

**Examining the Nature of Reflective Learning in an Online  
MBA; *a Dialogic Approach***

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## **Abstract**

The debate around the relevance of management education to practice is a long standing one. Critics argue that conventional, lectured-based teaching does not attend to practitioners' needs and their complex realities. Critical management education has been held up as an alternate teaching pedagogy that speaks more adequately to practice. A starting point for a critical pedagogy may be a social constructivist approach where students actively construct their own knowledge and meanings rather than passively receive information. The essence of critical management education is to create more spaces to promote a questioning attitude towards practice and theory and help management students to become active, reflective learners.

So far, investigations of criticality seem to have largely drawn on exploring management students' perspectives *about* their learning experience. Little evidence is available on what becoming more or less critical entails for management students from *within* practice. There is no mention of a rigorous framework that would offer insights about what to look for in investigating reflective learning from within its natural setting. As an area that appears to be under developed in critical management education research, the nature of reflective learning evoked in classroom dialogue is considered, and a framework is devised based on Bakhtin's dialogism to help identify and conceptualize reflective learning.

The availability of online courses has grown strongly over the past two decades. A number of commentators consequently see that online management learning is becoming a mainstream aspect of higher education. Yet, serious reservations against the nature of learning that an asynchronous, text-based learning environment can offer management students have been raised. Therefore, an online MBA classroom is chosen as the site of this study. Data is collected through a combination of observations of online classroom conversations and document analysis. The proposed framework is used to carry out a relational analysis of online, text-based classroom conversations.

It is not the asynchronicity of the setting that is inherently problematic in stimulating reflective, emancipatory learning. The potential of online management classrooms to

engender dialogic, reflective learning amongst management students responds to the wider critiques of the status of learning in management classrooms. A critical approach to online teaching, which is not underpinned by a critical curriculum, is proposed. There is an urgent need to attend to the role of online tutors and their influence on the nature of learning, which occurs in their conversations with students in virtual classrooms. The study opens up the scope for assessing online management learning as a “dialogical construction of meaning” and offers insights into the online setting beyond the passive portrayals of learners.

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## **Access to Contents**

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## **Glossary**

<b>AMBA</b>	<b>Association of Master of Business Administration</b>
<b>AACSB</b>	<b>Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business</b>
<b>CMC</b>	<b>Computer-Mediated-Communication</b>
<b>CME</b>	<b>Critical Management Education</b>
<b>IRF</b>	<b>Initiation-Response-Feedback</b>
<b>MBA</b>	<b>Master of Business Administration</b>
<b>OBHR</b>	<b>Organization Behavior and Human Resources module</b>
<b>OC</b>	<b>Organization in Strategic Context module</b>
<b>OAR</b>	<b>Orientation-Anticipation-Response</b>

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **I. Setting the Scene**

A long standing critique of business schools holds that they are overly occupied with developing programmes that promote the so-called 'best practice' (Roberts, 1996; Dehler et al., 2001) and the discovery of a set of reliable management techniques (Grey, 2004). In doing so, business schools advocate the systematic application of analytical and overly technical methods to every business/management situation (Cunliffe, 2002). The aim, thus, is to help management students develop context-independent, functional and technical skills (Hayes and Abernathy, 1980; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Armstrong, 2005; Raelin, 2007; Scott, 2010). This, however, is argued to come at the expense of context-specific, reflective engagement that affords a broader understanding of management (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005). Critics argue that orthodox pedagogies fail to recognize the ill-defined, chaotic, emotive and complex issues that managers face within their organizations (Argyris, 1982, cited in Cunliffe, 2002) and that, therefore, business schools are not helping managers to solve their problems (Schön, 1983, cited in Cunliffe, 2002). Nor do business schools deliver what they promise (Grey, 2004). Management is not about applying a set of reliable techniques to achieve predictable results, yet apparently this is what business schools seem to teach management students (Grey, 2004). Mainstream management education is also described as promoting conventional or traditional teaching, where management students are taught traditional content using a traditional process (Reynolds, 1999a). What Reynolds (1999a) means here is that management students are taught in a passive learning environment in which the teacher acts as the sole dispenser of expert knowledge (i.e. a knowledge transmission model of teaching).

In response to criticisms of a knowledge transmission model, management educators and business schools have begun to embrace more participative and collaborative learning approaches. For instance, the use of the case study approach and classroom dialogue is used to elicit students' engagement in the classroom. However, this shift to a more student-centered learning environment can retain some technicist attitude towards teaching/learning (Grey and French, 1996; Raelin, 2009). A technicist attitude is a

broad term used to describe teaching approaches that seek to reinforce the relevance of textbook theories to practice through the teaching of management techniques (Grey and Mitev, 1995).

The MBA, in particular, appears to be a vulnerable target explicating such criticisms of established (technicist) approaches to management education (e.g. Willmott, 1994; Mintzberg, 2004; Perriton, 2007). Critical approaches to management education (Cunliffe et al., 2002) or critical management education is argued to be a promising alternative that speaks adequately to management practice. Critical management education (CME) problematizes the idea that there is a set of objectified knowledge that can be generalized to yield predictable results and, thus, challenges technicist understanding of management. CME promotes a subjective understanding of reality (i.e. multiple realities), and encourages students to think about and/or question the impact of their own actions and assumptions in creating these realities and knowledge (Cunliffe, 2004). Teaching from this stance encourages students to challenge conceptions of reality, and explore new possibilities (Cunliffe, 2004).

Proponents of CME argue that encouraging management students to reflect on their experience in the classroom is a way of making learning more meaningful (Holman, 2000). In reflecting on experience, management students become active participants, constructing knowledge (Dehler, 2009). Becoming more critical involves engaging in intellectual critique and reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2002). Intellectual critique is a critique towards some ideology, theory, text, or process as an outside observer (Cunliffe, 2002). However, engaging in a simple reflection on an experience, or intellectual critique, may not necessarily help management students to talk and/or act in different ways (Cunliffe, 2002). In this view, reflecting on one's own experience is thought of as a stepping-stone to provoke reflexivity (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999; Cunliffe, 2002; Cotter and Cullen, 2012). Provoking reflexivity in management classrooms is meant to 'problematize' and/or 'unsettle' students' experiences including basic assumptions, discourse and practices they use to describe reality (Pollner, 1991, quoted in Cunliffe, 2004). In doing so, it opens up possibilities to see different things, as well as to see things in different ways (Cunliffe, 2002). In this sense, reflexivity is seen as a vehicle for

reflective, emancipatory learning in classrooms. Reflexivity involves bracketing conventional wisdom (Willmott, 1994) in instances that can be described, according to Wittgenstein (1953), as “arresting moments”.

Different approaches are proposed for enacting a CME in management classrooms. Reynolds’ (1999) proposal of a critical pedagogy as involving a critically-informed process and a critically-informed curriculum appears to have gained wide acceptance of what constitutes a critically-informed teaching or a critical pedagogy. However, Cunliffe (2002), amongst others, argues that a critically-informed process in teaching/learning can help management students engage in reflexive stances within conventional curricula. According to Reynolds (1999a: 544), a critically-informed process implies the use of “Teaching and learning methods and procedures that are participative, providing choice and opportunities for dialogue and influencing the program’s design and content”. Cunliffe (2002) argues that students’ and teachers’ engagement in reflective classroom conversations promote the image of management students and teachers as co-authors in the learning process (Cunliffe, 2002).

Whilst the importance of provoking reflection in management education appears to be gaining support, most of the existing literature in CME research places more emphasis on theoretical talk (e.g. Mezirow, 1998; Reynolds, 1998; 1999). This seems a bit contradictory when the aim of provoking reflection is to challenge management students’ practical accounts, views, and experiences. The current status of CME research shows that the practice of reflection is still addressed from within the insights of theories and concept definitions and that, we risk bringing in more prescriptions to something that is supposed to be situational and emergent. There is a need for more empirical studies to investigate the nature of students’ reflections from within practice.

The nature of management students’ reflections within practice (e.g. classroom dialogue, students’ written essays and assessed work) is explored by a few in the field (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006). Here, it is helpful to invoke Shotter’s (2006) distinction of conducting social research as from either *within* or *outside* of a social phenomenon of interest; “*Witness-Thinking*” as opposed to “*Aboutness-Thinking*”. The majority of empirical studies that critically investigate

management students' learning carry out investigations from the 'outside'. For instance, seeking management students' perception of their learning experience after it had ended (e.g. Griffiths et al., 2005; Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008). In this study, I explore the nature of management students' reflections which are provoked in classroom dialogue.

My interest in exploring classroom conversations (or dialogue) is aligned with my social constructionist assumptions of learning. I hold, among others, a view of learning as a dialogic, responsive *process* emerging from within classroom conversations (Cunliffe, 2002a). For Cunliffe (2008), a social constructionist's orientation towards learning involves a focus on responsive dialogue and conversations between participants in a classroom. Drawing on my critical stance in management education, exploring students' learning process is therefore an exploration of the nature of reflection provoked from within classroom dialogue. In other words, enacting reflective learning in a management classroom involves provoking reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity in classroom conversations, which places management learning within a social constructionist's framework. Management students ought to learn in an active learning environment in which they share, add, extend or interrogate ideas, perspectives and experiences with others.

## **II. Study's Site**

I chose to apply my study in the context of an online MBA programme for two reasons. First, there has been a noticeable growth in the numbers of business schools offering online programmes, which has led to more debates around the nature of online learning (Redpath, 2012). In a recent report, the percentage of AACSB Business schools offering online programmes increased from 9% in 2001–2002 to 24% in 2008–2009 (Redpath, 2012). In the UK, the Financial Times (2012) reports 48 of the top UK business schools offering distance MBA degrees. Arbaugh and Duray (2002) and Redpath (2012) argue that, with the acceleration of this trend, internet-based graduate management education will soon constitute a mainstream in higher education. However, attitudes toward online management learning tend to relegate it to an inferior status (Redpath, 2012). Second, the question of whether a critical pedagogy can be espoused in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment needs to be explored. The majority of CME research

addresses management learning in face-to-face (i.e. synchronous) settings (e.g. Reynolds 1999; Mingers, 2000; Cunliffe, 2002; 2004; Hedberg, 2009). Meanwhile, the majority of online management learning research appears dominated by attempts to assess the effectiveness of online learning environment at the expense of generating insights about the learning process (Hodgson and Watland, 2004). In their review, Hodgson and Watland (2004) argue that research in the field of online management learning (referred to as networked management learning) had not asked the right questions, and so failed to provide more insight into online *interactions* and *dialogue*.

The interaction and collaboration affordances of online learning environments have led to the rise of different perceptions and views about the nature of learning and role of students and tutors in online classrooms. For instance, online learning is seen as a “dialogical construction of meaning” (Hodgson and Watland, 2004:100); engaging students as co-producers of course content and learning (Brower, 2003); promoting reflective learning (Salmon, 2000; Brower, 2003; Hay et al., 2004); emphasizing collaborative learning and critical thinking (McConnell, 2000; Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005; Hodgson and Reynolds, 2010). This study aims to add to this growing literature on the nature of classroom dialogue in online learning, and role of tutors in it.

### **III. Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

Shotter’s (2006) ‘Witness-Thinking’ research approach and Cunliffe’s (2002a) idea of a dialogic approach in management inquiry provide insights about an adequate research approach and where learning is assumed to be a dialogic, responsive process. However, their work remains relatively silent on the aspect of creating a rigorous framework that would give insights on what to look for in investigating students’ reflections. In particular, there is no mention of aspects of methodology outside of an intensely, interactive synchronous setting or in learning situations where classroom conversations are text-based. Neither Cunliffe (2002), Rigg and Trehan (2004), nor Carson and Fisher (2006) offer guidance on how to interrogate data in their studies.

The work of the Russian philologist, Mikhail Bakhtin, and in particular, his theory of dialogism, provides a helpful theoretical framework guiding an investigating of

students' reflections from within practice. Bakhtin's ideas of *active understanding* and *polyphony*, as two broad themes underlying his work, can instigate a way to describe and interpret dialogic learning and where students' reflections occur as a part of it in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment. I use these two themes as the foundation of the framework proposed in this study. Bakhtin's ideas appear to inspire much of the work done on investigating knowledge co-constructed 'in-the-moment' during interactions with others (e.g. Shotter, 1993) and proposals of a dialogic learning process in management classrooms (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; 2004; Ramsey, 2008).

This study uses Bakhtin's work as the starting point for more clues to investigate the dialogic learning process and the role of reflection within it in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment (i.e. an online MBA programme). Bakhtin (1981) uses the term polyphony to describe a setting that is democratic and multi-voiced. He argues that a polyphonic setting is essential for dialogism and active understanding to occur. His notion of active understanding provoked from within individuals' interactions with each other is important as it suggests that active understanding is entwined with a participant's dialogic orientation. A dialogic orientation and active understanding describe a participant's effort to go beyond others' discourses; to make one's own voice heard. Bakhtin argues that dialogism in its various forms takes place in our attempts to relate to others, with whom we are having a conversation. For instance, if an individual engages in a reflection on experience (as a way of relating to others), then his/her orientation is dialogic and his/her understanding is claimed to be active. If, however, an individual repeats others' words, without adding his/her own intentions and experience, then his/her orientation is monologic and his/her understanding is deemed passive. Using this Bakhtinian understanding, what I am looking for in exploring online classroom conversations is management students' active understanding (as opposed to passive understanding). In this study, active understanding implies student's efforts to engage in reflective conversations, while passive understanding implies repetition, allegiance to others' discourses, or little or no effort to construct their own voice.

To pursue this investigation, I use a combination of online observation of classroom conversations and analysis of documents including students' assessed work, uploaded



biographies, and end of module feedback. In the Analysis, I carry out a two-stage analysis. In the first stage, I present visual representations of students' engagement in classroom conversations using two tools; a visual metaphor and a sociogram. In addition to communicating my interpretation and sensemaking of the observed setting, the use of visual tools helps to organize and summarize data in preparation for the second stage of analysis. In the second stage of the analysis, I use my understanding of Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse* and *internal dialogism* to construct the framework proposed in this study and guide my relational analysis and data interrogation. In my relational analysis, the unit of analysis is a text-based, classroom conversation consisting of a set of posts exchanged between at least two participants, to make up one classroom conversation or episode. I present seven episodes organized under four observed features. These features describe the nature of learning in an online, asynchronous learning environment. Under each feature, one or more episodes, a description, an analysis and argument are included.

In light of my interpretation of this study's findings, a discussion and a conclusion will follow. This study's contribution is twofold. First, it is a contribution to management education and online management learning research, offering an empirical illustration of reflection and developing an understanding of how reflective learning might be enacted in online management classrooms. Second, it is a contribution to methodology in terms of the approach, methods, and the theoretical framework put together to help us understand and conceptualize learning as dialogic, responsive process in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment. Drawing on my critical stance, this study is set to answer a main research question; "*Can an online, asynchronous MBA learning environment promote management students' reflections? How can these instances be identified and conceptualized from within their online classroom conversations?*"

#### **IV. Research Objectives**

- To investigate the potential and/or limitations of online asynchronous learning environments to induce reflective learning among management students.

- To exemplify instances of reflective learning from within online classroom dialogue.
- To explore the notion of the dialogic construction of meaning in an online classroom dialogue.
- To develop our understanding of how critical management education can be enacted in an online management classroom.

## **V. Research Questions**

*“Can an online, asynchronous MBA learning environment promote management students’ reflective learning? How can these instances be identified and conceptualized from within their online classroom conversations?”*

- A.** What is the nature of reflective learning- which is comprised of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity - provoked in online, asynchronous classroom conversations?
- B.** How might reflective learning be constructed in an online, asynchronous learning environment?
- C.** How can we understand, interpret, and conceptualize reflective learning in online, asynchronous classroom conversations?

## **VI. Research Relevance**

In CME research, few studies examine the nature of management students’ reflection from within practice. This study is an attempt to contribute to this stream of empirical research by applying a dialogic research approach and focusing on classroom conversations (or dialogue). The focus on classroom dialogue is meant to investigate management learning in the spirit of Shotter’s (2006) ‘Witness-Thinking’ approach. The study is applied in the context of online, virtual classrooms. Although the number of online programmes is growing, opinions around the nature of online learning tend to question its value in management education, except as a passive learning context. This study interrogates this negative attitude towards the nature of learning in an online MBA

classroom. Currently, there is no mention of a rigorous framework in the literature that would offer insights into what to look for when examining the nature of reflection in management classrooms. This study proposes a theoretical framework that can promote our understanding and ability to describe learning as a process of meaning construction and the role of reflection within it.

