivism* (pp. 70-86). New York, NY: Routledge.

Harraway, D. (2003). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 21-46). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Harris, J. (2000). Structuring Internet-enriched learning spaces for understanding and action. *Learning and Leading with Technology, 28*(4), 51-55.

Hartman, D.K. (1995). Eight readers reading: The intertextual links of proficient readers reading multiple passages. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(3), 520-561.

Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2000). From andragogy to heutagogy. UltiBase articles, December 2000 edition. Available http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Archives/articles.htm#dec00

Hasselgren, B., & Beach, D. (1997). Phenomenography – a "good-for-nothing brother" of phenomenology? Outline of an analysis. *Higher Education Research & Development, 16*(2), 191-202.

Haythornthwaite, C. (2000). Online personal networks: Size, composition and media use among distance learners. *New Media & Society, 2*(2), 195-226.

Haythornthwaite, C., & Andrews, R. (2011). *E-learning theory and practice.* London, England: Sage Publications.

Herring, S. (1999). Interactional coherence in CMC. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication, 4*(4).

Hew, K.F., & Cheung, W.S. (2003). Evaluating the participation and quality of thinking of pre-service teachers in an asynchronous online discussion environment: Part 1. *International Journal of Instructional Media, 30*(3), 247-262.

Hew, K.F., & Cheung, W.S. (2011). Higher-level knowledge construction in asynchronous online discussions: An analysis of group size, duration of online discussion, and student facilitation techniques. *Instructional Science, 39*(3), 303-319.

Hew, K.F., Cheung, W.S., & Ng, C.S.L. (2010). Student contribution in asynchronous online discussion: A review of the research and empirical exploration. *Instructional Science,* 571-606.

Hewitt, J. (2005). Toward an understanding of how threads die in asynchronous computer conferences. *Journal of the Learning Sciences, 14*(4), 567-589.

Hiltz, S.R., & Goldman, R. (2005). *Learning together online: Research on asynchronous learning networks.* New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Chapter 1: What are asynchronous learning networks? pp. 3-18).

Hiltz, S.R., Shea, P., & Kim, E. (2010). Using focus groups to study ALN faculty motivation. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 14*(1), 21-38.

Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. London, England: Sage Publications.

Holmes, B., & Gardner, J. (2006). *E-learning: Concepts and practice.* London, England: Sage Publications.

Holquist, M. (1981). (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Hramiak, A. (2010). Online learning community development with teachers as a means of enhancing initial teacher training. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 19*(1), 47-62.

Hultén, M. & Booth, S. (2002). *Considering Contexts for Networked Learning in a Phenomenographic Perspective*. Paper presented at Networked Learning 2002, Sheffield, 26–28 March.

Im, Y., & Lee, O. (2003). Pedagogical implications of online discussion for preservice teacher training. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 36*(2), 155-170.

Ivey, A. E., Bradford-Ivey, M., & Simek-Downing, L. (1987). *Counseling and psychotherapy (2nd ed.).* Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Jackson, L.C., Jones, S.J., & Rodriguez, R.C. (2010). Faculty actions that result in student satisfaction in online courses. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 14*(4), 78-96.

Jacques, D., and Salmon, G. (2007). *Learning in groups: A handbook for face-to-face and online environments (4th ed)*. London, England: Routledge.

James, C. (2003). On ethnographic authority. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 121-137). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

James, L. (2009). Creating an online, course-integrated generational learning community. In S. Wheeler (Ed.), *Connected minds, emerging cultures: Cybercultures in online learning* (pp. 91-117). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

James, N. (2007). The use of email interviewing as a qualitative method of inquiry in educational research. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 963-976.

James, N., & Busher, H. (2007). Ethical issues in online educational research: Protecting privacy, establishing authenticity in email interviewing. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education, 30*(1), 101-113.

Jetton, T.L. (2003). Using computer-mediated discussion to facilitate preservice teachers' understanding of literacy assessment and instruction. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 36*(2), 171-191.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Johnson, C. (1995). Disinfecting dialogues. In J. Gallop. (1995) (Ed.), *Pedagogy: The question of impersonation* (pp. 129-137). Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Johnston, M. (2000). *Strategies to facilitate online learning.* Paper presented at the Distance Education Association of New Zealand 2000 Conference, Dunedin, New Zealand: The University of Otago.

Jonassen,D., Davidson, M., Collins, M., Campbell, C., and Haag, B.B. (1995). Constructivism and computer-mediated communication in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education, 9*(2), 7-25.

Kanuka, H., Collett, D., & Caswell, C. (2002). University instructor perceptions of the use of asynchronous text-based discussion in distance courses. *American Journal of Distance Education, 16*(3), 151-167.

Kazmer, M.M. (2000). Coping in a distance environment: Sitcoms, chocolate cake, and dinner with a friend. First Monday, *5*(9), available: http://firstmonday.org/

Kehrwald, B.A. (2008). Understanding social presence in text-based online learning environments. *Distance Education, 29*(1), 89-106.

Kember, D., & Kwan, K. (2000). Lecturers' approaches to teaching and their relationship to conceptions of good teaching. *Instructional Science, 28,* 469-490.

Khan, B.H. (1997). (Ed.), *Web-based instruction.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications. (Chapter 1: Web-based instruction: What is it and why is it? pp. 5-18).

Khoo, E. (2010). Developing an Online Learning Community: A Strategy for Improving Lecturer and Student Learning Experiences (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Kim, H. Y., & Bonk, C. J. (2010, August). Toward best practices in online teaching: Instructional immediacy in online faculty experiences. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 7*(8). Available: http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Aug_10/article02.htm

Kleinman, S.S. (2004). Researching OURNET: A case study of a multiple methods approach. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues, and ethics* (pp. 47-62). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2004). *Teaching online: A practical guide.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews.* London, England: Sage.

Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8), 37-40.

Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

LaPointe, D.K. (2007). Pursuing interaction. In J.M. Spector (Ed.), *Finding your voice online: Stories told by experienced online educators* (pp. 83-103). London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lather, P. (2003). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 185-215). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Laurillard, D. (2002). *Rethinking university teaching: A conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies* (2nd ed.). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

LeBesco, K. (2004). Managing visibility, intimacy, and focus in online critical ethnography. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social*

research: Methods, issues, and ethics (pp. 63-79). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Leach, J., & Moon, B. (1999). (Eds.). *Learners and Pedagogy.* London, England: The Open University. (Chapter 19. Recreating pedagogy. pp. 265-276).

Leach, J., & Scott, P. (2003). Individual and sociocultural views of learning in science education. *Science & Education*, *12*, 91-113.

Le Francois, G. R. (2000). *Psychology For Teaching* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lehman, R.M., & Conceicao, S.C.O. (2010). *Creating a sense of presence in online teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lim Cher, P., & Cheah Poh, T. (2003). The role of the tutor in asynchronous discussion boards: A case study of a pre-service teacher course. *Educational Media International*, *40*(1/2), 33.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Denzin, N.K. (2003). (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (Chapter 1: Introduction: Revolutions, ruptures, and rifts in interpretive inquiry. pp. 1-17).

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (2003). Ethics: the failure for positivist science. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 219-237). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Litvak, J. (1995). Discipline, spectacle, and melancholia in and around the Gay studies classroom. In J. Gallop (Ed.), *Pedagogy: The question of impersonation* (pp. 19-27). Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Locke, T. (2007). E-learning and the reshaping of rhetorical space. In R. Andrews & C.A. Haythornthwaite (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of e-learning research* (pp. 179-201). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Locke, T., & Daly, N. (2007). Towards congeniality: The place of politeness in asynchronous online discussion. *International Journal of Learning, 13*(12), 121-134.

Lorenzo, G., & Moore, J. (2002, November). *The Sloan Consortium Report to the Nation: Five pillars of quality online education*. New York, NY: The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Loughran, J. (1999). *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy.* London, England: Falmer Press. (Chapter 1: Researching teaching for understanding. pp. 1-9).

Loughran, J. (2006). *Developing a pedagogy of teacher education: Understanding teaching and learning about teaching.* London, England: Routledge.

Lu, L.L., & Jeng, I. (2006). Knowledge construction in inservice teacher online discourse: Impacts of instructor roles and facilitative strategies. *Journal of Research on Technolology in Education, 39*(2), 183-202.

Lynch, M.M. (2004). *Learning online: A guide to success in the virtual classroom.* London, England: Routledge Falmer.

McGrath, A., Mackey, J. and Davis, N. (2008). *Designing for authentic relationships, content and assessment in unpredictable learning contexts.* Melbourne, Australia: ASCILITE 2008, 30 Nov-3 Dec 2008. 613-617. http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/melbourne08/procs/mcgrath.pdf.

McLachlan-Smith, C. (1998). Designing for dialogue at a distance: Reflections on how to create and maintain an effective teaching-learning relationship with students. *The Journal of Distance Learning, 4*(1), 11-22.

McLouglin, C. (2001, September). Evaluating learner support in networked learning environments: What works, how and why? Paper presented at the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia 15th Biennial Forum, Sydney.

McLure Wasko, M., & Faraj, S. (2000). "It is what one does": Why people participate and help others in electronic communities of practice. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems, 9*(2-3), 155-173.

McNiff, J., Lomax, P. & Whitehead, J. (1996). *You and Your Action Research Project.* London, England:Routledge.

McPherson, M., & Nunes, M.B. (2004). *Developing innovation in online learning: An action research framework.* London, England: Routledge Falmer.

Mahn, H., & John-Steiner, V. (2002). The gift of confidence: A Vygotskian view of emotions. In G. Wells & G. Claxton (Eds.), *Learning for life in the 21st century: Sociocultural perspectives on the future of education* (pp. 46-58). Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online.* London, England: Sage.

Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2004). Introducing online methods. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 367-401). Oxford. England: Oxford University Press.

Mantyla, K. (1999). *Interactive distance learning exercises that really work!* Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

Maor, D. (2003). Teacher's and students' perspectives on on-line learning in a social constructivist learning environment. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 12*(2), 201-218.

Markel, S. (2001). Technology and education online discussion forums: It's in the response. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 4*(2).

Marton, F. (2000). The structure of awareness. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 103-116). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Marton, F., & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and awareness.* New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Maxwell, J.A. (2010). Validity: How might you be wrong? In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 279-287). New Jersey, NJ: Routledge.

Mayes, T. (2001). Learning technology and learning relationships. In J. Stephenson (Ed.), *Teaching and learning online: Pedagogies for new technologies* (pp. 16-26). London, England: Kogan Page Limited.

Mazzolini, M., & Maddison, S. (2003). Sage, guide or ghost? The effect of instructor intervention on student participation in online discussion forums. *Computers & Education, 40,* 237-253.

Metge, J., & Kinloch, P. (1984). *Talking past each other: Problems of cross cultural communication.* Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press.

Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum.* Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Mishra, P., & Koehler, M.J. (2006). Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record, 108*(6), 1017-1054.

Moore, M.G. (1993). Theory of transactional distance. In Keegan, D. (Ed.). *Theoretical principles of distance educatio.* (pp. 22-38). London, England: Routledge.

Moore, M.G., & Keegan, D. (1993). *Theoretical principles of distance education.* London, England: Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (2004). Focus groups. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 263-285). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

225

Murphy, E., & Coleman, E. (2004). Graduate students' experiences of challenges in online asynchronous discussions. *Canadian Journal Of Learning And Technology / La Revue Canadienne De L'Apprentissage Et De La Technologie, 30*(2). Retrieved from http://www.cjlt.ca/index.php/cjlt/article/view/128/122

Noddings, N. (1984). Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Norsworthy, B. (2002). Revisiting reflection. *Waikato Journal of Education*, *8*, 101-114.

Nuthall, G. (1997). Understanding student thinking and learning in the classroom. In B. Biddle, T. Good, & I. Goodson (Eds.), *The international handbook of teachers and teaching.* Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press.

Offir, B., & Lev, J. (2000). Constructing an aid for evaluating teacher-learner interaction in distance learning. *Educational Media International*, *37*(2), 92-97.

Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (2001). *Lessons from the cyberspace classroom: The realities of online teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Palloff, R.M., & Pratt, K. (2003). *The virtual student: A profile and guide to working with online learners.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (2005). *Collaborating online: Learning together in community.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patrick, K. (2000). Exploring conceptions: Phenomenography and the object of study. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 117-136). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Pegrum, M. (2009). *From blogs to bombs.* Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing.

Poole, D.M. (2000). Student participation in a discussion-oriented online course: A case study. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education, 33*(2), 162-178.

Pratt, D.D. (1992). Conceptions of teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly 42*(4): 203–220.

Preece, J. (2000). *Online communities: Designing usability, supporting sociability*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd.

Prestridge, S. (2010). ICT professional development for teachers in online forums: Analysing the role of discussion. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(2), 252-258.

Prosser, M. (2000). Using phenomenographic research methodology in the context of research in teaching and learning. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 34-46). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Prosser, M., & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding learning and teaching: The experience in higher education.* Buckingham, England: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Punch, K.F. (2009). *Introduction to research methods in education.* London, England: Sage.

Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to teach in higher education*. London, England: Routledge.

Repman, J., Zinskie, C., & Carlson, R.D. (2005). Effective use of CMC tools in interactive online learning. *Computers in the Schools*, *22*(1/2), 57-69.

Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Roberts, G. (2003). Teaching using the Web: Conceptions and approaches from a phenomenographic perspective. *Instructional Science*, *31*, 127-150.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Rogoff, B. (1995). Observing activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In J.V. Wertsch, P. del Rio, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139-164). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Rogoff, B., Matusov, E., & White, C. (1996). Models of teaching and learning: Participation in a community of learners. In D.R. Olsen & N. Torrance (Eds.), *The Handbook of Education and Human Development.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Roulet, G., Khan, S., & Lazarus, J. (2008). On Being Too Nice: Message Interaction in an Asynchronous Learning Network. In S. Gülseçen & Z. Ayvaz Reis (Eds.), *Future-Learning: 2nd international Future-Learning conference on innovations in learning for the future 2008: e- learning (Istanbul, Turkey, March 27-29, 2008) proceedings* (pp. 439-447): Istanbul, Turkey: Istanbul University.

Rourke, L., Anderson, T., Garrison, D.R., & Archer, W. (1999). Assessing social presence in asynchronous text-based computer conferencing. *Journal of Distance Education, 14*(2), 50-71.

Rowe, M. (1986). Wait time: Slowing down may be a way of speeding up! *Journal of Teacher Education, 37*, 43-50.

Rutter, D.R. (1987). *Communicating by telephone.* Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Ryan, S., Scott, B., Freeman, H., & Patel, D. (2000). *The virtual university.* London, England: Kogan Page Limited.

Salmon, G. (2000). *E-Moderating: The key to teaching and learning online.* London, England: Kogan Page.

Salmon, G. (2002). *E-tivities: The key to active online learning.* London, England: Kogan Page.

Salmon, G. (2003). *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.

Salmon, G. (2011). *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (2003). Knowledge building. In *Encyclopedia of Education.* (2nd ed., pp.1370-1373). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Schwandt, T.A. (1997). *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms.* London, England: Sage.

Seale, C. (2003). Quality in qualitative research. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 169-184). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Seddon, K., Postlethwaite, K., & Lee, G. (2010). Understanding the experience of non contributory online participants (readers) in National College for School Leadership online communities. *Education and Information Technologies, 16*(4), 343-363.

Shank, P. & Sitze, A. (2004). *Making sense of online learning: A guide for beginners and the truly skeptical.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Sharpe, R., Beetham, H., & de Freitas, S. (2010). *Rethinking learning for a digital age: How learners are shaping their own experiences.* New York, NY: Routledge. (Introduction. An introduction to rethinking learning for a digital age. pp. 1-12).

Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications.* Toronto, ON: Wiley.

Sims, R.C., & Bovard, B. (2007). Using elaborations of online presence to foster critical thinking and reflection. In J.M. Spector (Ed.), *Finding your voice*

online: Stories told by experienced online educators (pp. 163-182). London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Somekh, B. (2007). *Pedagogy and learning with ICT: Researching the art of innovation.* London, England: Routledge.

Spector, J.M. (2007). *Finding your voice online: Stories told by experienced online educators.* London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. (Chapter 1. Competencies for online teachers. pp. 111-18).

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sternberg, J. (1999). It's all in the timing: Synchronous versus asynchronous computer-mediated communication. Retrieved April 18, 2007, from http://homepages.nyu.edu/~js15/p-time.htm

Sugar, W.A. & Bonk, C.J. (1998). Student role play in the world forum: Analyses of an Arctic adventure learning apprenticeship. In C.J. Bonk, & K.S. King (Eds.), *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse* (pp.131-155). New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Svensson, L. (1997). Theoretical foundations of phenomenography. *Higher Education Research & Development, 16*(2), 159-171.