## **VII. Content and Structure of the Study**

The content of this study will be presented in the following five chapters:

- **Chapter Two: Literature Review.** The chapter opens with a focus on this study's site; the virtual classroom, justifying my choice of it for the purpose of this study. I review perceptions of the nature of learning promoted in online settings and the distinctive features of an asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue. Then, a link is developed between negative perceptions of online management learning and scholars' criticism to a knowledge transmission model in management education, paying particular attention to the importance of reflective learning. I focus on educators' attempts to promote reflective learning in management classrooms; approaches and difficulties. Towards the end of this review, I define the meaning of reflective dialogic learning in the context of an online MBA classroom and propose a theoretical framework, which is based on Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, to guide its investigation.
- **Chapter Three: Methodology.** In this chapter, I present a brief review of the dominant research methods in online management learning and management research as a mean to position this study. Next, I use Bakhtin's dialogism to construct a theoretical framework to offer us some guidance in data interrogation and elaborate on how it is used. Finally, I introduce my study site, followed by details of this study design.
- **Chapter Four: Analysis.** I start this chapter with a number of screen shots from within the observed classroom to help the reader become familiar with the observed setting. The first stage of analysis presents my interpretation of the complexity and the flux involved in students' interactions in their asynchronous,

text-based classroom conversations using two visual tools. In the second stage, I carry out a relational analysis of seven classroom conversations (i.e. participants' texts), presented as seven episodes and grouped under four observed features. Each feature includes an episode (or two), a description, an analysis and argument.

- **Chapter Five: Discussion and Findings.** In this chapter, I discuss this study's findings, drawing on relevant literature and the proposed theoretical framework. Towards the end of this chapter, I share some methodological reflections.
- **Chapter Six: Conclusion.** In this chapter, I answer this study's questions and describe my contribution to knowledge. Towards the end of this chapter, I share my learning involved in this Ph.D. journey.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **I. Introduction**

I start this chapter with a focus on the particularities of this study's site; *the online Master of Business Administration (MBA) classroom*. I justify the choice of the virtual/online classroom, and discuss the use of technology and its impact on perceptions of online learning. I also review the implications of adopting a 'networked learning' approach on the potential of online learning in management education and its pedagogical roots.

Most of the debates and concerns in the field of management education have focused on the issue of its relevance to management practice, criticizing the way management students are conventionally taught in classrooms. I examine perspectives offered by proponents of critical management education (CME) and I elaborate on my understanding of the espoused link between critical theory and CME by attending to Alvesson and Willmott's (1996) notion of 'micro-emancipation'. Next, I outline my understanding of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity in management classrooms and develop the idea of micro-emancipation further by linking it to reflexivity in management classrooms. I also, review approaches to instigate reflective learning in management classrooms and the difficulties encountered by critical scholars in face-to-face classrooms.

In attendance to the social constructionists' aspects of learning, I review perspectives on the use of classroom dialogue and the roles of both teachers and students in management education and in relation to Cunliffe's (2002) idea of co-authorship and Bakhtin's (1981) notion of multi-voicedness. Then, I move on to define the meaning of dialogic reflective learning in the context of an online MBA classroom, paying particular attention to Cunliffe's and Shotter's work. I elaborate on the relevance of Bakhtin's ideas to guide the investigation of online learning as a process of meaning construction and where reflective learning occurs as a part of it. This chapter closes with a summary of my argument, identifying the purpose of the study.

Online management learning is growing rapidly and is expected to increase in importance. However, the use of online learning environments in management education is frequently perceived as promoting passive, un-reflective and un-emancipatory learning. As a consequence, the aim of this chapter is twofold: (1) to argue that we need to develop a better understanding of the nature reflection as experienced by students, particularly in the context of an online MBA classroom, and (2) to define the meaning of dialogic, reflective learning in the context of an online MBA classroom and propose the work of Bakhtin (1981) to set a theoretical framework that would fit in with its investigation.

## **II. Online Learning and Management Education**

This section is organized around four subsections. The aim of this section is to review perceptions and debates around the nature of learning in virtual classrooms, in particular in learning settings which do not allow for real time interactions among participants in classroom. This section argues that negative attitudes towards online management learning are more concerned with the absence of face-to-face contact rather than critically examining the underlying assumptions of online learning/teaching and design of online classrooms, where an asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue can be used to promote collaboration and the dialogic construction of meanings among learners.

To this end, first, I justify the choice of the virtual classroom as this study's site. Second, I discuss perceptions of online learning and elaborate on the concept of 'networked learning' as a pedagogical approach that is informed by a critical, inquiring, and a dialogic perspective on online learning. Third, I briefly review features and issues around the use of text-based dialogue in online learning environments. Finally, I review scholars' views on the potential of virtual classrooms to promote dialogic learning and criticality amongst students.

### **A. Why the Virtual Classroom?**

Online learning has grown substantively during the past two decades, opening up greater possibilities to meet the needs of adult learners (Redpath, 2012). In the period between 1995- 2005, AMBA reported a 23.2% increase in the number of distance MBA students

(Armstrong, 2005). The number of AACSB members offering online MBA programmes increased from 26 in 2001, to 202 in 2010 (Mondello, 2012). In a recent report, the percentage of AACSB Business schools offering fully online programmes had increased from 9% in 2001–2002 to 24% in 2008–2009 (Redpath, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. In the UK, the Financial Times (2012) reported that 48 of the top UK business schools offered distance MBA degrees. This led a number of scholars, such as Duray (2002), May and Short (2003) and Redpath (2012) to believe that online learning is becoming an important aspect of higher education, particularly in the USA and UK universities (Gilmore and Warren, 2007). Online learning is appreciated by adult learners who value the flexibility of learning at a time and a place of their convenience (Leidner and Jarvenpaa 1995; Stacy, 1999; Arbaugh, 2000a; Arbaugh and Duray, 2002; Brower, 2003; Hay et al., 2004; Jones and McCann, 2005; Allan, 2007; Wang and Woo, 2007). In particular, busy managers who enroll into online programmes and combine work with study, value alleviating time and travel pressures compared to face-to-face, on-campus learning/teaching (Jones and McCann, 2005; Allan, 2007).

Consistent with this trend, online learning has gained considerable attention within business schools (Arbaugh et al., 2009). In particular, MBA programmes are often claimed to be the ‘early adopters’ of online learning (Hay et al., 2004a). There are also claims that competitive pressures are leading the push for more courses to be internet-based (Arbaugh, 2000) and that the universities are racing to adopt more of the online technologies without a reasonable understanding of how to use them (Arbaugh and Duray, 2002). These concerns are exacerbated by critiques against the nature of learning and teaching that these online classrooms can afford in management education (Arbaugh and Duray, 2002; Redpath, 2012). Critics of online learning appear to relegate it to an inferior status compared to face-to-face, on-campus learning (Dumont, 1996; Brower, 2003; Barker, 2010; Redpath, 2012). Some may even call online learning “the ultimate in commoditization” (Weigel, 2002:30). Others claim that online classrooms can only promote learning that is passive and cognitive (Barker, 2010). This means, according to Barker’s (2010) claim, that online learning falls short of promoting learning that is

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<sup>1</sup> full online programmes are programmes that may be completed in full by students enrolled in courses taught online (Redpath,2012).

dialogic and responsive and that the potential of online classroom dialogue to foster students' learning is disregarded.

In assessing these critiques, Redpath (2012) claims that negative attitudes towards online learning are often limited to personal intuition and lack of online teaching experience. Unless an educator, Redpath (2012:127) continues, is engaged in an online teaching experience in "... an active and collaborative on-line learning environment, it is difficult to understand how it works". This also suggests that a lack of research on the potential of online learning environments to promote dialogic, responsive learning nurtures these negative attitudes.

Arbaugh et al. (2009) observe in their review that the number of studies investigating the learning process is notably limited. However, the problem is not in the number of studies but also what is being investigated in online classrooms. Ten years ago, Hodgson and Watland (2004) expressed their concerns about the kind of research that dominates the field of online management learning. Hodgson and Watland (2004) claimed that research in the field lacked focus on *interactions* and *dialogue* in favour of an emphasis on effectiveness of online learning environment. This most often led to the development of (quantitative) measures from the outside, rather than attempting to understand the learning processes from 'within' its natural, online setting. For instance, learning is assessed in terms of students' perceived learning or attitudes (e.g. Alavi et al., 1997; Arbaugh, 2001, 2002; McGorry, 2002; Marks et al., 2005; Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2007), grades attained (Arbaugh, 2005), level of satisfaction (e.g. Alavi et al., 1997; Arbaugh, 2000; 2001; 2005; Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2007), type of online interactions (e.g. Alavi et al., 1997; Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2007), and the characteristics and design of the online learning environment through the use of a pre-defined model, like the Technology Acceptance model (TAM framework) (e.g. Arbaugh, 2000; 2000b; Martins and Kellermanns, 2004) or some other general typology such as objectivist vs. collaborative online environment (e.g. Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2007).

Following from this review, online courses have grown strongly over the past two decades and there are expectations that it will continue to grow because of: (a) the time



and place flexibility it offers to busy managers who want to combine study and work, and (b) it is a good source of income for business schools given the growing (student) demand. But, critics frame online learning environments as passive learning contexts and research in the field of online learning management has paid little attention to interactions and classroom dialogue in online classrooms. Consequently, this study examines the potential of the virtual classroom as a collaborative learning environment, paying more attention to interactions and online classroom dialogue in the context of an online MBA programme. The next section will review the different perceptions of the nature of learning in virtual classrooms and its pedagogical roots.

## **B. Perceptions of Learning in Online Classrooms**

It is often argued that advancements in Internet technologies have contributed to the growth of online management education (Hay et al., 2004a). In the UK, the earliest forms of distance learning can be related to the Open University's correspondence courses as an alternative to face-to-face, on-campus teaching in 1969 (Bates, 1997; Ricketts et al., 2000). Prior to the rapid advancements in computer-mediated communications (CMC), this kind of learning was often referred to as 'distance education/learning'. McConnell et al. (2012) concur with Harris (1987) that at this stage of development, distance education aimed at removing administrative barriers to learning as location, timing and cost of study.

According to The Complete University Guide (n.d.), "Distance learning is a way of learning remotely without being in regular face-to-face contact with a teacher in the classroom". In its earlier forms, students received their textbooks via post. Students were allowed the flexibility of working from home, with little or no interaction with their teachers or others on the same course (Brower, 2003). Learning was perceived as self-dependent (James and Gardner, 1995); promoting individualization (Dede, 1991). As such, students depended on textbooks and their capabilities to digest what they learned (James and Gardner, 1995). With the integration of technologies such as audiotapes, videotapes, and talk-back television (James and Gardner, 1995; Salas et al., 2002), Brower (2003) argued that the process of delivering distance education had been 'humanized'. Although the advancements in technology allowed a human element to

penetrate the delivery of distance courses, early forms of distance education were based on a conventional knowledge transmission model of teaching<sup>2</sup>. In other words, online teaching is focused on disseminating information and online learning is assessed in terms of accurate performance and/or mastery of skills or behaviour imparted by the teachers (Hodgson, 2002). In similar vein, Brower (2003) describes the teaching/learning process in early forms of distance education as ‘unidirectional’, promoting monologic interactions from the expert tutor to passive students.

Influenced by the rapid advances in internet-based technologies and the increased accessibility to the Internet, tools such as chat rooms, e-mails, and discussion forums/boards are used to promote classroom interactions and collaboration (Brower, 2003), where students’ engagement can be less or more structured (Coomey and Stephenson, 2001). The emergence of these technologies, Beldarrain (2006) argues, led to the distortion of the concept of distance between a teacher (online tutor) and their students. Since then, it has become more common in the field of distance education to use different terms and phrases as online learning, online education, online distance education, e-learning, web-based learning, and virtual learning in reference to the use of internet-based technologies that enable students to access education at any time and from any place.

Through the use of these information and communication technologies, interaction and collaboration are now attainable either asynchronously or synchronously (Beldarrain, 2006). Synchronous learning environments allow students and their online tutor to connect in real time as if they were exchanging words in a face-to-face classroom (Gilmore and Warren, 2007). An asynchronous learning environment involves participants posting text-based messages on a ‘discussion board/forum’ for others to read when they visit the relevant website or page (Gilmore and Warren, 2007). Asynchronous learning environments which use tools such as FirstClass, WebCT, or Blackboard are among the most common kinds of online learning platforms for students in higher education (Goodyear et al., 2004). However, not all online learning settings utilize these technologies to foster students’ interactions and collaboration in virtual

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<sup>2</sup> Knowledge transmission model of teaching is explained in more detail later on in this chapter.

classrooms. For some, May and Short (2003) argue, online learning is concerned with uploading lecture notes in the virtual classroom, with little, if any, (unmonitored) use of discussions forums. Thus, learning in these settings becomes pertinent to content delivery or dissemination and so echoes earlier forms of distance education which were concerned with removing administrative barriers to learning as location, timing and cost of study, rather than the nature of learning itself.

The interaction and collaboration features of online learning environments have led to the rise of different perceptions and views about the nature of learning in online classrooms. As such, some scholars (e.g. Hodgson, 2002; Hodgson and Watland, 2004; Ferreday et al., 2006; Hodgson et al., 2012; McConnell et al., 2012) set 'networked learning' as a pedagogical approach at a distance from other forms of technology mediated learning. The first definition of networked learning; "learning in which information and communication technology is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors, between a learning community and its learning resources", appears to receive wider acceptance (e.g. Steeples and Jones, 2001; Goodyear et al., 2004). However, it is not without critique (McConnell et al., 2012). The definition, according to McConnell et al. (2012), lacks a focus on 'negotiation, collaboration and cooperation', which has become to be seen as an important and integral aspect of networked learning. In particular, Goodyear et al. (2004) argue that the centrality of human interactions (as in the use of classroom dialogue) in the design of an online classroom carries with it some pedagogical assumptions and beliefs about the nature of learning itself. Learning in a networked learning pedagogy is achieved through participation in community of learners where meaning is created through relational dialogue (Hodgson et al., 2012). In this view, networked learning places a high value on both differences among international learners and the democratic process of learning. Also, Hodgson and her colleagues add that a networked learning approach assumes that an understanding and view of the world is socio-culturally influenced and constructed. By adopting a networked learning approach, we conduct education in a way that helps learners critically examine the way we work and live and take learning into the wider world (Hodgson et al., 2012). It is in this sense that networked learning is assumed to align itself with some of the ideas of critical

scholars as Freire (1970) and Dewey (1916), giving attention to issues of power, voice, access, and inclusion (Hodgson et al., 2012).

The emerging ideas on networked learning suggest a pedagogical framework which enables a shift from the use of technology to support a knowledge transmission model to more participative approaches which allows for the co-construction of knowledge and meaning-making through relational dialogues in online classrooms (Hodgson et al., 2012; McConnell et al., 2012). Brower (2003) explains that structuring online courses to include asynchronous discussions engages students as co-producers of course content and learning. Others believe that the purpose of engaging in online classroom dialogue is to help students recognize critiques and move beyond their taken-for-granted assumptions (e.g. McConnell, 2000). In his attempt to develop a pedagogical foundation for networked learning, McConnell (1994; 2006) suggested that: (a) online learning is seen to occur in a social context, (b) online learners take responsibility for indentifying their own learning needs and that they can define the focus of their learning in meaningful and relevant contexts, (c) a supportive online learning environment exists to allow learners to work without fear, and that (d) assessing the networked learning course is a cooperative tutor-learner process (McConnell et al., 2012). Under a networked learning approach, technology only mediates and so has a material impact but it cannot on its own determine learning (Hodgson et al., 2012).

To sum up, online learning- contrary to critics' perceptions- can involve more than the dissemination of course content and the use of on-line material. The potential of online learning relates to the application of a pedagogical approach which fosters a critical and inquiring attitude towards learning and focuses on the use of technology to promote 'negotiation, collaboration and cooperation' amongst learners. This suggests that learning in online classrooms can be social; taking place through dialogue, joint knowledge construction, and critique. But what opportunities and/or challenges await online classroom dialogue in absence of visual cues? and what does this knowledge construction and being critical look like in virtual classrooms - if any? .

As outlined before, we do not have enough evidence to help us develop an understanding of the process of knowledge construction and criticality in virtual

classrooms. Having said this, the current study is set with this issue in mind. This study's site uses the Blackboard as an online learning platform to promote text-based, asynchronous classroom dialogue in online MBA classrooms. As such, the next section will focus on opportunities and challenges around the use of text-based, asynchronous dialogue in online learning environments. Later, I review perspectives on dialogic learning and criticality in virtual classrooms.