Swan, K. (2003). Learning effectiveness: What the research tells us. In J. Bourne & J. Moore (Eds.), *Elements of quality online education: Practice and direction* (pp. 13-45). Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium.

Swan, K., and Shea, P. (2005). The development of virtual learning communities. In S.R. Hiltz & R. Goldman (Eds*.), Learning together online: Research on asynchronous learning networks* (pp. 239-260). New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Taber, K., & Student, T.A. (2003). How was it for you?: The dialogue between researcher and colearner. *Westminster Studies in Education, 26*(1), 33-44.

Tallent-Runnels, M.K., Thomas, J.A., Lan, W.Y., Cooper, S., Ahern, T.C., Shaw, S.M., & Liu, X. (2006). Teaching courses online: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(1), 93-135.

Tan, S. C., & Hung, D. (2002). Beyond information pumping: Creating a constructivist e-learning environment. *Educational Technology*, *42*(5), 48-54.

Thomas, M.J.W. (2002). Learning within incoherent structures: The space of online discussion forums. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 18*(3), 351-366.

Thurlow, C., Lengel, L.B., & Tomic, A. (2004). *Computer mediated communication: Social interaction and the Internet.* London, England: Sage.

Tiffin, J., & Rajasingham, L. (1995). *In search of the virtual class: Education in an information society.* London, England: Routledge.

Trigwell, K. (2000). A phenomenographic interview on phenomenography. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 62-82). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Van Manen, M. (1999). The language of pedagogy and the primacy of student experience. In J. Loughran (Ed.), *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy* (pp. 13-27). London, England: Falmer Press.

Visser, L. (2007). Online teaching experiences in higher education: Obstacles and opportunities. In J.M. Spector (Ed.), *Finding your voice online: Stories told by experienced online educators* (pp. 105-121). London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1935/1994). The problem of the environment. In R. van der Veer & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *The Vygotsky reader* (pp. 338-354). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. Orig work publ 1935.

Walsh, E. (2000). Phenomenographic analysis of interview transcripts. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 19-33). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University Press.

Walstrom, M.K. (2004). "Seeing and sensing" online interaction: An interpretive interactionist approach to USENET support group research. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues, and ethics* (pp. 82-97). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Wegerif, R. (1998). The social dimension of asynchronous learning networks. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 2*(1), 34-49.

Weigel, V.B. (2002). *Deep learning for a digital age: Technology's untapped potential to enrich higher education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice.* San-Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Weller, M. (2002). *Pedagogies for online teaching: Delivering learning on the net.* London, England: Kogan Page.

Wells, G. (1994). Text, talk and inquiry: Schooling as semiotic apprenticeship. In N. Bird, P. Falvey, A.B.M. Tsui, Allison, D.M., & A. McNeill (Eds.), *Language and learning* (pp. 18-51). Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education, Hong Kong Education Dept.

Welser, H.T., Gleave, E., Fisher, D., & Smith, M. (2007). Visualizing the signatures of social roles in online discussion groups. *JoSS: Journal of Social Structure, 8*, 1-19.

Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Wertsch, J. (1991). *Voices of the mind.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Westera, W., & Sloep, P.B. (2001). The future of education in cyberspace. In L.R. Vandervert, L.V. Shavinina, and R.A. Cornell (Eds.), *Cybereducation: the future of long distance learning* (pp.115-136). Larchmon, NY: Mary Ann Liebert Inc.

Williams, M., & Robson, K. (2004). Reengineering focus group methodology for the online environment. In M.D. Johns, S.S. Chen, & G.J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues, and ethics* (pp. 25-45). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Woodhouse, R. (2010). Hype or hope: Can the scholarship of teaching and learning fulfill its promise? *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 4*(1), http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsotl

Yates, S.J. (1996). Oral and written linguistic aspects of computer conferencing: A corpus based study. In S. Herring (Ed.), *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 29-46). Amsterdam, the Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Yin, R.K. (2006). Case study methods. In J.L. Green, G. Camilli, & P.B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 111-122). Washington, WA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Zimmerman, L., & Milligan, A.T. (December 2007/January 2008). Perspectives on communicating with the Net generation. *Innovate: Journal of Online Education, 4*(2), available http://innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=338&action=article Accessed 4 Dec 2007

Appendix 1

Letter of invitation – staff

1 February 2008

Dear colleagues

I would like to invite you to be part of a doctoral research study I am conducting this year. The focus is on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion (AOD). My supervisors are Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell.

This research aims to unravel the hidden complexities of effective learning/teaching through AOD. It seeks to consider the place of AOD in teacher education papers at the University of Waikato, and to gather perspectives of staff and students engaged in AOD, with a view to deriving new insights into learning through AOD. Ultimately, it is hoped that the research will suggest implications for improved practice in AOD.

If you teach online in teacher education papers within the School of Education, it would be great to have you involved. In the first instance, your involvement would entail your attendance at a face-to-face focus group session to be held on:

Date: Wednesday 13 February
Time & duration: 1-2.30 pm
Place: Ed Leadership Centre, Seminar Room (TC1.05)

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to gather initial ideas relating to the research topic.

Following this initial focus group session, there will also be an opportunity for interested volunteers to join an online focus group. Two case study staff members are also sought for participation in individual interviews. However, it is not necessary to

participate beyond the initial face-to-face focus group, if this is your preference. All participation is of course entirely voluntary.

For further details about the study, please contact me for an information sheet and consent form:
Email: diforbes@waikato.ac.nz
Phone: ext 7844
Office: TL3.14

Please register your interest in participating in a focus group discussion by returning the consent form to me. The first ten respondents to return the consent form will be registered for the session time indicated above. Should more than ten staff be interested in participating, a second group may be formed, at an alternative time to be advised (most likely on Tuesday 19th Feb).

I am happy to clarify any questions you may have, and look forward to your participation.

Regards,

Dianne Forbes

Appendix 2

Letter of invitation – students

Date:

Dear students in XXXA-08(NET)

I would like to invite you to be part of a doctoral research study I am conducting this year. The focus is on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion (AOD).

This research aims to unravel the hidden complexities of effective learning/teaching through AOD. It seeks to consider the place of AOD in teacher education papers at the University of Waikato, and to gather perspectives of staff and students engaged in AOD, with a view to deriving new insights into learning through AOD. Ultimately, it is hoped that the research will suggest implications for improved practice in AOD.

As students currently studying in an online class, it would be great to have you involved. In the first instance, your involvement would entail your participation in an online focus group discussion, which will open shortly within your online class as a Moodle forum. This focus group will be available throughout the remainder of Semester A, for your voluntary participation as your time allows.

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to gather your ideas relating to the research topic; exploring your experiences of asynchronous online discussion; and your perspectives as students. Staff do not have access to this forum, which is for you as students, and for me as a co-participant and researcher. The specific directions of the discussion will change over time, as new points arise. Each week I will send an email to the students in your class in order to update you with a summary of key themes stemming from the discussion, and suggesting further questions for the week. If you do not wish to receive these emails and do not intend to participate in the focus

group discussion at any point, simply email me and I will remove you from the access list to the focus group forum. If you do wish to participate, you can do so at any time convenient to you, and the amount of time you spend is entirely at your own discretion. You will each receive an email requesting your informed consent for this focus group and are asked to reply to that email indicating your consent or refusal. It should be noted that participation in the focus group is voluntary, unrelated to your coursework, and should not be permitted to interfere with your own study time.

As part of the study, I will also be requesting your permission to archive and analyse one of your course-related online discussions in this paper. You will each receive an email requesting this permission and are asked to reply to that email indicating your consent or refusal.

Three case study students are also sought for participation in individual interviews. However, it is not necessary to participate beyond giving permission for the archival and analysis of the sample discussion; or beyond the online focus group, if this is your preference. All participation is of course entirely voluntary.

For further details about the study, please see the attached information sheet. If you have further questions about the study, please feel free to contact me:
Email: diforbes@waikato.ac.nz
Phone: 8384466, ext 7844
Office: TL3.14

I am happy to clarify any questions you may have, and look forward to your participation.

Regards,
Dianne Forbes

Appendix 3

Information sheet

This information sheet relates to the doctoral research study I am conducting this year. My supervisors are Dr Noeline Wright and Associate Professor Beverley Bell. The focus of the study is on effective teaching and learning through asynchronous online discussion (AOD). This sheet explains the study, what it involves and what you may need to consider before agreeing to participate. It should be read in conjunction with the letter of invitation and consent forms. You will be asked to sign the latter prior to participation in any aspect of the study.

The study

Aims

This research aims to unravel the hidden complexities of effective learning/teaching through AOD. It seeks to consider the place of AOD in teacher education papers at the University of Waikato, and to gather perspectives of staff and students engaged in AOD, with a view to deriving new insights into learning through AOD. Ultimately, it is hoped that the research will suggest implications for improved practice in AOD.

Data collection

Stage 1: Staff focus groups - To gather data, I want to begin by holding a face-to-face focus group with School of Education staff who teach online, in order to gather initial ideas relating to the research topic. Following this initial face-to-face focus group, an online focus group will be established for staff, in order to continue discussion asynchronously. It is anticipated that the discussion within the online focus group will involve staff in relating their own experiences of teaching/learning through AOD, and commenting on issues raised by others.

Stage 2: Case study staff and classes - From this larger focus group, two staff volunteers will be sought for engagement in case studies and individual interviews. Each of these case study staff will be asked to nominate an online class they are teaching in Semester A (2008). This will establish two case study classes, from whom permission will be sought to archive and analyse a course-related asynchronous online discussion (e.g. a one-week discussion on a given theme or topic). In addition, an online focus group will be established with students from each case study class, who will be invited to contribute to an asynchronous online discussion in which they discuss their own experiences of AOD and comment on issues raised by others.

Stage 3: Interviewing staff and students - From these student groups, six student volunteers will be sought for participation in individual interviews. Each case study staff member and student will be interviewed three times: Firstly, prior to the online discussion central to the case study, in order to gather initial perspectives relating to learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. A second interview will occur during the central online discussion, in order to elicit perceptions about how the discussion is progressing, and to delve into participants' thinking about the discussion, and intentions relating to their postings, while the discussion is in process. Finally, a third interview will invite retrospective analysis of the discussion by the staff/students. In this way, co-analysis of the asynchronous online discussion will occur.

Aspects to consider

Time

Becoming involved in research will take up your valuable time. It is expected that the staff face-to-face focus group will last for 90 minutes; the staff and student online focus groups will continue for the duration of Semester A, 2008 (approx 12 weeks), and are likely to take about 30 minutes for a single weekly contribution, although the level of contribution is entirely at the discretion of each individual participant. Individual interviews will be scheduled for 45 minutes per interview (total of 2 hours, 15 minutes). Staff and students who participate in the online focus groups will receive a weekly email summing up the current themes of the discussion, and suggesting further questions for the week.

Right to withdraw

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and should not be permitted to disrupt other activities. You have a right to withdraw at any time, however data collected online will remain part of the analysis, due to the disruption caused by deleting segments of discussion.