### **C. Features of Asynchronous, Text-based Dialogue in Online Classrooms**

The inclusion of text-based, asynchronous discussion forums in online classrooms is not without problems. Gregor and Cuskelly (1994) argue that if classroom dialogue is not deliberately designed into the structure of virtual classrooms, online students will be more reluctant to use discussion forums or chat rooms in their learning. Debates around the implications of forcing an online classroom dialogue are far from settled (Anderson, 2008). Campbell (2001) is concerned that assessing students' participation in online classroom dialogue may reinforce a sense of instrumentalism whereas Vrasidas and Mclsaac (1999), Brower (2003), and Anderson (2008) perceive it as motivator for students' engagement. According to management education scholars, students' instrumentalism is used in reference to perceptions of education itself and/or the attained degrees as rewards (e.g. Currie and Knights, 2003)<sup>3</sup>. Another reported feature is the phenomena of excessive postings (Brower, 2003; Johnson, 2006) which may result in students' being overwhelmed (Kimball, 1995; Brower, 2003; Redpath, 2012) and confused (Salmon, 2000). Students often develop these feelings when they attempt to follow up related messages on discussion forums, where some messages attract no response from others in the virtual classroom. Brower (2003) suggests that this 'no response' situation may in part be related to others' perception of the addresser as an over participator. Some students refer to the phenomena of excessive postings as a 'noise factor' in their online learning experience (Jones and McCann, 2005). In asynchronous, text-based discussions, it is possible to find many of the students respond to several other students in the same text/message (Dysthe, 2002). This is a feature that reflects on the complexity of observing the process of meaning constructions in online

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<sup>3</sup> More illustration on students' instrumentalism is found in p.26

learning environments. There is also the challenge of having student lurkers in the virtual classroom who simply read others' messages on discussion forums. Lurkers' learning may not be visible to their class tutor, but according to Dysthe (2002), learning can result when observing others' texts and conversations provoke an internal dialogue with the self.

Others believe that the online classroom may have some advantages compared to face-to-face classroom (Hay et al., 2004a). First, there is transparency. In a text-based, asynchronous discussion, when a student responds to a previous posting, the response is 'threaded' or 'linked' to the previous posting. In this way, participants in a discussion forum can see the relationships between postings and follow the flow of conversations (Brower, 2003). Second, there seems to be a potentially higher degree of democratic contribution. Online students are able to share and draw on other learning resources as well as contributing to a discussion several times without having to compete on a 'window for speaking' or 'air time' with others (Brower, 2003; Meyer, 2003). Third, online platforms allow for the development of repositories of conversations. These repositories of conversations mean that all students' posts are saved for later access, which then can help promote students' reflections. For instance, Meyer (2003), Johnson (2006), and Wang and Woo (2007) argue that text-based, asynchronous discussions (or threaded discussions) promote students' reflections, where students spend extended time reading others posts, thinking about it, preparing a response and then checking back others' responses on the discussion forum. In this way, text-based discussions are perceived as 'thoughtful' (Brower, 2003; Hay et al., 2004a). Fourth, the transparency and repository functions are argued to invoke a certain competitive element in students. As their contributions are visible and others in the virtual classroom can see their responses, students are encouraged to work a little harder to produce quality responses (Hay et al., 2004a) and avoid embarrassing mistakes (Meyer, 2003).

Finally, there is also the advantage of remaining anonymous to others in the classroom. While the absence of visual cues and body language in a text-based, asynchronous discussions is perceived by some students (and educators) as an inherent disadvantage (Meyer, 2003), others tend to agree that the so-called 'relative anonymity' of online

learning makes participation easier (Sullivan, 2002). Drawing on Sullivan's study (2002), the advantage of relative anonymity arises from not having to face others in a face-to-face classroom atmosphere, and in particular, when one agrees or disagrees with what is being said. Other students refer to the benefits of online relative anonymity as not having to be judged by others on the basis of how they look, their weight, height or personality (Sullivan, 2002). In Sullivan's study, participants described online learning as helping them to 'speak honestly,' 'be yourself if you are invisible' and 'be more freeing'. It is no surprise to find relative anonymity (Arbaugh, 2000) or reduced self-presentation anxiety (Corston and Colman, 1996) cited as possible reasons for increased online participation.

In this section, I discussed some of the features (transparency, democratic contribution, a repository of conversations, relative anonymity) and some of the issues (participation assessment, excessive postings and lurkers) that accompany the use of asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue. Although we know very little about the nature of learning from within online students' dialogue and interactions (Hodgson and Watland, 2004), the use of asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue can defy the portrayal of online students as passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, it positions online learners as producers rather than consumers of knowledge (Hodgson et al., 2012). The next section will attend to scholars' perspectives on promoting knowledge construction and criticality in online learning environments.

#### **D. Dialogic Learning and Criticality in Online MBA Classrooms**

Some suggest that online learning environment, underpinned by social constructionist learning assumptions, can support learners in becoming critical lifelong learners (Hodgson et al., 2012). Hodgson and Reynolds (2005) assert that the potential of online learning in management education lies in allowing for the plurality of multiple online discourses, reinforcing democratic values but also recognizing differences. Some scholars value online learning environments as a platform promoting reflective learning (e.g. Meyer, 2003; Brower, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Wang and Woo, 2007). However, these views are not usually backed up with empirical evidence. Online learning is seen as a fruitful arena for the development and application of participative methods

(Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005), emphasizing collaborative learning and critical thinking (McConnell, 2000; Hodgson and Reynolds, 2010) and promoting students' reflections in their online classroom dialogue (Salmon, 2000; Brower, 2003; Hay et al., 2004)<sup>4</sup>.

The importance of these views stems from the underlying assumptions about learning in online classrooms, where learning as a process is closely aligned to Bakhtin's (1981) "dialogical construction of meaning" (Hodgson and Watland, 2004:100). Bakhtin is a Russian philologist who attends to the role of dialogue in constructing and/or negotiating meanings among multiple voices (Bakhtin, 1981). A number of scholars borrow Bakhtin's ideas to explain the collaborative and interactive potential of online learning settings (e.g. Koschmann, 1999; Dysthe, 2002; Mitra and Watt, 2002; Ferreday et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008; Hodgson, 2009). Dysthe's (2002) study uses Bakhtin's dialogic construction of meaning to illustrate the interactive and social potential of online learning. In her study, Dysthe (2002) presents an example of how understanding is constructed as each student's voice builds on, contrasts or extends the understanding of others in classroom.

Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of polyphony (or multiple voices), Mitra and Watt (2002) propose that the notion of 'voice' or 'voices', should be attended to when analyzing online texts; what is being said and how. Koschmann (1999) maintains that Bakhtin's treatment of 'voice' and 'dialogicality' (i.e. dialogism) can provide a base for re-conceptualizing learning as a social process in online educational settings. Ferreday et al. (2006: 237) draw on Bakhtin's work to show "how the active and performative nature of dialogue forms the basis for both creating (new) meaning and constructing social identities in relation to self and other" in a blended learning MA programme<sup>5</sup>. As argued by Ramsey (2003), these views suggest that learning is constructed in ongoing relations among students and between students and their online tutors.

This focus on online learning environments, as a context which can promote dialogic learning, implies that online management learning can afford more than a mere delivery

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<sup>4</sup> For now, the term 'reflection' implies an attempt to connect theory with own practice and/or experience.

<sup>5</sup> A blended learning programme is one which offers its students a blend of online interactions and face-to-face workshops and/or seminars.



of objectified knowledge to online students, who are left to digest what they are taught on their own, with little, if any, interaction. It is true that it is not the mode of delivery per se (i.e. online vs. face-to-face) that determines the teaching methods and approaches, and the nature of learning that occurs in virtual classrooms (Redpath, 2012). This suggests that problems with online management learning are not in the 'technology'. Technology only mediates (Hodgson et al., 2012). Then, the problem is rather in the 'hands and minds' using this technology to facilitate management students' online learning. For Redpath (2012), the roles of students and online tutors, and classroom design influence the nature of learning in online management classrooms.

Whilst the studies outlined above have focused on the role of online classroom dialogue, meaning construction, and students-tutor relations, often in the tradition of a social constructionist perspective, fewer studies have focused explicitly on the potential of online learning environments to promote criticality amongst management students and, thus, to respond to the wider concerns about management education.

Indeed, critiques to a knowledge transmission model of teaching are not confined to online learning environments. It is important to acknowledge that these concerns about what constitute learning /teaching have been well-established by management education scholars long before the use of the Internet and online learning. In other words, critiques (e.g. Barker, 2010) of the nature of online learning (i.e. being passive, concerned with knowledge dissemination) are already exacerbated by a wider community of scholars who acknowledge the limitation of conventional teaching in management classrooms (e.g. Grey and Mitev, 1995; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; French and Grey, 1996; Holman et al., 1997; Mintzberg, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005; Raelin, 2009). It is essential then to review these wider concerns about management education, paying particular attention to critical management education (CME) response to these concerns and critiques.

The focus on CME literature in the next sections stems from its espoused link to the learning assumptions that underpin a networked learning approach. According to Hodgson et al., (2012), perspectives on 'networked learning' as an online pedagogical approach assume learning as a social process which involves meaning/knowledge construction, and appreciation of difference, as well as attending to issues of power,

voice and inclusion. Though the potential of CME, as argued in the following sections, is much broader, it advocates the use of more participative and collaborative learning approaches, designed to elicit students' engagement and critical thinking in the classroom. With the paucity of online management learning research which attends to criticality and classroom dialogue in the context of online MBA programmes, I draw upon CME literature to develop an understanding of the meaning of, the approaches to promote, and the difficulties that accompany being critical in face-to-face management classrooms. To this end, I begin with elaborating on CME scholars' critiques to a knowledge transmission model of teaching in the next section.

### **III. Critique to Management Education**

Management education has become the subject of critique for: (a) promoting a technicist and instrumental understanding that management problems can be solved using tools or instruments which aim at achieving control, and (b) applying a teaching model that is based on transmitting knowledge to students. However, management practice is neither value-free nor context-independent. Criticism that management education is not relating adequately to management practice has led to suggestions of alternative teaching approaches. CME is said to be a promising alternative that views management as a value-informed practice and that, it can speak adequately to management practice. CME is an attempt to bridge the relevance gap between education and practice in business schools.

Management education has been (and still is) the subject of considerable debate, especially over what should constitute an MBA programme (Lock, 1996) as it remains a popular degree (Mellahi, 2000) in US and UK, attracting increasing numbers of local and international students. Research carried out by the AMBA, shows that a total of 99 institutions offer a university-validated MBA degree in the UK (Lock, 1996) and a total of 119 programmes are believed to serve 12,000 MBA students (Armstrong, 2005). In the period between 1995 and 2005, estimates show a 56.7% increase in full-time MBA students, a 30.5% increase in part-time, and a 23.2% increase in distance students (Armstrong, 2005). This raises the question: Should business schools set the MBA debate aside?

Critics of management education include practicing managers themselves who criticize management education for bearing the least relevance to their real life problems and practices (Fox, 1997) and scholars who express concerns that business schools are so preoccupied with theory that value to the practitioners' world is limited (e.g. Grey and Mitev, 1995; Mintzberg, 2004; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Paton et al., 2013). It worth noting that there are other scholars who insist that there is enough evidence to suggest that business schools' research and education is relevant and valuable (e.g. Baldrige et al., 2004; O'Brien et al., 2010).

In the UK, there is a well-established debate about management education which raised the issue of business schools' enforcement of a "technicist" and instrumental understanding to management (Grey and Mitev, 1995). A technicist understanding seeks to present management practice as a set of technical functions. As such, management problems can be adequately diagnosed and solved using tools or instruments aimed at achieving control (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:10). Holman (2000) and Raelin (2007) refer to this technicist understanding as a scientific understanding, promoting objective knowledge about management practice. In this view, management education exists to provide management students with skills and knowledge to improve performance (Grey and Mitev, 1995) and to operate efficiently and effectively (French and Grey, 1996). Under these assumptions, what business schools do at best is to spoon-feed management students with knowledge (Raelin, 2009) and teach them techniques which are presumed reliable and can yield predictable, context-independent end results (Grey, 2004). The problem with this spoon-feeding or knowledge transmission teaching model is that it assumes that managers are scientific practitioners (Holman et al., 1997), perceived as able to use some of the tools and instrument to test theories and achieve results in a controlled environment. Grey (2004) points out that promoting this instrumental reasoning (or logic) through the use of presumably reliable techniques does not do much good for managers. Instrumental logic teaches management students that they can remain on top of things or events or control their organization performance if they use the right tool kit. This is where technicist approaches fall short in real world practices.

Business schools are perceived as overly occupied with developing best practice programmes (Roberts, 1996; Dehler et al., 2001) which place more emphasis on developing the functional and technical skills of their students (Samra-Fredericks, 2003) and overlook students' experience (Mintzberg, 2004), and produce business graduates who can talk about practice rather than competent practitioners (Armstrong, 2005). These views suggest that management education bestows legitimacy upon knowledge that is objective, value-free and context-independent. It is no surprise, then, that management graduates are described as narrowly-oriented, overtly analytical and technical, and uninterested in lifelong learning (Hayes and Abernathy, 1980; Armstrong, 2005; Raelin, 2007; Scott, 2010). In this context, management students may perceive the attainment of an MBA degree as a form of consumption. The MBA degree itself can be perceived as a luxury commodity (Sturdy and Gabriel, 2000) which leads to "status symbol" gains of prestige and credentials (Vaara and Faÿ, 2011). Currie and Knights (2003) report that the attainment of an MBA degree can also be perceived as a "reward" for memorizing taught facts. Business graduates, in joining an MBA programme, hope that a subsequent salary raise, promotion or new job will soon follow the completion of their studies. These perceptions of the MBA *rewards* are often referred to as "student instrumentalism" (Currie and Knights, 2003). As management graduates complete their studies and move to real life practice, they sooner or later realize that what they are taught in classrooms is simply inapplicable in the real world (Grey and Mitev, 1995); their learning is practice-detached (Currie and Knights, 2003), and that reality is more complex (Grey, 2004).

The focus in a technicist classroom, Raelin (2007) claims, is on 'teaching'; transmitting knowledge to passive management students, rather than on the 'learning'. Objective knowledge is codified and transferred to management students, who in time learn to accept the views of teachers and textbooks with little question (Anderson and Thorpe, 2004). Scholars describe this educational model as encouraging management students' dependency on their teachers to acquire 'experts' knowledge' (Vince, 2010). Gutiérrez (2002) draws on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) to describe what this conventional, knowledge transmission model of teaching looks like. The features Gutiérrez (2002:531)

lists below emphasize the image of a teacher as the sole expert and the authority figure in the classroom. The teacher:

- teaches because he/she knows everything and students are taught because they know nothing;
- talks and students listen-meekly;
- chooses and enforces his choice, and students comply;
- acts and students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- chooses the program content, and students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- confuses the authority of knowledge with his/her own professional authority which he/she sets in opposition to the freedom of students;
- is the subject of the learning process, while students are mere objects.

Cunliffe (2004), who cites Freire's work, also identifies three basic assumptions underlying a knowledge transmission model. These assumptions are: (a) social reality is objective, (b) learning is disembodied, structured, and cognitive, and (c) learning takes place in the head and knowledge can be applied in terms of techniques, principles, and models to practice and can be used to align individual actions with the organizational goals of efficiency and effectiveness. It is these technicist teaching practices and assumptions about management education against which much of the relevance debate is corroborated (Grey and Mitev, 1995).