Conflicts of interest

If you are a student in one of the classes I am currently teaching, arrangements will be made for your coursework in our class to be marked by the co-lecturer rather than by me, so that conflicts of interest can be avoided.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality can be a challenging issue in an online environment, although access to each online focus group forum will be limited to the particular case study group. It is acknowledged, however, that it is not possible to entirely control the phenomenon of 'backseat browsers' or those who look over a user's shoulder as they read an online forum. If you agree to participate in the research, care will be taken to protect your privacy, and participants will not be named in any publications or thesis. In the interests of confidentiality,

participants in focus groups are asked to avoid reporting of discussion to those outside of the participant group. This is of particular importance where information reported is of a personal nature or potentially sensitive. Participants are therefore asked to respect confidentiality.

Benefits to participants

Most of the benefits will be intangible, consisting of aspects like: opportunities to reflect on your learning/teaching through asynchronous online discussion; sharing experiences and a support network; contribution to the researched knowledge about effective learning and teaching through AOD in our local context, with possible impact via improved practice.

Further information

If you would like to know more, or meet with me to discuss the project before making any kind of decision, please feel free to contact me. I will be happy to address your concerns. I can be contacted in the following ways:

By phone: (home) 8476733

        (work) 8384466, ext 7844

By email: diforbes@waikato.ac.nz

In person: Office TL3.14, School of Education, University of Waikato

Dianne Forbes

Appendix 4

Consent A – staff participating in F2F focus group

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I understand that the research will involve attendance at a face-to-face focus group discussion session that will be taped and transcribed.

I consent to the recording of my comments, which may involve me sharing my insights and experiences of online discussion, and engaging with comments made by others. I understand that my privacy will be protected within the research reports, as I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions.

I undertake to preserve the confidentiality of focus group discussion, by refraining from reporting on comments made outside of the session.

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles.

I understand I am free to withdraw from the focus group at any time, and if I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell).

Signed _____

Date: _____

Full name: _____

Department: _____

Email: _____

Appendix 5

Consent B – staff participating in the online focus group

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I understand that the research will involve participation in an online focus group. The focus group will be set up as a Moodle Forum, and will be open from 14 February to 6 June 2008. I understand that I will receive a weekly email throughout this time period, which will summarise the emerging themes from the discussion, and will suggest questions for the week. During this period, I will try to contribute to the discussion, by sharing my insights and experiences of online discussion, and engaging with contributions made by others. I understand that the level of my contribution (e.g. frequency, time spent) is at my own discretion. I am aware that I may withdraw from participating in the discussion at any time, however if I do contribute online prior to withdrawing, I agree that the contributions already made to the focus group discussion may remain part of the analysis. I understand that I can withdraw my username from the Moodle forum and email list by contacting Dianne on diforbes@waikato.ac.nz
If I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell).

I consent to the archiving of my online contributions, within Moodle, and to paper copies being retained securely by Dianne. I am aware that my identity will be known to others within the online focus group, however I understand that my privacy will be protected within the research reports, as I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions.

I undertake to preserve the confidentiality of focus group discussion, by refraining from reporting on comments made outside of the forum. I will also take care not to share postings on the focus group forum with unauthorised users.

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Full name: _____

Username: _____

Department: _____

Email: _____

Appendix 6

Consent C - students participating in the online focus group

Email consent

To complete the form please insert your name and complete the declaration at the bottom of the page, then copy the full text into an email to: diforbes@waikato.ac.nz

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I understand that the research will involve participation in an online focus group. The focus group will be set up as a Moodle Forum, and will be open from 14 February to 6 June 2008. I understand that I will receive a weekly email throughout this time period, which will summarise the emerging themes from the discussion, and will suggest questions for the week. During this period, I will try to contribute to the discussion, by sharing my insights and experiences of online discussion, and engaging with contributions made by others. I understand that the level of my contribution (e.g. frequency, time spent) is at my own discretion. I am aware that I may withdraw from participating in the discussion at any time, however if I do contribute online prior to withdrawing, I agree that the contributions already made to the focus group discussion may remain part of the analysis. I understand that I can withdraw my username from the Moodle forum and email list by contacting Dianne on diforbes@waikato.ac.nz

If I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Dr Noeline Wright and Associate Professor Beverley Bell).

I consent to the archiving of my online contributions, within Moodle, and to paper copies being retained securely by Dianne. I am aware that my identity will be known to others within the online focus group, however I understand that my privacy will be

protected within the research reports, as I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions.

I undertake to preserve the confidentiality of focus group discussion, by refraining from reporting on comments made outside of the forum. I will also take care not to share postings on the focus group forum with unauthorised users.

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles.

Declaration: I have read and consent to the above. My return email and details indicates my informed consent.

Signed – type full name here:
Date:
Username:
Email:

Appendix 7

Consent D – archiving discussion

Email consent

To complete the form please insert your name and complete the declaration at the bottom of the page, then copy the full text into an email to: diforbes@waikato.ac.nz

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I give my permission for the archiving and analysis of one online discussion occurring as part of the coursework in XXX-08A(NET). This data will be secured indefinitely in the office of the researcher, and will be stored electronically on Moodle's server with access limited to the researcher.

If I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell).

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles. I understand that I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions.

I am assured that participation in this research project has no link to the assessment for the paper I am currently studying.

Declaration: I have read and consent to the above. My return email and details indicates my informed consent.

Signed – type full name here:

Date:

Username:

Email:

Appendix 8

Consent E – case study staff interviews

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I understand that my involvement in the research will entail:

-becoming a case study staff participant

-nominating an online class I am teaching in Semester A, 2008, for participation in the study

-working with Dianne to select a suitable course-related online discussion for archiving and analysis (e.g. a one-week discussion on a given theme or topic)

-giving Dianne access to my online class in order to invite student participation in the study, and to obtain informed consent from students;

-participation in three 45-minute individual semi-structured interviews with Dianne, each of which will be transcribed and discussed with me.

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles. I understand that I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions

I understand I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and if I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell).

Signed _____

Date: _____

Full name: _____

Username: _____

Department: _____

Email: _____

Appendix 9

Consent F – case study student interviews

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Dianne Forbes on effective learning and teaching through asynchronous online discussion. I have read the Information Sheet relating to the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in the research.

I understand that my involvement in the research, as a case study student, will entail participation in three 45-minute individual semi-structured interviews with Dianne, each of which will be transcribed and discussed with me.

I consent to my comments being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles. I understand that I will not be named in any publication or thesis and pseudonyms or codes will be used to label my contributions

I understand I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and if I wish to seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors (Noeline Wright and Beverley Bell).

Signed _____

Date: _____

Full name: _____

Username: _____

Email: _____

Appendix 10

F2F focus group – staff – question schedule

What kinds of discussion do you use in your online classes?

Tell me about discussion in your online classes

Prompts:

The place of online discussion

Relationship to rest of paper

Why it is used

The function it performs, purpose

Assessment

Topics

What do you aim for in online discussion?

Prompts:

What do you want to see happen?

What theoretical understandings guide your practice in online discussion?

How do you see your role as a lecturer when working with online discussion?

Prompts:

What do you do?

How/often do you monitor? Contribute?

Form of own contributions

Influences

Preparation

Feedback

What do you expect from your students in online discussion?

Prompts:

Assessment criteria

Guidelines – given to students, or implicit

Learning intentions

Tell me about a time when discussion "worked" or was "magic" for you

Prompts:

When does a discussion 'feel' right to you?

How do you know when it is going well?

What do you enjoy about online discussion?

Has a discussion ever surprised you?

What hinders a good discussion?

Prompts:

Constraints, challenges, barriers, problems

How do you think discussion could be improved?

Prompts:

Specific pedagogical actions for teachers in given situations

Future plans for discussion

Ideals of best practice

What pointers would you give to a staff member working through online discussion for the first time?

What pointers would you give to a student working through online discussion for the first time?

Appendix 11

Online focus group – staff – question schedule

Initial question/starter:

Let's talk about discussion within the online papers we teach. If we take stock of some of the ways we employ discussion in our online classes currently, some of the ideas raised at this week's face-to-face focus group included:

….

To what extent do these ways of using online discussion correspond to your own approaches?

What do you see as the place of online discussion in the papers you teach?

Note:

Discussion will proceed from this open starter.

Further prompts/probes will pick up on points listed in the face-to-face focus group schedule; and will arise from points made by participants (e.g. will ask for further explanation, clarification, or for the reactions of others to points made)

The weekly summary will be of the general form:

-A thank you to those who have participated during the past week, and an acknowledgement of those who may be silently monitoring the discussion;

-A summary of key themes, and points arising

-Suggested avenues to explore – new questions to keep the discussion moving

-An renewed invitation or reminder to join us online to discuss

-An opportunity to withdraw – by emailing diforbes to have access to the Moodle Forum removed

Appendix 12

Individual semi structured interviews – staff

Interview One

Tell me about discussion in your online classes

Prompts:

The place of online discussion

Relationship to rest of paper

Why it is used

The function it performs, purpose

Assessment

Topics

What do you aim for in online discussion?

Prompts:

What do you want to see happen?

What theoretical understandings guide your practice in online discussion?

How do you see your role as a lecturer when working with online discussion?

Prompts:

What do you do?

How/often do you monitor? Contribute?

Form of own contributions

Influences

Preparation

Feedback

What do you expect from your students in online discussion?

Prompts:

Assessment criteria

Guidelines – given to students, or implicit

Learning intentions

Tell me about a time when discussion "worked" or was "magic" for you
Prompts:
When does a discussion 'feel' right to you?
How do you know when it is going well?
What do you enjoy about online discussion?
Has a discussion ever surprised you?

What hinders a good discussion?
Prompts:
Constraints, challenges, barriers, problems

How do you think discussion could be improved?
Prompts:
Specific pedagogical actions for teachers in given situations
Future plans for discussion
Ideals of best practice

What pointers would you give to a staff member working through online discussion for the first time?
What pointers would you give to a student working through online discussion for the first time?

Interview Two
Looking at the discussion in progress, ….
How do you think the discussion is going?
Tell me about student involvement in this discussion
Tell me about your involvement in this discussion
Which of the student postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?
Which of your own postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?
What did you intend as you made each posting?
What do you see as the highlight of the discussion so far?

Which part/s of the discussion have been less interesting/stimulating/useful?

How have other participants, including any guests, helped your own participation in the discussion?

What have you learned from this discussion? What has surprised you?

Interview Three

Looking back at the discussion, what can we conclude about…

How the discussion went?

Students' involvement in this discussion?

Your involvement in this discussion?

Which of the student postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?

Which of your own postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?

What did you intend as you made each posting?

The highlight/s of the discussion?

The part/s of the discussion that were less interesting/stimulating/useful?

What have you learned from this discussion? What has surprised you?

Let's revisit the questions from our first interview finally, in order to capture new insights.

Appendix 13

Online focus group – students – question schedule

Initial question/starter:

Let's talk about Asynchronous Online Discussion (AOD).

What experiences have you had of AOD as a student?

How does this work in your classes?

Note:

Discussion will proceed from this open starter.