The criticism that management education does not relate adequately (or is irrelevant) to practice should not be considered as an urge for 'more effective' tools and techniques (Grey, 2004). Rather, it is meant to push for a different conception of management practice; one that acknowledges contradictions and conflicting values and interests as inherent ingredients of management practice. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) argue that the conception of management practice as a technical, neutral activity devoid of social relations appears illusory. This is echoed by Samra-Fredericks (2003:294) who cites Reynolds (1998); "(management) is not a neutral, disinterested process of developing the most effective and efficient means through which to achieve prespecified ends". Neither is it a science (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2004). For Grey (2004), to engage in management is to commit to some kind of stance on political and moral values (e.g.

enhance shareholder's value, increase efficacy and profitability, improve employee's well-being and customer satisfaction). As a consequence, the educator needs to raise management students' awareness of the political, social, and ethical issues inherent in their practices, which together act as an underlying context, shaping or constraining their actions and perspectives (Reynolds, 1999; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Grey, 2004). In this perspective, what is required is not to transmit value-neutral recipes for effective action. What is required is to attend to values and context (Grey, 2004). In doing so, the goal of management education should be to help managers understand, analyse and challenge the complex activity of management (Grey and French, 1996; Hay and Hodgkinson; 2008). What is argued by scholars here is that educators need to suspend their assumptions that management students need to be taught techniques and tools to have control over their practices, organizations, and surroundings. It is, practically, unrealistic to assume that there exists a tool or technique that can achieve this kind of control. What educators need to do instead is to be realistic and relevant in their teaching. This then brings to mind a long standing question: *what is management about? Or what do managers do to manage?*

Pfeffer and Fong's (2002) assertion that the practice of business management is not restricted to people who possess a formal credential or certificate of training is perhaps a good starting point to answer this question. If this is the case, management is not restricted to the application of some tools that are learnt in classrooms. There are other essential aspects of management that are learnt within its practice that managers who never attended a business school are as good as (if not better than) those who did. In Schön's (1983) view, a "practice is characterized by indeterminacy, and what distinguishes the excellent practitioner from the merely adequate one is the ability to render indeterminate situations determinate" (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002:85). This suggests that managers in their day-to-day experience rely on their ability to read/interpret situations to make sense of whatever they are dealing with.

Shotter (1993) argues that management is not only about reading situations from different perspectives, but it is also about producing meaningful accounts of ill-defined situations to other members in the organization. Bailey and Ford (1996) assert that

ambiguous organizational events and diverse interests typically evokes multiple, conflicting interpretations and that, therefore, management students need to develop the ability to use language to construct shared interpretations with others. Thus, management requires less easily transferred skills (e.g. communication and interpersonal skills) which do not necessarily involve the application of theory and analytical techniques that are most often imparted by business schools (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). As such, they cannot be taught within a knowledge transmission model of teaching.

Mintzberg and Gosling (2004) argue that managers who face issues in the full complexity of living, need educators to help them with better ‘descriptions’ and illustrations of alternate ways to understand their world, rather than ‘prescriptions’. For Reynolds (1998), management students need to understand the social, political, and moral ingredients inherent in their practices and to be able to make sense of their practices by relating them to a broader socio-political context. Thus, in a teaching method that emphasizes decontextualised prescriptions and imparts theory and analytical techniques devoid of experience and/or a practice component, it is not clear how business schools can be more relevant to practice. As Bailey and Ford (1996:9) argued, “The practice of management is best taught as a craft, rich in lessons derived from experience and oriented toward taking and responding to action”. Efforts to teach management disassociated from context and experience undermine management education, most commonly by reducing it to analysis (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2004).

Attempts to respond to debates around a knowledge transmission model of teaching led to the rise of more participative approaches and methods in teaching management students. These participative approaches were thought of as tools bridging the theory-practice gap and promoting a student-centered classroom (Mingers, 2000), whilst eliciting interest from management students (Grey et al., 1996). Yet, Grey and French (1996) and Raelin (2009) concur that the use of participative approaches, as in the use of case studies and role playing, can be designed within a knowledge transmission model. Case studies, *although entailing some premises*, are commonly used to encourage a technicist attitude towards management, promoting the application of theory to practice. Grey and Mitev (1995) argue that a technicist attitude is not only concerned with the use

of techniques, but also backing it up with a constant reference to real world examples or case studies. Others advocate the use of case studies to promote critical thinking in management classrooms (e.g. Mingers, 2000; Cunliffe, 2002). This suggests that it is the learning assumptions which underlie the use of case studies and whether case studies are written to promote incontestable answers or provoke questions about theory, and management practice that determine the nature of learning in management classrooms.

Critical management scholars and educators argue that CME holds an appropriate response to the “bogus claims of translatability and generalizability”; challenging the assumption that producing generalizable knowledge is something possible (Grey, 2004). Theory and research can be treated as provocations (Ramsey, 2008), to explore continuities and discontinuities between students’ experiences and theory (Grey et al., 1996) which can inform practices in managerial contexts.

CME also directs attention to ‘practical reasoning’. Practical reasoning is different from instrumental reasoning in that it is not concerned with control, nor is it aimed at the development of a means to an end. Rather, it is a form of reasoning that is politically and socially informed (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 96). According to Alvesson and Deetz (2006), practical reasoning focuses on understanding and the mutual determination of the (alternative) ends to be sought, rather than technical means to control achievement of particular interests. If this is the case, practical reasoning involves the use of one’s own wisdom and sensemaking.

Roca (2008) draws on Aristotle to define practical wisdom as the ability to identify the salient features of complex and particular situations. Through the exercise of practical wisdom, Roca (2008) continues, one is able to make sense of the significant aspects of a particular situation and so applies ones’ knowledge, experience and values to make a ‘good’ decision. Cunliffe (2002) refers to everyday sensemaking in which we implicitly know things about our surroundings as ‘implicit knowing’; everyday knowing. Both notions of practical wisdom and implicit knowing point out that changeability, particularity, sensemaking, and values are inherent elements of practice. Considering this view, technicist approaches to teaching ignores that managers rely on practical wisdom or implicit knowing to help them act in their day-to-day activities.



In this section, I reviewed critiques to conventional management education. A knowledge transmission model of teaching, whether in an online or a face-to-face classroom, advocates that there exists a set of objective, generalizable and theoretical knowledge that can be spoon fed to management students, who can apply it later in their organizations to achieve control. Technicist approaches ignore (a) the ill-defined, chaotic, emotive, and complex issues that managers face in their organizations, (b) the assessment of this objective, theoretical knowledge in relation to a broader social, political or historical context, and (c) that there exists other forms of knowledge that are relevant to everyday practices (e.g. practical wisdom or implicit knowing).

As a consequence, technicist approaches lead to the further separation of management education and practice. There is no one formula on how best to educate management students, but there are alternative teaching approaches that appear to be more relevant to management practice. In particular, teaching approaches which attend to interpersonal and communication skills, conflicting interests/values, politics, and contexts are needed. In drawing insights from critical management studies, CME attends to the complexity of management practice and helps managers become more critical in their day-to-day activities. That is, the goal of management education is to assist management students to develop better descriptions of more complex realities. In this sense, Hay and Hodgkinson (2008) argue that management education is not an end itself but it helps managers' on-going learning process.

In attendance to Alvesson and Willmott's (1996) idea of 'micro-emancipation', the next section presents an understanding of the insights CME can draw from critical management studies in relation to management students' learning.

#### **IV. Emancipation and Management Learning**

Fenwick (2005), who cites Alvesson and Willmott (1996), claims that CME promotes the intention of critical theory within management practice;

“to challenge the legitimacy and counter the development of oppressive institutions and practices . . . [seeking] to highlight, nurture and promote the potential of human consciousness to reflect critically upon such practices” (p. 13).

Critical theory takes as its starting point the position that “the world is not given to us in some objective and unchanging form” (Prasad and Caproni, 1997:286). Arguing that reality is socially constructed allows us as societal members to play the main role in its creation, continuous revision and/ or reinforcement up to a point where the meanings we attach to our reality become so deeply engraved that we come to believe that certain realities are rather objective than are socially constructed (Prasad and Caproni, 1997). On this note, views that knowledge about reality can exist as objective and neutral is replaced by the subjective interpretations we construct about reality based on some dominant ideologies. Central to critical theory argumentation, is the role of power relations in shaping those realities and in creating some dominant ideologies that may well act to masquerade social injustice and inequality. These dominant ideologies are mostly taken-for-granted, and are rarely questioned (Prasad and Caproni, 1997). Cunliffe (2004) argues that these taken-for-granted assumptions are what we utilize to make sense of what is happening around us as we interact with it. Thus, according to Cunliffe, our knowledge of the world is constructed in our interaction with our surroundings and is influenced (and constrained) by some taken-for-granted assumptions.

Teaching from this stance requires encouraging students to question one’s own assumptions and actions; to challenge conceptions of reality, and to explore new possibilities (Cunliffe, 2004). For critical theory, knowledge is not only explicit (e.g. theory) or implicit (e.g. experience), it also arises from within our interactions; dialogic knowing (Bakhtin, 1981) or situated knowing (Shotter, 1993). Unlike a technician teaching model, CME recognizes that there are other forms of knowledge that are socially constructed.

Critical theory is guided by an emancipatory intent (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). As Alvesson and Willmott (1992:432) put it;

“Emancipation describes the process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions, in particular those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness”.

In this sense, the intent of critical theory is to help individuals change their lives by promoting this kind of understanding about the sociopolitical elements of their lives

(Fay, 1987, cited in Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). However, promoting this kind of understanding can result in individuals feeling disappointed, helpless, and paralyzed (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). The authors continue to explain to us that these feelings are the likely outcome if individuals do not have enough power to cause a social movement (e.g. against the exclusion of women in some cultures) or deconstruct an existing oppressive social structure (e.g. which puts power in the hands of elites). What Alvesson and Willmott (1996) introduce is the idea of ‘micro-emancipation’ as an alternative to a broader emancipation project. In their view, micro-emancipation is concerned with “...partial, temporary movements that break away from diverse forms of oppression” (p.172).

Following from this, micro-emancipation involves developing a questioning attitude towards claims of authority (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), but on an individual level (i.e. micro-level). For instance, micro-emancipation can involve challenging the authority of conventional wisdom (such as, profitability implies efficiency), discourse (e.g. a theory, a perspective, or language use), an organizational norm (e.g. access to privileged areas), or a local practice (e.g. an experience). Thus, central to the idea of micro-emancipation is incorporating a questioning attitude (or a reflexive attitude) in attendance to every day micro-practices, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

From this perspective of micro-emancipation, the essence of CME in management classrooms is to create more spaces to promote this reflexive attitude. In this sense, emancipatory learning means that a management student, in incorporating a reflexive attitude, takes steps to achieve some (attainable) changes (e.g. in his/her own perspective, attitude, or practice). This reflexive stance can enable management students to see the social construction of their realities; to see choices or alternatives in what they do that may better serve other individuals, their organizations, and their societies (Prasad and Caproni, 1997). For Cunliffe (2004:408), the hope in promoting this reflexive stance in management classrooms is to help students make more informed and responsible decisions and “develop more collaborative, responsive, and ethical ways of managing organizations”. In developing a questioning attitude, management students can become

more critical about the complexity of their realities. As Cunliffe (2004) points out, CME helps management students develop a subjective understanding of realities and sensitivity towards contexts, and question the impact of their own actions and assumptions in creating these realities and knowledge. Cunliffe et al. (2002) and Grey (2004) contend that critical approaches can help management students to ‘think outside the box’- a precondition for managers who seek to be creative, innovative, and flexible in a rapidly changing business world. In similar vein, Antonacopoulou (2010) asserts that attending to the socio-political context creates new possibilities that were previously thought of as impossible or nonexistent.

CME recognizes that there are other forms of knowledge that are relevant to practitioners in action (Cunliffe, 2002), and that management is also about “creating new possibilities for action, new ways of being and relating in indeterminate, ill-defined realms of activity” (Cunliffe, 2001). Reflective, emancipatory learning that aims at problematizing one’s own assumptions and actions, challenging conceptions of reality and exploring new possibilities is more relevant to practitioners, who rely on their own sensemaking, wisdom, and communication and interpersonal skills to act in situations.

The message here is that the potential of this form of emancipatory, reflective learning cannot be achieved within a lecture-based, technicist learning setting which hones students’ instrumental logic and technical skills by promoting a set of objective, generalizable knowledge. What critical theory tells us is that much of the learning that takes place in management classrooms is un-emancipatory and therefore, is not helping management students become more critical about the complexity embedded in their roles. We need to know how such emancipation may be achieved in management classrooms. For this, I turn to CME works on practice, where I outline the importance of reflective learning.

## **V. Reflective Learning in Critical Management Education**

Critical pedagogy in management learning has been a topic of discussion by many scholars (e.g. Grey et al., 1996; Prasad and Caproni, 1997; Reynolds, 1998; 1999a; Mingers, 2000; Reynolds and Trehan, 2001; Watson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; Gutiérrez,

2002; Currie and Knights, 2003; Cunliffe, 2004; Perriton and Reynolds, 2004; Perriton, 2007; Raelin, 2008; Hedberg, 2009). There seem to be multiple propositions and approaches to help students become more critical (Reynolds, 1999; Antonacopoulou, 2009). In this study, I remain focused on Cunliffe's (2002) and Shotter's (1996) work which attends to the role of dialogue in constructing and examining realities (i.e. learning in this case) as well as Cunliffe's use of terms and phrases like 'simple reflection', 'intellectual critique', and 'reflexivity'.

According to Grey et al. (1996), approaches to CME appear to be ad hoc, experimental, and fragmented. The literature review points out that invoking criticality in management classrooms is not simply a matter of introducing critical management topics or issues into classroom curricula, but should involve rethinking our notions of management learning and the role of classroom dialogue in it, and students-teacher relationships. To this end, first, I investigate the potential of bringing practical experience into management classrooms, as this is core to critical scholars' critique of conventional learning settings. Second, I focus on developing criticality in management classrooms and the argument that developing a reflexive stance, rather than encouraging a simple reflection on experience or engaging in intellectual critique, helps management students become more emancipative. Third, I discuss some of the difficulties that the critical scholar encounters in developing emancipatory, reflective learning in their classrooms. Finally, I review proposals of promoting reflective learning in management classrooms.

#### **A. Experience and Reflection; *a stepping-stone for criticality***

Educators' failure to account for management students' experience is seen as one reason for the perceived crisis in management education (Cunliffe, 2002; Mintzberg, 2004). Management education is criticized for being theoretical, ignoring the view that managers rely on other sources of knowledge including own experience and sensemaking to help them act within their circumstances. What we know from previous sections is that managers are not practical scientists, applying prescribed recipes (theories and techniques) to well known problems (Holman et al., 1997).

Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) report that managers in their study perceive that their ‘experience’ is the base for their development. Schön (1983) describes the ability to reflect as an important prerequisite to effective management decision making, in particular whereas a business environment involves unique elements to which there are no defined solutions (Hay et al., 2004). Willmott (1997) claims that managers, in their daily setting, experience a tension between own values and priorities as persons, and the demands of their roles. Managers are presented with repeated opportunities to reflect on their experiences (Willmott, 1997). Although their day-to-day experiences appear to be a rich source of learning, managers are used to placing more emphasis on action rather than taking time to reflect (Daudelin, 1996). In a fast, turbulent world, reflection may appear to be a luxury to which managers can only devote little time (Daudelin, 1996; Gray, 2007; Hedberg, 2009). Given its importance, management educators need to help their students understand the potential of reflection. So, what is reflection in management learning?

In Cunliffe’s (2002) view, a student can connect implicit and explicit knowledge in one of three ways; reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity, all of which are possibilities or forms of reflective learning. A student can draw on theory and/or practice, and use theoretical and/or practical ways of talking to construct his/her account of an experience (Cunliffe, 2002). For Cunliffe, this process of connecting theory and practice (i.e. explicit and implicit knowledge) is like “muddy water”; there is no straightforward process of doing it. What Cunliffe means is that students’ engagement with theory and practice can take different forms, and that the language they use could be less or more influenced by theory.

Reynolds (1998) claims that the search for a learning theory that has some immediacy with the particularities of managing has elevated experiential approaches to learning because of its focus on learning in and from work experience. Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning is one of the most popular illustrations of learning in management education and development, which assumes that “Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience” (Vince, 1998:305). For Kolb (1984), experience is the foundation of the learning process (cycle), which includes four stages: concrete

experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing implications of concepts in new situations. Although Kolb's cycle offers an insight into learning as a process and promotes 'experience' as a source of learning, it has attracted a number of critiques. One of the critiques leveled at Kolb's learning cycle is that it reinforces the image of managers as practical scientists (Holman et al., 1997). Managers do not test theories in action, yet their skills in reading complex situations using their own implicit knowing (Cunliffe, 2002) and their ability to produce meaningful accounts of ill-defined situations with others (Shotter, 1993; Holman et al., 1997) set them at a distance from scientists. Another critique is the assumption that learning is an individualized process; devoid of social interactions with others (Holman et al., 1997). This missing social dimension defies social constructionist assumptions of learning as a social process, taking place in collaboration with others. Vince (1998) extends the critique to Kolb's learning cycle to include its lack of focus on the lived experience. The assumption that learning is a social process and the consideration of the here and now experience provide a theme for much of the argument constructed in the previous and proceeding sections of this review. Later on, I discuss the value of lived experience and classroom dialogue in reflective, emancipatory learning. Below, I answer the question raised earlier: What is reflection in management learning?