Further prompts/probes will pick up on points listed in the individual interview schedule; and will arise from points made by participants (e.g. will ask for further explanation, clarification, or for the reactions of others to points made)

The weekly summary will be of the general form:

-A thank you to those who have participated during the past week, and an acknowledgement of those who may be silently monitoring the discussion;

-A summary of key themes, and points arising

-Suggested avenues to explore – new questions to keep the discussion moving

-An renewed invitation or reminder to join us online to discuss

-An opportunity to withdraw – by emailing diforbes to have access to the Moodle Forum removed

Appendix 14

Individual semi-structured interviews – students

Interview One

Tell me about your perspectives on learning and teaching through AOD

Prompts:

Your experiences – examples you recall

What do you see as the purpose or point of AOD? (relationship to rest of paper)

How teaching occurs – processes observed, behaviours of lecturers – realities and preferences

How you learn – what you do (influences, preparation)

Tell me about a time when discussion "worked" or was "magic" for you

Prompts:

A time when discussion helped you to learn, extended your understanding

When does a discussion 'feel' right to you?

How do you know when it is going well?

What do you enjoy about online discussion?

What hinders a good discussion?

Prompts:

Constraints, challenges, barriers, problems

How do you think discussion could be improved?

Prompts:

Specific pedagogical actions for teachers in given situations

Future plans for discussion

Ideals of best practice

What pointers would you give to a student working through online discussion for the first time?

What pointers would you give to staff working through online discussion?

Interview Two

Looking at the discussion in progress, ….

How do you think the discussion is going?

Tell me about your involvement in this discussion

Which of your postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?

What did you intend as you made each posting?

What do you see as the highlight of the discussion so far?

Which part/s of the discussion have been less interesting/stimulating/useful?

How have other participants, including your lecturer and fellow-students, or any guests, helped your own participation in the discussion? (e.g. looking across other groups?)

What have you learned from this discussion? What has surprised you?

Interview Three

Looking back at the discussion, what can we conclude about…

How the discussion went?

Your involvement in this discussion?

Others' involvement in this discussion?

Which of your postings are you most/least satisfied with? Why?

What did you intend as you made each posting?

The highlight/s of the discussion?

The part/s of the discussion that were less interesting/stimulating/useful?

What have you learned from this discussion? What has surprised you?

Let's revisit the questions from our first interview finally, in order to capture new insights.

Appendix 15

Initial Discussion Guidelines

The place of discussion in our class

Why we have discussion:

In effect, online discussion is parallel to lectures and tutorial sessions on campus.

There are three levels of justification for the requirement that you engage in discussion as part of this class.

1. At the individual level, students should engage in discussion in order to learn from and with their peers and lecturers. Ideally, discussion should involve testing out ideas, sharing and building on other peoples' thinking, and gaining feedback and challenge from others' responses to our own thinking. There is very rarely ONE answer to any worthwhile question. Instead, this is about thinking of a higher order, where multiple answers and perspectives are possible.

2. At the community level, firstly students have a responsibility to each other to join a learning community and to learn together, supporting others' learning as well as their own. This is part of teacher education and is very good preparation for becoming a teacher. Students should contribute to online discussion so that they don't let their group members down, so that comments aren't ignored, and so that help is found when needed.

3. At the wider community level, future teachers must be prepared for teaching in the classroom/school, and for meeting the needs of the children you will work with. Discussion is one element in this preparation, and participation in discussion with colleagues (whether face-to-face or online) should expose future teachers to a range of thinking, perspectives, theory and issues. If students do not engage with this thinking, they may be less prepared for teaching, and less prepared for the professional discussions that will be ongoing throughout your careers.

- Contribute to every discussion, at least twice

- Keep each contribution to around150 words max

- Write in clear paragraphs, for ease of reading

- Respond to others in the discussion, building on ideas with direct acknowledgment of your fellow participants

- Share personal experience and perspectives of relevance to the discussion

- Use the discussion to clarify understanding, and to engage critically and deeply with the theme, theory and issues

- Aim to keep the discussion moving forward

In relation to readings, these should be completed regularly in order to construct familiarity with theory and diverse perspectives. When you refer to readings, you should avoid lengthy direct quotes in discussion. Instead, discuss readings by paraphrasing the key ideas and applying your own thinking to these. When directly using readings in discussion, it is not necessary to use full APA referencing if the reading is known to the class (e.g. it is from the book of readings). In this case it is fine to use the author's name only. However, if using an original source, that others may be unacquainted with, a full reference should be provided to enable others to track down and follow up the reading if they want to.

What you should avoid doing:

- Please do not avoid discussion, or post once and then disappear. These approaches breach the intent of discussion, indicate lack of regard for our class community and fall short of minimum attendance and participation requirements for this paper

- Similarly, do not double-post (2 consecutive posts, or posts very close together). While this may be necessary when 'life gets in the way', it is not ideal and if everyone did this, there would be no discussion occurring throughout the week, limiting the chances for reflection and response within our community

- Do not post lengthy contributions. Research suggests that your fellow students will not read your posts if they are too long

- Do not post without firstly reading what others have said. This is often perceived as ignorant and disrespectful
- Do not fixate on the personal. Although valued, it is a starting point. Your experiences are one set of possible experiences, and the goal is to begin with these as a starting point while looking more widely beyond the past or here and now
- Do not play it safe, agreeing with all and sundry. This is dull, unimaginative, and does not assist in moving the discussion along. If you agree, say why and justify why your agreement matters
- Please do not take things personally. Don't be quick to take offence, but rather give others the benefit of the doubt. Remember that
    a. others may be playing "devil's advocate" and proposing an extreme view in order to prompt thinking, and raise alternative perspectives;
    b. it is easy to misinterpret tone and intention online. Use emoticons purposefully in order to soften and convey a constructive mood ☺

What to expect from your lecturers in our online discussions:

Lecturers aim to join in each discussion, meeting similar expectations to the students. In short, we aim to:

- Be there
- Be brief
- Respond
- Share our own stories
- Promote deep and critical thinking (at times, we will play 'Devil's Advocate' in order to probe differing viewpoints)
- Keep the fires burning

Feedback on discussion will be given within the discussion, formatively, so look out for lecturer comments on how the discussion is progressing.