A number of management education scholars reference the work of Dewey (1933), Mezirow (1991), and Schön (1991) to assume reflection as a process involving levels or stages (e.g. Hay et al., 2004; Peltier et al., 2005; Scott, 2010). The authors found that it is possible to identify three key stages in the process of reflection. These are: a review of experience (i.e. *awareness*), analysis (i.e. *critical analysis*), and reevaluation (i.e. *change*) (Hay et al., 2004; Peltier et al., 2005). Here, I focus on the first stage; *awareness*. An awareness in reflection, is a "turning back on experience", which includes awareness of an object, event, or a state, but does not necessarily include an assessment of what is reflected upon (Mezirow, 1998:185). This lack of assessment is what differentiates simple reflection from other forms of reflective learning outlined later. Peltier et al. (2005), who cite the work of Mezirow, assume that reflection involves a previous experience brought into consciousness, stimulated by positive or negative feelings about a learning situation. Reflection is more than simply understanding (Gray,

2007). The main difference is that the former involves learning that is related to a personal experience (Willmott, 1994; Hay et al., 2004).

For Cunliffe (2002; 2004), a simple reflection means that a social reality, an experience, or a situation is read from within the insight of a theory. In reflection, a student acts as an objective observer (Cunliffe and Jun, 2005). A student reflects on an experience that he/she encountered in the past from a distance. Cunliffe (2002) calls this an 'outside-in' approach; reflecting on a situation from outside and using explicit knowledge to explain actions. In this form of reflective learning, the language used is mostly grounded in the academic speech genre (Cunliffe, 2002). Cunliffe offers a quote from a student's paper as an example of this student's sensemaking of his experience of working in a team, and using Kolb's work to gain insights into it;

"... following the model of my 'band', I assigned P and F as the most visible members, similar to concrete experience learners described by Kolb..." (2002:51).

It is often argued that students are more familiar with this form of reflective learning (Cunliffe, 2002), but how can promoting this form of reflective learning be different from traditional, lecture-based learning?

Scholars in management education used different terminologies and concepts to describe the learning that associates reflection apart from lower levels of learning. Hay et al. (2004) and Peltier et al. (2005) describe reflective learning as a higher level learning. In Hay et al.'s (2004) view, lower (surface) level learning refers to comprehending the reading materials. For Cope (2003), it is a mere repetition, usually short-term and temporary. In these respects, lower level learning is unreflective learning and not related to one's personal experience or other situations of interest. Peltier et al. (2005:253) argue that in unreflective learning "most of what is learned stays within the boundaries of pre-existing perspectives". It remains an abstract, unrelated theory (Leung and Kember, 2003). In other words, while reflective learning utilizes a deep approach because it involves attaching a personal meaning to a concept and accordingly, a concept becomes related to other knowledge and experience (Leung and Kember, 2003), recalling facts and memorizing is believed to be superficial learning (Brown, 2000).



In similar vein, Hedberg (2009), who draws on her teaching practices, posits that management students give their classroom and experience meaning through their reflection. This is echoed by Holman (2000:199) who suggests that learning becomes “more meaningful if it is grounded in the experience and context of learners”. In their reflection on experience, management students are active in the process of knowledge creation (Dehler, 2009), rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Reflection could be a way of eliciting students’ interest in learning. Reflection, according to Grey et al. (1996), could convey to students that reading course material could be enjoyable, rather than a burdensome and painful obligation.

Paradoxically as this may sound, while reflection leads to more active learners, it does not instigate more critical ways of talking in classroom (Cunliffe, 2002; Hedberg, 2009). In attendance to students’ experience, critical scholars are concerned with more than a mere connection between theory and practice. If this was the only concern with promoting reflection on an experience, then the emancipatory project falls short of achieving its potential. Shotter (1996:295) argues that “we cannot change ourselves by simply ‘putting a theory into practice’ ”. In reflection, a student draws a connection between theory and practice. This would still promote a theoretical talk about practice (Cunliffe, 2002), rather than provoking questions about theory, practices and perspectives which can result in some sort of emancipation. This suggests that learning by simple reflection on an experience is personally meaningful, higher-level learning but not emancipatory.

The concern in encouraging students’ reflection on experience is essentially with problematizing their experiences, practices and perspectives (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1998; 1999; Mingers, 2000; Cunliffe, 2002; 2004). This involves challenging students’ ways of seeing, doing, acting or talking. In this view, a reflection on an experience is a stepping-stone for developing criticality (e.g. Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999; Cunliffe, 2002; Cotter and Cullen, 2012) and reflective, emancipatory learning in classrooms. So, what is it that turns a simple reflection on an experience into *reflective, emancipatory* learning? The next section outlines that provoking reflexivity can result in reflective, emancipatory learning.

## **B. 'Becoming Critical' in Management Classrooms; *Intellectual critique and reflexivity***

Different scholars in the field of CME seem to agree that a sense of 'questioning' or a 'careful examination' of the social, political, and cultural contexts of an experience is needed to become critical (e.g. Reynolds, 1999). However, there appears to be a diverse and a discrepant use of the terms among critical scholars about what becoming critical means (Antonacopoulou, 2010).

Being critical, according to Antonacopoulou (2010), can involve different forms of critique. Yet, in this study I focus on Cunliffe's (2002; 2004) understanding of what becoming critical entails, which is mirrored in the choice of terms used in this section; intellectual critique and reflexivity. Cunliffe (2002) believes that unless educators can invoke more embodied ways of talking about experiences and/or situations in their classrooms, reflective learning may not necessarily help management students to talk and/or act in different ways. But what do we mean when we say it does or does not invoke more 'embodied ways of talking'? What is this 'embodied' way of talking? Does becoming critical imply talking in more embodied ways? To answer these questions, I discuss the difference between intellectual critique and reflexivity.

In the field of CME, scholars differ in the way they interpret the meaning of critical engagement in management classrooms. For Reynolds (1998), being more critical involves probing beneath the surface; examining the broader social, cultural, and/or political context, within which an action, a decision, a task or problem is situated. For others, it implies that an *individual* is undergoing some *change* (e.g. Boud et al., 1985; Mezirow, 1991; Cunliffe, 2002; 2004, Carson and Fisher, 2006; Raelin, 2007).

Cope (2003) points out that Boud et al. (1985) and Mezirow (1991) concur that reflection becomes critical if it challenges 'personal' norms and assumptions, and so leads to a 'changed perspective';

"Reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which *individuals* engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to *new understandings* and *appreciations*" (Boud et al., 1985:3, my emphasis).

Also, Cunliffe (2002; 2004), Carson and Fisher (2006), and Raelin (2007) appear to contend that critical engagement needs to be personal and committed to some individual-level transformation or change. Cunliffe (2002) differentiates between critical engagement that does not necessarily offer management students a practical way to move forward and critical ‘reflexive’ engagement that can help management students act and think differently in their day-to-day activities. Cunliffe (2002) calls the former *intellectual critique* and the latter *reflexivity*.

An intellectual critique is concerned with questioning theory, concepts and ideologies from outside (Cunliffe, 2002). This echoes Mingers’ (2000) use of an information system failures case study to promote students’ critical engagements, whereby a student can engage in a critique of rhetoric (i.e. logical soundness of an argument) tradition (i.e. simple questioning of the accepted), authority (i.e. legitimacy of a perspective) and objectivity (i.e. validity of information). For instance, a simple questioning of the accepted would involve asking - why are we doing this project? A critique of authority would involve identifying the different stakeholders involved in the project and how the project (or an event) is perceived from different perspectives and what conflicting interests are involved as a result. Critique of objectivity involves questioning the validity of information including distortions to quantitative information and failure to capture important qualitative aspects.

In this sense, whilst management students become more critical, they act as outside observers who “... focus on realities and systems existing independent from our (their) own personal involvement...” (Cunliffe, 2002:39, my bracket). This form of reflective learning, Cunliffe continues, does not necessarily means learning to act in more critical ways in everyday experience. Intellectual critique is being critical of a generalized other (Cunliffe, 2002). According to Cunliffe (2002), an intellectual critique may lead to feelings of helplessness and disempowerment as management students realize that they are not in a position to force a social change.

Cunliffe’s (2002) stance echoes Mezirow’s (1998) distinction between *objective reframing* and *subjective reframing*. Although Mezirow holds a different view of reflection (i.e. process-based, cognitive) and uses different terminologies, he appears to

concur with Cunliffe (2002), Carson and Fisher (2006), and Raelin (2007) that critical engagement is *personal* and involves *a change*<sup>6</sup>. For Mezirow (1998:192), examining “... the validity of concepts, beliefs, feelings or actions being communicated to you ... by assessing the truth or justification of taken-for-granted assumptions” is a form of objective reframing. Subjective reframing means examining own assumptions which are the specific reasons for limiting ones’ own lens and the constitutive conditions of formation of one’s experience and beliefs (Mezirow, 1998).

In her view, Cunliffe (2002) argues that the possibility of a change is improved if critical educators encourage reflexive engagements in their classrooms. Reflexivity, according to Cunliffe (2002), entails attending to our own, often unacknowledged representations and assumptions of realities, working from within our (lived) experience. In this sense, a student learns, talks, and thinks in more ‘embodied’ ways (Cunliffe, 2002). By more embodied ways, Cunliffe means an ‘inside-out’ approach. That is, a speaker (or writer) in a reflexive conversation starts with incorporating self in a lived experience (Cunliffe, 2004); incorporating own feelings, assumptions, actions, or knowledge in talking about the here and now experience.

This view on reflexivity brings to mind Alvesson and Willmott’s (1996) micro-emancipation project. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) suggest that micro-emancipation entails becoming more critical towards micro-practices; day-to-day practices. In a management classroom, micro-emancipation means that students are becoming reflexive in the way they make sense of an experience; recognizing how their tacit suppositions influence the way they construct realities. So, if management students are able to break away from what they perceive as conventional and taken-for-granted, from what may bind them to a particular way of thinking, acting or talking, then they can make sense of others’ ways of thinking, acting, or talking. This then opens up possibilities for a change; to see things differently or to see different things (i.e. emancipatory learning). Managers who face issues in the full complexity of living; who act in the midst of conflicting values and interests and who need to be able to produce and communicate

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<sup>6</sup> Personal does not indicate that it must take place privately. The social element of a learning process is commonly emphasized by critical scholars in management education.

meaningful accounts of ill-defined situations, need educators to help them to open up to alternate ways to understanding and sensemaking.

In this study, reflexivity is seen as a form of critical engagement that leads to reflective, emancipatory learning in management classrooms; learning that can result in some form of a change on an individual level. This suggests that a critical engagement could take one of two forms. It is seen as an ‘intellectual critique’ when it involves students’ becoming critical in a *disembodied* sense. This means engagement in a critique, independent from one’s own personal involvement. A critical engagement is seen as an instance of ‘reflexivity’ when it entails students’ developing a more *embodied* critical stance in a lived experience that aims at change and so results in reflective, emancipatory learning.

Cunliffe’s (2002:51-52) quotes from two students’ papers are examples of a reflexive dialogue with self;

“.. As I worked through my struggles with regard to information sharing.....I have made several realizations...It is only through these realizations, and my learning through such, that I am better able to understand the dynamics of information sharing and am better prepared to move forward.”

“ .. A third example of our group’s talk constructing our sense of our situation is my use of the word “Have Fun” (written at the top of the group game plan). Actually, as I considered earlier in this paper, this is probably an example of when talk is ‘mis-used’ and outcome is a co-constructed reality that is *not shared*. Meaning that one portion of our groups (K and B) believed our reality was one thing and the other portion (me) believed it was another. The challenging part is that neither is necessarily *wrong*, but rather are simply two different realities”

Another example can be found in Carson and Fisher’s (2006:708-709) quotes from a student’s paper;

“I was able to uncover these assumptions which I had made about Oxfam as being an “inferior” organisation and about the “prestige” of working for the UN. These were clearly a result of my socio-cultural beliefs of how others would perceive me and the job I was undertaking. I understood that they emphasised reputation and recognition above other more tangible measures, had affected my perspectives and threatened to adversely affect my work attitude and contribution towards the organization. (Student 3)”

Hedberg (2009, 33-34) presents us with an excerpt from a student’s reflective paper at the end of term, and where a student reflects on his/her learning experience;

“I used to think, as long as we get our assignments done, and everyone participates, then the goal is accomplished. I was not excited about doing group work, because it made me feel like this is a standard in classrooms, we all have to do it, so just get your stuff done, and the goal is accomplished. . . .My whole perspective has changed now. I see group work as, first, a great opportunity to meet people; second, an opportunity to develop trusting relationships; third, an opportunity to become a better person; and fourth, an opportunity to gather the talents and resources others have to create something that I would never have been able to do on my own”

Cunliffe (2004:407), who quotes Pollner’s (1991) words, describes reflexivity as an ‘unsettling’; “an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality”. For Raelin (2007), it involves probing more deeply to question own assumptions and beliefs. The ability to develop a critical sense, according to Willmott (1994), rests with one’s ability to bracket conventional wisdom. To provoke reflexivity, educators may question students’ accounts of an experience, exposing contradictions and possibilities (Cunliffe, 2002). This suggests that breaking away from the way we conventionally perceive reality (and hence become reflexive) is not easy and does not occur naturally.

Cunliffe (2002), who draws on Chia (1996), proposes that reflexivity involves complexifying thinking or experience; a complicated understanding that increases the variety of ways an event can be understood (Bartunek et al., 1983; Dehler et al., 2001). Wittgenstein (1953, no. 144) describes what might be called “arresting moments” as directing our attention to something as yet unnoticed in our everyday talk that changes “our way of looking at things”. Shotter’s (1993:123) view of these instances echoes Wittgenstein’s arresting moments. Yet, Shotter uses the term ‘moving’ instead of ‘arresting’, arguing that these instances are meant to move individuals. Their function, Shotter (1993) continues, is to allow individuals to re-position themselves in relation to their situation, to re-see it in a new perspective. With this in mind, we can envisage these instances as involving a reflexive doubt. Thus, instigating reflexive doubt is meant to ‘move’ students in management classrooms. This involves broadening their perspectives; becoming aware of others’ realities and Otherness; recognizing that their own realities are partial, influenced by their own taken-for-granted.

In this sense, reflexivity in management classrooms implies not only that students are given the opportunity to speak their own views and perspectives, but that students have

also developed an ability to listen to others' voices. Promoting reflexivity can, thus, surface disagreements and disputations among management students. This diversity of views and perspectives amongst students is not directed towards the articulation of a phenomena as 'it is' or as 'it should be', but toward the possibilities of a phenomenon. As Wittgenstein (1953, no.90) puts it,

"...our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the *'possibilities'* of phenomena"

Earlier, I have reviewed some of the ideas and practices associated with networked learning pedagogy which, according to McConnell et al. (2012), corresponds to areas of critical pedagogy, and democratic and experiential learning in online learning settings. This then is used to connect a networked learning approach in online classrooms to CME argument about the nature of learning in face-to-face management classrooms, and where the importance of reflective learning is emphasized. In this section, I have argued that there are different forms of reflective learning; reflection, intellectual critique, and reflexivity. These three forms of reflective learning constitute this study's focus in the context of an online MBA classroom and are defined in ways that echo Cunliffe's (2002) approach to this form of management learning.

All three forms of reflective learning require engagement with an experience. However, only developing reflexive doubt is seen as a vehicle for reflective, emancipatory learning, which can result in some form of a change on an individual level. In this sense, reflexivity promotes a micro-emancipatory intent in management classrooms, helping students become aware of the way their taken-for-granted assumptions influence their sensemaking and realities. In instances of reflexivity, students talk in more embodied ways about a lived experience. Reflexive instances are seen as 'moving moments' or 'arresting moments', in which students are able to voice their views as well as hear other voices in disputation to theirs'. Reflexivity entails (a) an unsettling of own assumptions and /or perspective, (b) an embodied way of talking, incorporating self in a lived experience, and (c) a change.

This study, thus, examines the potential of online, asynchronous learning environment to promote CME in online MBA classrooms, but remains specifically focused on

examining forms of reflective learning as outlined here rather than attending to issues as power, access, and inclusion. The latter issues are commonly examined in the tradition of a networked learning approach (Hodgson et al., 2012).

In CME literature, critical scholars offer a number of proposals and approaches for developing criticality in their classrooms. However, as we may expect, it is not often easy for students to engage in reflective, emancipatory learning. In the next section, I discuss some of the difficulties that the critical scholar encounters in instigating criticality in their classrooms.

### **C. Some Difficulties with Reflective Learning in Management Classrooms**

Critical educators report difficulties in promoting criticality in their classrooms (e.g. Currie and Knights, 2003; Hagen et al., 2003; Carson and Fisher, 2006; Sinclair, 2007; Dehler, 2009; Hedberg, 2009). It is often argued that reflexivity does not suit everybody and that some students find it difficult to engage in critical practices. For instance, Carson and Fisher (2006) note that one fourth of their students tend to describe rather than critically engage with an experience. While some management students realize the potential in their critical engagements, others may avoid or resist becoming a critical being. Research shows that reflexivity entails a side effect i.e. a dark side (Brookfield, 1994).

It is often argued that attempts to introduce critical thinking to MBA programmes quite often meets with strong opposition (Reynolds, 1999). Challenging assumptions and beliefs can lead to feelings of uncertainty, discomfort, vulnerability and defensiveness (Bowen et al., 1988; Cunliffe, 2002). Gray (2007) contends that calling one's long-established belief systems into question can lead to anxiety and a sense of identity loss (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992), as well as fear, resentment and feelings of being intimidated (Brookfield, 1987). Antonacopoulou and Gabriel (2001), and Gilmore and Anderson (2011) agree that in learning situations which entail challenging previously learned ideas, assumptions and own values, 'anxiety' can be translated into feelings of uncertainty and discomfort.



Furthermore, Reynolds and Trehan (2001) concur with Vince (1998) that there is 'no learning without anxiety' where differences (e.g. race, gender, values, beliefs... etc) among participants in an educational setting are evident. Emotions can also interfere with management students' learning, either to hinder or promote it (e.g. Vince, 1998; Brown, 2000).

From another perspective, Hedberg (2009) expresses her concern of too much reflexivity in classroom. Students, Hedberg (2009) continues, may develop a sense that they need to question every assumption and practice and never reach a conclusion. These assertions about the relationship of learning and emotions suggest that even though we may not be concerned with exploring emotions in a learning experience, its potential influence cannot be easily dismissed from our interpretations. Indeed this study is not the place to discuss emotions at length - this has been done elsewhere (see for e.g. Bowen et al., 1988; Fineman, 1997; Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Vince, 2006; 2010), but it suffices to suggest that its influence on the nature of learning in management classrooms cannot be escaped.

Enacting criticality in management classroom is not an easy job for the teachers themselves as it requires skills that may not be present (Gray, 2007). Raelin (2007) identifies a set of tasks that critical educators should be able to do to facilitate their students' learning, including asking probing questions instead of questions with preconceived answers, acknowledging their ignorance instead of masking it, inviting students to ask genuine questions to bring out the collective knowledge of everyone, promoting diversity instead of seeking consensus on a controversial topic, and reinforcing the value of student's practice-knowledge. Although Raelin's (2007) views seem to reinforce collaborative learning settings and participative approaches, he does not discuss teachers' roles in facilitating classroom dialogue. This is an aspect that is emphasized in Cunliffe's (2002) and Ramsey's (2008) views.

Cunliffe (2002) stresses the importance of teachers being aware of their influence on classroom dialogue, arguing that it is their responsibility to develop a learning environment which encourages reflective learning through classroom dialogue. This requires an ability to influence what happens next in a conversation through generating

ideas to engage students (Ramsey, 2008). Dey and Steyaert (2007:454) assert that educators need to cultivate 'entrepreneurial imagination' in their classrooms. This involves, according to the authors, promoting students' imagination and creative potential in order to accommodate new ideas and concepts. In the spirit of Shor's (1993) views, teachers need to be skilled in relating to their students' talk in ways that would create 'moving moments' for them. For Grey et al. (1996), teachers need to be able to point out continuities and discontinuities between students' experiences and theory. On these views, critical educators need to be skilled in more than conventional lecturing, and/or communicating.

The role of teachers can also embed enormous amount of tension and difficulties (Dehler, 2009). Teachers may feel so threatened by having to forgo their positions as experts or authority in the classroom that they remain wedded in their conventional teaching (Currie and Knights, 2003). Reynolds and Trehan (2001) point to the fiction of teacher and student's equality in attendance to teachers' facilitation role. Reynolds (1999) argues that teachers need to be aware of the inconsistencies between any critical position they espouse and their practices. For instance, teachers' practices in terms of sharing expertise, assessing the performance of students (Cunliffe, 2002), and assessing participation in classroom dialogue rather than allowing participation to be given freely (Mingers, 2000), suggest that a teacher's control over the learning process is not nonexistent. In similar vein, Reynolds and Trehan (2001) assert that the students-teacher relationship is certainly not equal. However, these claims about the tensions in students-teacher relationship and the authority vested in teachers' role do not nullify the benefits of moving towards less hierarchical; non-lecture based teaching approaches (Mingers, 2000). It may not be ideal, but justification can be found in encouraging active engagements in management classrooms, instead of a passive reception of expert knowledge.

Some report that moving toward less hierarchical classroom designs can be problematic to MBA students from different (i.e. non-UK) cultural backgrounds (Griffiths et al., 2005), and hence inhibit the realization of a critical pedagogy in classrooms (Currie and Knights, 2003). It is often argued that the influence of a passive educational context,

which promoted learning in terms of memorizing and recalling facts, may be difficult to overcome in teaching international, postgraduate students (Gutiérrez, 2002; Griffiths et al., 2005). In Currie and Knights' (2003) study, one student from South-East Asia described engagement in classroom dialogue as "a complete cultural shock". Others find it quite daunting to challenge Western management thinking when all they want from joining a UK MBA programme is to 'be(ing) socialized into Western thinking' (Currie and Knights, 2003:38). Gutiérrez (2002) observes that even though students engage in classroom dialogue they may listen to and address the expert's (i.e. teacher's) voice, ignoring their peers' voices and perceiving them as 'ignorant'. Students, Gutiérrez (2002) continues, may come to classroom with a fixed idea about their inferior role.

Currie and Knights (2003) claim that 'students' instrumentalism' cannot be completely eradicated and that instrumentalism can still find its way in, to the extent that their students appear to go along with what they are asked to do albeit for instrumental reasons. There is also the issue of language for MBA students whose first language is not the English language. Griffiths et al. (2005) claim that international students studying for their MBA in an unfamiliar language can experience feelings of anxiety, frustration and anger. Griffiths and her associates also argue that most MBA students wear masks of happiness, self-confidence, and assertiveness to conceal these feelings. A lack of work experiences (Dehler, 2009) or the inability to relate a theory or a concept to own experience (Gutiérrez, 2002), is another reported obstacle that hinders the realization of criticality in management classrooms.

In this section I have reviewed some of the difficulties and challenges that can obstruct the realization of criticality and reflective learning in management classrooms. These difficulties include the nature of students and their cultural backgrounds, teachers' practices and skills, and feelings of anxiety that accompany teaching and learning differently. This suggests that although a learning environment (synchronous or asynchronous) can be designed in a way to encourage criticality in classrooms, it may not always work. The next section discusses scholars' proposals and approaches that can broadly be considered critical, involving a critically-informed curriculum and process.

#### **D. Approaches and Tools in Reflective Learning**

Following the review of the forms of reflective learning and scholars' reported difficulties in their attempt to promote criticality in management classrooms, I explore in this section tools and approaches to induce reflective learning in management classrooms. According to Sinclair (2007), there is an extensive discussion of approaches that can be broadly considered critical in management education research. However, what this section aims at is to offer an overview of the different approaches proposed for enacting criticality. It is not meant to list all critical management scholars' proposals. The literature points out that reflective learning needs to be deliberately designed into classroom/programme structure, and that a student's ability to engage in reflective, emancipatory learning is context-dependent.

I find Reynolds' (1999; 1999a) categorization of different approaches to CME, which is originally proposed by Giroux (1981), useful in reviewing the teaching approaches presented in this section. This involves a critically-informed process (process-focused hereafter) and a critically-informed curriculum (content-focused hereafter). Reynolds' categorization is commonly referred to in the field of CME (e.g. Dehler et al., 2001; Currie and Knights, 2003; Perriton, 2009). The main difference between these teaching approaches lies in whether the critical educator would consider a critical content (e.g. a syllabi that covers issues of power, identity, ethics, and gender), particular teaching methods and tools (e.g. classroom dialogue, reflective journals, reflective papers), or both to enact criticality in the classroom. Reynolds (1999:173) proposes that critical pedagogy involves the following principles, which are reflected in course content, teaching process and methods, or both:

- questioning the assumptions and taken-for-granted embodied in both theory and professional practice;
- making clear power relations and vested interests subsumed within the social fabric structures and practices;
- confronting claims of rationality and objectivity;
- an underlying aim that is emancipatory– the realization of a more just society based on fairness and democracy;

- acknowledging the authority of experience in developing ideas and appreciating the social nature of experience (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001).

Cunliffe (2004), who cites Freire's work, advocates a critical teaching approach that includes three elements; *critical thinking* provoked within a *classroom dialogue* with the intent to cause a *change*. Cunliffe (2002; 2004) suggests the use of classroom activities, critical reflexive journals, and classroom dialogue to provoke reflection in management classrooms. According to Reynolds' categorization, Cunliffe (2002; 2004) advocates a process-focused teaching approach within a conventional curriculum. Cunliffe (2002) argues that written case-studies in conventional management education can be looked at as 'stories'. Stories can be used as triggers; not to impart objective information, but to allow management students to engage with it and tell their own stories/experience in their reflective conversations with the self (as in the use of a reflective journal) or with others in a classroom dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002). In this sense, case studies are not used to endorse the acceptance of decontextualised, analytical techniques and/or concepts.

Watson (2001) and Ramsey (2005; 2008) support a similar approach. Watson (2001) emphasizes the role of stories and classroom dialogue to involve management students and educators in the learning process. He promotes bringing together accounts of their various experiences and observations, and working together using, where appropriate, academic concepts and theories to draw out any possible 'story behind the stories' which can inform practices in managerial contexts. While sharing their stories from their practices and organizations, Ramsey (2005) argues that management students are offered a different lens to look at the story they are telling. Story telling consists not only of how we tell the story, but of how it is received and interpreted by others (Ramsey, 2005). Thus, core to this approach is the idea that stories about experiences and practices (i.e. reflections) are told within a collaborative learning setting. Ramsey (2005) goes on to explain that these narratives create spaces for differences to be evoked without demanding a reduction to one truth. A 'provocative' pedagogy, according to Ramsey (2008), entails creating dialogic opportunities through classroom activities whereby

theory and research are treated as provocations rather than a way to finalize students' learning.

Drawing on her teaching practices, Hedberg (2009) advises management educators to allow room for reflection on the learning experience itself more than once in the classroom and in different forms. Hedberg (2009) suggests that an educator can take few minutes in the middle of a classroom activity to ask how a particular activity is going. In small group discussions for instance, questions could include: Who is acting as the manager of your group? Why do you say this? Who is the leader? How are they acting differently from a manager? If there is no manager or leader, how are you accomplishing your goals? At the end of a session, Hedberg (2009) continues, educators can ask students to reflect on their reactions to what they have experienced, while their impressions are still forming. Hedberg argues, among others (e.g. Watson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2005), that management students' sharing of their reflections in a collaborative setting can be beneficial to management learning and may result in interpersonal or cultural understanding.

Relevant to Reynolds' (1999) perspective is Mingers' (2000) content- and process-focused critical pedagogy. Mingers (2000) explains how course material is designed to illustrate different forms of questioning (rhetoric, tradition, authority, and objectivity) and that course delivery included no lectures in what he called 'a student-centered environment'. In this classroom's setting, management students are assessed based on their participation in classroom dialogue, presentations, and responses to essay questions. Mingers (2000) explains a classroom activity in which undergraduate students are asked to apply their understanding of different forms of questioning in course material to real situations that were put together as case studies. In similar vein, Dehler et al. (2001) argue that critical pedagogy should involve both de-centering power in classroom – where teachers and students recognize that all issues are contestable and engage in a common journey toward understanding, and a critical curriculum. Others who share Reynolds' (1999) emphasis on a critical content in course curriculum and classroom dialogue include Sinclair (2007) and Dehler (2009).

In an internship programme, Carson and Fisher's (2006) approach relied on the use of a combination of lecturing, which focused on helping students distinguish between values, beliefs and assumptions, and classroom activities to promote reflective learning. Classroom activities included modeling reflection in classroom and using exemplars of reflective learning from students' work in other courses, encouraging the use of personal journals as well as reflection in pairs, classroom discussion and feedback.

Currie and Knights (2003), while agreeing with Reynolds' view of a critical pedagogy, argue that adopting a process-focused pedagogy is an essential starting point. The authors claim that a process-focused pedagogy in an MBA programme is meant to promote classroom dialogue, pluralism and differences. They argue that in applying this approach, there are 'no right or wrong answers' whether that be through the authority of a teacher or a textbook (Currie and Knights, 2003). Yet, Currie and Knights' (2003) findings echo claims that a process-focused critical pedagogy within a conventional curriculum can fall short of achieving its potential (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999), and that international students who are unfamiliar with participative approaches and critical thinking find it difficult to challenge images of teacher as 'the' expert and management knowledge as 'the' legitimate knowledge.

Reynolds (1999) concurs with Grey et al. (1996) that a process-focused pedagogy fails to problematize management knowledge which it seeks to transmit. It offers, Grey and his associates argue, little opportunity for management students "to develop imaginative or creative insights about their work and, are more likely to seek out the 'least effort path' to attaining a degree" (p.102). Carson and Fisher (2006) raise a similar concern when one fourth of their students tended to describe their experience rather than engage with it reflexively. The authors assert that promoting reflective learning in a conventional educational environment that asks students to confirm and adhere to the status quo could be a risky path that students may feel reluctant to pursue.

However, these arguments against the use of a process-focused pedagogy are challenged by other critical educators. For instance, Cunliffe (2002; 2004) was able to help her management students become reflexive through the use of classroom dialogue and reflective papers/journals whilst using a conventional curriculum. Others propose tools

such as the use of metaphors and concept mapping to provoke criticality in management classrooms (Gray, 2007).

To sum up, scholars' proposals to invoke criticality in classroom suggest that (a) reflective learning needs to be deliberately and purposefully built into the classroom/programme structure, and (b) instigating criticality in classroom is context-dependent. Whilst some scholars report that their students' become more critical (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Carson and Fisher, 2006), others report difficulty in enacting criticality (e.g. Currie and Knights, 2003).

However, Hay and Hodgkinson's (2008) findings seem to suggest that a form of CME in an MBA programme can operate, if only *accidentally*. In their study, management students spoke of their learning experience as "opening eyes", "getting a wider perspective". The authors, who cite Cunliffe's (2002) view of reflexivity, claim that the learning process allowed a space for the questioning of self, where students challenge given ways in which they have come to see themselves;

"I suppose the confidence to share and approach things and challenge things. Whereas two years ago I would have been mortified if somebody thought what I said was stupid or whatever. So I have obviously grown a huge amount in my own confidence and ability" (Communications manager).

(Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008: 30)

Furthermore, the majority of the outlined approaches to critical pedagogy in management classrooms share an emphasis on students' experiences (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Currie and Knights, 2003) and the use of classroom dialogue as the dominant vehicle for a process-focused pedagogy (e.g. Mingers, 2000; Watson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2008; Hedberg, 2009). The next section in this literature review goes on to elaborate on the role of classroom dialogue in promoting management students' learning and in relation to Cunliffe's (2002) and Shotter and Cunliffe's (2003) idea of co-authorship.

## **VI. Classroom Dialogue and Authorship in Management Learning**

Above I have outlined how perceptions of online learning as a dialogic construction of knowledge leads us to re-consider the role of online students as knowledge constructors,



and that a networked learning pedagogy, which promotes online learning environments as platforms to foster criticality and emancipation, echoes critical scholars' perspectives on management students' learning in face-to-face classrooms. In this sense, I have argued that the potential of online MBA classrooms to promote criticality can be examined using our understanding of CME scholars' perspectives and approaches to promote reflective learning in their face-to-face classrooms. The aim of this section is to point out that currently we do not have literature that takes an overtly critical and dialogic approach to the facilitation of online classroom dialogue, and that CME literature can offer us (again) some insights onto teachers' facilitation role which aims at promoting reflective learning amongst students.

In a report titled "*Quality Issues in Distance Learning*", the AACSB International's Distance Education Task Force emphasises the importance of having faculty members who understand the shifts in their roles when teaching online (AACSB, 1999). A number of studies in distance learning argue that the role of online tutors is concerned with engaging students, facilitating collaborative learning, and providing guidance, feedback and support (e.g. Nijhuis and Collis, 2000; Ricketts et al., 2000; Coppola et al., 2002; Easton, 2003). Leidner and Javenpaa (1995) were among the first to suggest that online management teachers/tutors need to adjust their teaching paradigm to better fit the characteristics of the medium (May and Short, 2003). However, research into the nature of teachers' roles in facilitating online classroom dialogue appears to be populated with different insights (Dysthe, 2002), which transgress the image of online tutors as knowledge dispensers in virtual classrooms. Online tutors appear to facilitate a polyphonic setting, in which online students co-construct meanings in their responses to each other in online classroom dialogue.

For instance, Anderson et al. (2001) describe facilitating online classroom dialogue as supporting and encouraging participation by modeling appropriate behavior and commenting on students' responses, encouraging learners who participate less, and holding back particular groups from dominating discussions. Salmon (2000) asserts that the role of an online tutor shifts from a traditional content transmitter to a facilitator of the *construction of meanings*. The role of online tutors, according to Salmon (2000:494),

is to “engage their students so that the knowledge they construct is usable in new and varying situations”. Ramsey (2003), reflecting on her own online teaching experience, claims that online tutors need to position themselves and their students as *co-learners*. This stance, according to Ramsey (2003), involves limiting an online tutor’s presence as an expert who has the authoritative words. Ramsey (2003) perceives an online tutor as a companion, sharing struggles and encouraging students’ participation. Similarly, Brower (2003), and Arbaugh et al. (2009) suggest that online tutors should promote students’ discovery - and not be tempted to dispense wisdom - and only intervene when a redirection is needed. Brower (2003) advocates a ‘silence is golden’ principle in her facilitation of online dialogue but recognizes that the absence of visual cues and body language can place an online tutor at a disadvantage, unable to observe students’ reactions during their classroom engagements.

These are all thoughtful attempts showing how online tutors draw on social constructionist assumptions of learning to change their teaching practices. However, there is little literature that takes an overtly critical or dialogic approach to online facilitation in management classrooms. For instance, Redpath (2012) argues that facilitating online dialogue can involve promoting the exploration of ideas, probing and reflection and summarizing discussions. Hay et al. (2004) describe the role of online tutors as promoting reflective learning. With these limited attempts to adopt a more critical perspective onto online facilitation, we can draw some insights from CME literature, where perspectives on the roles of both the teacher and their students appear to be well-established.

Holman et al. (1997:143) assert that management students learn better through “a responsive, rhetorical and argumentative process that has its origins in relationship with others”. This means that participative, less hierarchical educational settings are encouraged (Reynolds, 1999), and that the roles of both the teacher and the student need to be altered (Dehler et al., 2001). As students are becoming active constructors of their own knowledge and meanings (Dehler, 2009), educators are providing ‘a space’ for their students’ learning (Dehler et al., 2001). As argued in a networked learning pedagogy, Cunliffe (2002) and Raelin (2007) agree that teaching in a face-to-face participative

setting is a form of 'facilitation'. Dialogue, debate and discussion are crucial vehicles to thinking critically and differently in management classrooms (Cunliffe 2002; 2009). Currie and Knights (2003) assert that changing the role of management educators involves advocating pluralism and difference in the classroom. Their view echoed Grey and Mitev (1995), who assert that teachers should expand rather than restrict the ways in which students regard the world.

Raelin's (2008:521) view of the classroom dialogue as a vehicle for the "creative interaction of contradictory and different voices" is helpful here; delineating possibilities of learning in a democratic setting in which different perspectives and views are voiced. He claims that newly constructed knowledge is an endpoint of a process of dialogue and engagement. For Hedberg (2009), if all of the reflective learning in classroom is designed to be done privately, in isolation from others in the classroom, then students will miss the opportunity to learn from others. Hence, the image of a classroom as being dominated by the sole voice of an expert teacher is replaced by another which envisages classrooms as a polyphonic setting (Ramsey, 2008) constructed by participants' multiple voices (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin, a Russian philologist, uses the term monologism to describe a situation where a speaker's voice dominates and his/her discourse is authoritative, demanding allegiance from his/her listeners (Bakhtin, 1981). This, then, fits in with a knowledge transmission model of teaching and where a teacher acts as the sole knowledge expert in classroom.

In the polyphonic classroom, knowledge construction is neither referring to teachers' or theory's talk nor to students' implicit knowledge, but rather to a 'knowing of the third kind' (Shotter, 1993) or meanings co-constructed in joint action. Center to the view of the polyphonic classroom is the attention given to the dialogic practices of teachers and their influence on the kind of learning that is taking place in management classrooms (Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2008). Cunliffe (2002) argues that teachers should create 'dialogic opportunities' in their conversations with students and should themselves, act as learners. What Cunliffe means is that teachers should use students' conversations to trigger reflective learning. She explains from within her teaching practice how she was able to shift a conversation from a simple reflection on the validity of Maslow's

hierarchy of needs in interpreting an experience of working in a team to a reflexive one about the nature of theories in general and the assumptions that they represent reality (Cunliffe, 2002).

A polyphonic classroom is, thus, different from a student-centered one, in that the former requires all voices (i.e. of both the teacher and students) to share responsibility in the learning process. As such, Cunliffe (2002) proposes that learning in management (polyphonic) classrooms is better viewed through the lens of co-authorship. Authorship means that management students and teachers “are collaborators... in (classroom) conversations in which everything is prospective learning” (Cunliffe, 2002:48, my bracket). Both teachers and management students are partners, and play active roles in the learning process (Cunliffe, 2002).

The notion of managers as practical authors is traced back to Shotter’s (1993) work (Holman et al., 1997; Cunliffe, 2001). Shotter (1993:148) claims that management is not only about reading situations from different perspectives. It is also about producing meaningful accounts to what may seem to others as ill-defined, complex, and chaotic-like situations (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). The authors explain the essence of authorship in terms of an individual’s ability to make sense to others in his/her talk;

“ practical authors speak in such a way that other participants can creatively respond in their own unique way but in ways that still make sense to all those involved”.

(Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003:17)

It is in this sense of authorship that I speak of teachers and management students as practical co-authors, sharing responsibility in the dialogic process of learning (Cunliffe, 2002). From a CME stance, practical authors are those whom in their conversations with others in the classroom, engage in reflective dialogic practices in a way that make sense to others. However, good (reflexive) authors are also good ‘listeners’: are able to see something new or ‘moved’ by others’ responses to them (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). In the classroom, good authors are students or teachers whose reflective, emancipatory learning opens up for them a possibility for change.

The next and final section is set to offer the reader an overview of this study’s focus and purpose, and in commitment to the literature review carried out in this chapter. It points

to a potential research gap, using the ideas of Shotter (1993; 1996; 2006) and Cunliffe (2002; 2002a; 2008) to define reflective learning in the context of an online MBA classroom dialogue and propose Bakhtin's work to guide its investigation and so set the foundation for this study's methodology.

## **VII. Empirical Illustrations of Reflective Learning in Management Classrooms**

Following the review outlined in this chapter, critics tend to relegate online management programmes to passive learning environments, in which students learn on their own with little real-time interaction that would allow for the kind of dialogic learning that is a prerequisite for reflective learning. Yet, the availability of online courses has grown steadily over the past two decades. In the context of online MBA programmes, there is an urgent need to investigate the potential of virtual classrooms to promote dialogic, reflective learning in the sense argued by critical education scholars and hence, develop an understanding of whether these settings can respond to wider concerns about management education. There is a growing stream of online management learning research which argues that learning in online classrooms can be dialogic (e.g. Koschmann, 1999; Dysthe, 2002; Mitra and Watt, 2002; Ferreday et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008). However, these efforts did not consider the nature of this dialogic learning in relation to reflective learning.

The majority of efforts in CME examine reflective learning from within the insights of theoretical concepts (e.g. Mezirow, 1998; Reynolds, 1998; 1999). Theory is a good starting point to develop our understanding of features of CME; how it is different from conventional teaching approaches, and why its proponents claim it is more relevant to management practice and education. Yet, equally important is gaining insights about what a management student *becoming more (or less) critical* entails and in the context of an online MBA classroom.

Studies, which are concerned with the nature of reflective learning as experienced by students, are relatively few. In investigating students' learning experience, the majority of CME studies in face-to-face classrooms sought students' perspectives on their learning experience and most often through the use of in-depth interviews (e.g. Currie

and Knights 2003; Griffiths et al., 2005; Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008). Others presented ethnographic accounts of their own teaching experience, where they reflect on the learning experience through their engagement with their students (e.g. Gutiérrez, 2002; Sinclair, 2007; Hedberg, 2009; Gilmore and Anderson, 2011). Few presented us with accounts of students' reflections from within students' assessed work or as experienced by students in classroom (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006). In the latter stream, the authors exemplified the nature of their students' reflective learning by collecting data from and analyzing students' (reflection) papers. In Rigg and Trehan's (2004) study, the authors also present us with an excerpt from classroom dialogue to exemplify reflexivity as provoked in students' speech communication. The excerpt conveys an example of participants' talk about how they have adjusted their self-perceptions or perceptions of others and have consequently made changes to how they relate with others. However, none of these studies presented a rigorous framework (or a set of indicators) that could be used to interrogate data in investigating students' reflective learning. In the absence of such a framework, the question is raised: How can we contribute to this growing stream of research which seeks knowledge of reflective learning as experienced by students in classrooms?

We may want to attend to Shotter's (2006) "Witness-Thinking" research approach. Shotter (2012) appears skeptical of gaining a detached understanding of social phenomenon from a distance. He argues that researchers should not attempt to dissociate data from its natural setting. His argument for a "Witness-Thinking" research approach as a way of generating knowledge stems from a relational social constructionist stance, where the focus is on interactions as a vehicle of meanings co-constructed in relation to and with others.

"Instead of immediately focusing upon how individuals come to know the objects and the entities in the world around them, we are becoming more interested in how people first develop and sustain certain *ways* of relating themselves to each other in their talk, and then, from within these ways of talking, make sense of their surroundings".

(Shotter, 1993:2)

This points to a '*no I without you*' view of the world (Shotter, 1989). That is, "what any one individual is doing is part of what a 'we' is doing" (Shotter, 1996:297). Shotter

(1996) claims that our individualistic notions of understanding leave this dialogic nature; that everything we do in practice is a response to an other or otherness in our surrounding, unnoticed in the background. Shotter (1996), who cites Wittgenstein's words (1953, no.89-90), claims that individuals tend to seek understanding of a phenomenon as a fact, a status quo in plain view rather than possibilities of a phenomenon.

In similar vein, Cunliffe (2002a:130) proposes a 'dialogic' approach in management inquiry, describing an approach concerned with our responsive interactions and where meanings are created as language plays through us in moment-to-moment interactions;

"...how we create meaning through our everyday discursive practices, that is, our moment -to-moment, responsive interaction in particular social contexts".

Cunliffe's view reveals an 'intersubjectivity'; a focus on the micro-processes of how participants shape meaning between themselves in their responsive dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002a; 2008). Our understanding of our surroundings (or our realities), Cunliffe (2008) continues, is intersubjective; "continually emerges in (our) relationally responsive interaction with others", because "we are always selves-in-relation-to-others" (p.130-129, my bracket). This means, according to Cunliffe (2002a), we tend to shape our realities, meaning, and selves in our conversations with others. If this is the case, participants' understanding provoked from within conversations is situational. This implies, as Shotter (1993:19) calls it, participants' *situated knowing* or *practical knowing from* (within) or *knowing from the third kind*. That is, participants' understanding is influenced by their ability to carry on in their conversations; to react and respond in ways that connect to others and their surroundings (Wittgenstein, 1953; Shotter, 1996). In this sense, participants engaged in a conversation can be perceived as co-authors; creating meaning and discussing their sense-of-being in relation to and with others (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003).

Cunliffe (2002a) asserts that this view of the world incorporates a "language as ontology", rather than language as already-given representations. Language creates rather than represents reality (Holman and Thorpe, 2003). Words do not possess pre-existing, determinate, or rigorous meaning(s). Rather, words have meaning only in a

*living conversation* (Bakhtin, 1981), in the stream of life (Shotter, 1993). Drawing on Samra-Fredericks (2003), dialogue is packed with meaning construction, in which realities (or meanings) are constructed, re-constructed, and co-constructed. Learning as a dialogic process is, thus, *intersubjective* (continually emerging in students' relations to and with others in the classroom), *situational* (unique; depending on the moment of its occurrence and those involved), and *socially-constructed* (meanings are constructed in students' dialogue and interactions with others).

Accordingly, this study examines the dialogic responsive process of learning, developed within an online, text-based MBA classroom dialogue and where students' reflection on an experience, intellectual critique and reflexivity occurs as a part of this dialogic learning. In the context of this study, reflection on a social reality, an experience, or a situation is an attempt to connect theory to what is being reflected upon, and so offer a reading from within the insight of a theory. Engagement in intellectual critique is being critical of generalized other in disembodied ways. In this study, reflexive instances promote "different ways of seeing and interpreting issues and situations" (Cunliffe, 2002a; 2008:133).

So, the work of both Shotter (e.g. 2006) and Cunliffe (e.g. 2002a) can provide us with some guidance in devising an adequate research approach to fit in with our investigation of this dialogic reflective learning, but remains relatively silent on the aspect of creating a rigorous framework or a heuristic map on how to go about identifying cues that may indicate the kind of reflective learning we are after (i.e. reflection on experience, intellectual critique, and reflexivity).

What needs to be done is to construct a framework that could (a) help us understand and explain learning as a dialogic responsive process, and (b) offer us some indicators in investigating students' reflective learning that occurs as a part of this dialogic learning. In the next chapter, I propose a theoretical framework based on Bakhtin's (1981) notions of *polyphony* and *active understanding* to guide our investigation of learning as a process of joint meaning construction (i.e. dialogic) and the role of reflective learning that occurs as a part of it.



The work of the Russian social philosopher Michael Bakhtin appears in much of Shotter's writings about a 'Witness-Thinking' approach (2006; 2012) and conversational realities (1993), and also in Cunliffe's (2002; 2002a; 2008) proposals of a dialogic approach and notion of learning as a co-authorship. Holquist (2002:14) argues that dialogue is "an obvious master key to the assumptions that guided Bakhtin's work throughout his whole career". Bakhtin's interest in dialogue and meanings constructed in individuals' (speech and written) communications provide us with means to understand and explain learning as a dialogic responsive process. Also, Bakhtin's interests in examining the multi-voicedness of a setting, the dialogic construction of meanings, individuals becoming sensitive to others' voices and discourses, and the influence of an individual's social context such as background, values, religion, profession, age, etc. on his/her views account for Bakhtin's critical stance.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, concerned with the construction of meaning in interaction with others, Bakhtin (1981) examined 'texts', 'narratives', and/or 'novels', rather than seeking characters and authors' perspectives. Thus, his ideas and methodology fall within the realm of Shotter's (2006; 2012) 'Witness-Thinking' research approach which is adopted here and fits in well in examining a classroom dialogue that is asynchronous and text-based.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

With the steady growth in the number of online programmes, one broad objective of this study is to respond not only to negative perceptions of online management learning as passive, unreflective, and un-emancipatory but to wider concerns about management education. This study examines the potential of an online asynchronous MBA learning environment to promote reflective learning that is dialogic. Reflective learning, which is comprised of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity, is seen as higher level learning and its provocation in a classroom dialogue constitutes a shift from a conventional knowledge transmission model in teaching to a polyphonic classroom.

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware that this bears resemblance to the work of Habermas, but through my commitment to the above literature, I will trace these ideas further through the work of Bakhtin alone.

Reflective learning involves more than a mere understanding of theory and concepts. It is in this sense that reflective learning is described in the next chapter as denoting Bakhtin's (1981) idea of active understanding. Teachers and students are co-authors, sharing responsibility in the learning process. Students are encouraged to be active learners, rather than passive recipients of expert knowledge. In this study, the way reflective learning is perceived and defined is influenced by much of the work done by both Anne Cunliffe and John Shotter. Reflexivity, as one form of reflective learning, appears to pursue the emancipatory potential of critical theory in management classrooms. Reflexivity is meant to cause a change on an individual level which results in reflective, emancipatory learning in management classrooms. Reflexivity is seen as an opening-up process, where students speak in more embodied ways, bracketing their own conventional wisdom and broadening their perspectives.

The majority of approaches to promote reflective learning appear to be informed by a relational and dialogic perspective to learning/teaching. In particular, Cunliffe's (2001; 2002; 2002a; 2004) work stresses the importance of dialogue. This suggests the view of learning as a dialogic process (i.e. intersubjective, situational and socially-constructed). In attendance to the dialogic and responsive process of learning in an online MBA classroom, this study responds to Shotter's (2006) 'Witness-Thinking' approach to conduct research about a social phenomenon from within its natural setting. Although the work of Shotter (2006) and Cunliffe (2002a) inspires much of our understanding of an appropriate research approach to investigate online management learning, it does not offer us a set of indicators that may indicate the kind of reflective learning that is addressed in this study. In the next chapter, I construct and propose the use of a framework that is based on Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism which can offer us a way to indicate different forms of reflective learning.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### I. Introduction

In the Literature Review chapter, I reviewed perspectives on how management students should learn, and argued that reflective learning need to be explored as experienced by management students in classrooms. The literature review pointed out four issues. First, there are few empirical illustrations of criticality in management classrooms. Second, there is no available framework that would give insights on what to look for in investigating reflective learning from within its natural setting. Third, there is no mention of aspects of methodology outside of an intensely, interactive synchronous setting and where classroom conversations are text-based. Finally, although there is a growing stream of online learning research that have focused on the role of classroom dialogue, meaning construction, and students-tutor relations, fewer studies have focused explicitly on the potential of online learning environment to promote criticality/reflective learning in virtual management classrooms. As such, my research question is: *“Can an online, asynchronous MBA learning environment promote management students’ reflections? How can these instances be identified and conceptualized from within their online classroom conversations?”*

To carry out this investigation, I explained how Shotter’s (2006) ‘Witness-Thinking’ research approach and Cunliffe’s idea (2002a) of a dialogic approach in management inquiry inspired the way this study’s methodology was put together. Their work emphasises a third type of knowledge; a situated knowing or practical knowing from within (Shotter, 1993:16), which continually emerges in individuals’ interactions with others (Cunliffe, 2008). In this view, our realities, meaning, and selves are shaped in our conversations with others (Cunliffe, 2002a), and our conversations are packed with meaning construction (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). Following this stance, learning is perceived as a dialogic responsive process.

Also, I proposed the work of the Russian philosopher Michael Bakhtin to construct a framework to guide an investigation of reflective learning from within classroom dialogue and justified my choice in terms of four aspects. First, much of Bakhtin’s work

appears in the work of both Cunliffe (e.g. 2001; 2002; 2002a; 2008) and Shotter (e.g. 1993; 1996; 2006; 2012). Second, Bakhtin's work entails a consistent interest in dialogue (Holquist, 2002) and meaning construction, which fits in well with the perception of learning as a dialogic process. Third, his ideas of multi-voicedness, sensitivity to others' voices and views and the influence of a social context, amongst others, suggest a critical stance relevant to critical perspectives on management learning. Fourth, Bakhtin's methodology in examining texts and novels is adequate to the exploration of learning from within its natural setting (i.e. 'Witness-Thinking' approach), and where classroom conversations are text-based. In this chapter, I turn to show how Bakhtin's dialogism is used to construct the proposed theoretical framework to guide this study's investigation. Next, I describe my research design and include issues of access and some background information of this study's site.

According to Cunliffe (2002a), this study's approach can be broadly called a 'dialogic' approach. A case study method with ethnographic orientation is used. An ethnographic orientation implies the use of a combination of classroom observations and document analysis. The analysis includes the use of visual tools and a relational analysis of conversations. The proposed framework which is used in the relational analysis is deliberately presented prior to the study design section. I felt it essential to present it in this unusual sequence as the decisions of methods, data collection and analysis tools are influenced by the proposed framework.

In this chapter, I start with a review of dominant research methods in online management learning research. Next, I use the Bakhtinian themes of 'active understanding' and 'polyphony' to construct a theoretical framework which draws on Bakhtin's concepts of authoritative discourse, framing context, rhetoric discourse, and internal dialogism to investigate dialogic, reflective learning in an online MBA classroom. Later, I explain my study design, introduce my study's site and define my unit of analysis and analysis tools.

## **II. Dominant Research Methods in Online Learning Research**

The aim of this section is to review the research methods which have been used by a number of scholars mainly in the field of online management learning research. However, the distinctive combination of the asynchronicity of research site, research questions, proposed theoretical framework -as outlined in Chapter Two- and my ontological approach mean that I need to create a methodology that is equally distinctive and fit for the purpose of this study. As such, I will also review research methods from the broad field of management studies, in which participants' are perceived as constructing 'reality' (e.g. change, strategy, emancipatory learning) in their conversations. These studies focus on conversations among participants, echoing the ontological stance taken here.

Previous research in online management learning, in particular online MBA programmes, is predominantly occupied with objectivist methodologies and assumptions (Hodgson and Watland, 2004). In response to Hodgson and Watland's (2004) observation, Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich (2004) justify the dominance of objectivist methodologies in terms of the following: the need to test the efficiency and effectiveness of a relatively new educational environment, the nature of research questions, and pressures to publish in high-ranking academic journals favouring quantitative research designs.

Morgan and Smircich (1980) argue that the choice and adequacy of a method is closely related to the assumptions about the nature of phenomena under investigation and the knowledge a researcher seeks to generate. Following from this, this study aims at penetrating the learning process to explore the nature of dialogic, responsive learning, and the role of reflection in it. Thus, an investigation of a dialogic learning cannot be carried using objectivist methodologies, which portray learning as an outcome that can be assessed using some quantitative measures and indicators from the outside (e.g. Alavi et al., 1997; Arbaugh, 2000; 2000b; 2001; 2002; McGorry, 2002; Martins and Kellermanns, 2004; Arbaugh, 2005; Marks et al., 2005; Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2007). Even though students' learning may be assessed in terms of engagement or disengagement in reflection, the mode of investigation does not clearly mirror this

critical stance. For instance, Hay et al. (2004) investigate aspects of reflective learning in an online learning environment, but share with the above stream the use of objectivist methodologies and the broad interest in the effectiveness of online learning environment. In their study, Hay et al. (2004) collected data using a survey posted to MBA students and run some statistical tests. In their findings, the authors claim that online learning environments promote reflective learning.

Another stream of online management learning research is concerned with gaining an understanding from outside the learning experience (i.e. Aboutness-Thinking approach). For instance, Salmon (2000) sought online tutors and management students' perspectives on their online learning/teaching experience. In collecting data from participants' written reflections after the online learning experience, Salmon (2000) sought an understanding from the outside of the experience. Another stream (e.g. Stacy, 1999; Yoo et al., 2002; Allan, 2007) uses a 'Witness-Thinking' approach in analyzing online students' texts to generate some themes, answering different research questions. Stacy (1999) describes the attributes which support both the social construction of knowledge and supportive environment for collaborative learning. Yoo et al.'s (2002) study is concerned with examining the efficacy of collaborative learning using discussion boards, and Allan (2007) explores issues of time vision and management within three online professional development and post-graduate programmes. These studies ignore the relational/dialogic nature of students' messages. In analysis, these studies focus on students' messages rather than on conversations as a unit of analysis. Accordingly, the relational, responsive element of students' learning is not considered. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) ideas, students' messages on a discussion forum are relational; seek to address a particular addressee. This idea of the 'relational nature of text' is important to this study as it suggests a mode of investigation in which students' messages are read from within the flow of a conversation between an addresser and an addressee.

Others presented us with their auto-ethnographic accounts of their own online teaching experience (e.g. Brower, 2003; Ramsey, 2003; Gilmore and Warren, 2007), equally drawing on their assessment of their students' learning based on their interaction with

students and engagement in the online learning process. These ethnographic accounts seek to develop an understanding of a phenomenon from within its natural setting and so respond to Shotter's (2006) 'Witness-Thinking' approach. However, there was neither an account of the dialogic learning process nor an explicit focus on the potential of online learning environment to promote reflection in virtual management classrooms.

Walker (2004) also adopts an ethnographic approach as he observes and analyzes students' asynchronous classroom conversations, to explain how online students handle conflicts situations to enable the process of meaning construction to proceed. For Walker, learning is a dialogic, responsive process. His study focuses on students' strategies to manage conflict rather than the process of meaning construction. Walker (2004) argues that students' strategies include complimenting, generalizing, and agreeing.

Other scholars use Bakhtin's work to investigate the learning experience in online learning environments, using mainly observation as a method for data collection from within. The importance of these studies lies in the way their research approach is influenced by Bakhtin's idea of the relational nature of text and hence, their analysis and interpretation of students' messages in relation to those that preceded them, and those that followed them. For instance, Dysthe (2002), who draws on Bakhtin's ideas of the dialogic construction of meaning and multi-voicedness, observes text-based conversations to investigate the potential of online learning environment in promoting higher level learning. Yet, she does not present us with an in-depth analysis of her participants' conversations in support of her claim that asynchronous classroom discussions contributed to students' higher learning. Ferreday et al. (2006) examine the ways in which the nature and the kind of classroom dialogue adopted (whether in online or face-to-face settings) contribute to constructing participants' identities within an MA programme. Whilst taking a critical stance, the authors use Bakhtin's ideas to show how participants' identities are socially constructed and/or negotiated through their relational dialogue. There is also Jones et al.'s (2008) study which observes two online learning environments that involved educational leaders exchanging ideas with the potential to create knowledge. The study applies a network perspective to characterize the types of

links that are made during the process of engagement in and through these two networks. The authors explain how Bakhtin's ideas of 'many voices in text' and the 'dialogic nature of utterance' were helpful in their investigation, and present their accounts of participants' dialogue in light of the adopted network perspective.

The next stream of research is one that broadly belongs to the management field (i.e. organization change, organization strategy, and management education), where authors examine different phenomena in offline settings. What is common in this combination of studies is that authors, according to Shotter and Billig (1998, cited in Cunliffe, 2001), appear to perceive *conversations* as vehicles in which participants construct meanings responsively and relationally in their interactions with others and their surroundings, and that *language* is creating rather than representing reality (Cunliffe, 2002a). For instance, Ford and Ford (1995) propose that the production of an intentional change in organizations takes place in members' conversations. Using an example of real change programme, Ford and Ford (1995) present their account of four types of conversations, where change is created, sustained, and managed in and by speech communications. Samra-Fredericks (2003a), observes and records strategists' every day conversations to show how strategists' use of language, forms of knowledge and modes of rationalities can shape strategic direction. Jacobs and Heracleous (2005) explore the role of managers' conversations in promoting a fundamental strategic innovation in a group workshop. Rigg and Trehan (2004), in their focus on the extent to which students' reflections fit in with the hopes of critical action learning, present an example of a classroom conversation, where students appear to adjust their self-perceptions or perceptions of others.

In this section, I reviewed different methods and approaches adopted in the field of online management learning and management studies in general. I have discussed authors' use of methods and approaches in conjunction with my ontological stance, view of learning and the proposed theoretical framework. I have argued that to carry out this investigation, there will be no use of objectivist methodologies which are most frequently used in online management learning research. This study is concerned with understanding and explaining learning as a process of meaning construction. This



implies that this study will focus on classroom conversations/dialogue. It is in the stream of research studies that perceive reality as constructed and co-constructed in individuals interactions and conversations (e.g. Ford and Ford, 1995; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; 2003a; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Walker, 2004; Jacobs and Heracleous, 2005) - that this study positions itself. Also, it is in the steam of research studies which draw on Bakhtin's work in investigating online learning (e.g. Dysthe, 2002; Ferreday et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008) - that this study aims to build on others' work. In both streams, the authors (a) used a case study approach to carry out some observations, and (b) analyzed and interpreted participants' conversations (in offline or online settings).

In the next section, I construct this study's theoretical framework drawing on Bakhtin's dialogism. To this end, I explain how the Bakhtinian concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse*, and *internal dialogism* will be used to indicate different forms of reflective learning in online classroom dialogue and so guides the process of data interrogation.

### **III. Constructing a Framework based on Bakhtin's Dialogism to Investigate Reflective Learning in an Online Classroom Dialogue**

In the Literature Review, I argued that empirical illustrations of what becoming more (or less) critical entails in management classrooms are limited and that currently there is no mention of a rigorous theoretical framework in the literature that would give insights on what to look for in investigating reflective learning from within its natural setting. I drew on Shotter's (1996; 2006; 2012) "Witness-Thinking" approach and Cunliffe's (2002a) dialogic approach to devise an adequate research approach, where learning is dialogic.

Now, I turn to use two themes in Bakhtin's (1981) work, namely *polyphony* and *active understanding*, which constitute the overarching themes of the framework constructed in this section. 'Active understanding' and 'polyphony' are interrelated themes; the former describes the nature of understanding and the latter describes the setting in which this understanding could be provoked. In the context of online management learning, these

themes can help us explain and understand learning as dialogically constructed and where reflective learning occurs as part of it.

To construct the proposed framework, I firstly elaborate on my understanding of Bakhtin's (1981) views on the conditions of a polyphonic setting to promote active understanding. Second, I illustrate how the notions of 'active understanding' and 'polyphony' mirror scholars' perspectives on management learning. Third, I elaborate on my use of Bakhtin's concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse* to detect different forms of reflective learning from within students' text-based classroom conversations.

### **A. Bakhtin's Dialogism; Polyphony and active understanding**

In his 'Discourse in the Novel' essay (1981), Bakhtin emphasizes the role of dialogue in creating spaces for the dialogic construction of meanings. For Bakhtin, to live means to participate in dialogue; to ask questions, heed, respond, or agree (Shotter, 1993:62). Bakhtin's use of the term dialogic is meant to capture what he assumed to be a *relational nature* of texts;

"... every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates it ..." (1981:280).

But dialogue, according to a Bakhtinian scholar Sue Vice (1997), is not reduced to Bakhtin's dialogism. Dialogism implies a willingness to listen and respond to your interlocutor in exchanging intentions, ideas and positions within the structure of a dialogue (Vice, 1997). Dialogism requires an active engagement with others' ideas and discourses and finding a way to relate to others. Bakhtin's dialogism, points out that an active engagement requires one to relate to the speaker's talk (or the writer's narratives) to either express his/her agreement or contestation. Bakhtin (1981) describes a narrator's active engagement as a movement beyond others' discourse, where the narrator's discourse is described as internally persuasive or double-voiced. In double-voiced discourse, the narrator uses his/her own words and intentions (i.e. own voice) to retell or assimilate others' words and discourse(s). What this implies is that Bakhtin believed in

the influence of others' discourses in shaping what an individual thinks is internally persuasive for him/her.

Bakhtin (1981) goes on to describe this narrator's understanding of others' discourses in this case as an *active understanding*. For Bakhtin, dialogism (or a dialogic orientation) implies narrator's active understanding as he/she relates to others. Bakhtin (1981:281) points out that a monologic orientation implies a passive understanding of others' words and discourses. For Bakhtin, a passive understanding - understanding that is purely receptive and contributes nothing new to the discourse - is "no understanding at all". Bakhtin views the whole process of engaging with others as oriented towards (active) understanding (Shotter, 1993), which consists of seeing and/or making connections between own practical activities and perspectives, and those of others.

Bakhtin notes that the coming together of the voices of the different individuals is essential to an individual's growth, development, or change (Freedman and Ball, 2004);

"The tendency to assimilate others' discourses takes an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives to determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior"

(Bakhtin, 1981: 342)

For Bakhtin, "ideological becoming" refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas (Freedman and Ball, 2004). Then, Bakhtin goes on to illustrate that the essential role others' discourses play in an individual's history is their potential to create a moment of struggle for him/her, and the new perspective or understanding that he/she gains out of it;

"The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous" (p. 348).

Thus, for Bakhtin achieving a new understanding or worldview is related to instances of struggle and tension with others' discourses. Following from this, we can claim that Bakhtin's dialogism involves a critical stance as it attends to others' discourses and Otherness.

Bakhtin argues that dialogism and *polyphony* operate together, where polyphony creates the condition for dialogism (Bakhtin, 1983; Vice, 1997). The word polyphony is rooted in Greek words ‘many voices’ (Vice, 1997). Bakhtin’s polyphony refers to the co-existence of multiple voices or multi-voicedness (Vice, 1997:112). Thus, a polyphonic setting is essentially a dialogic, democratic setting, which allows for the interaction of multiple voices through dialogue. Bakhtin, thus, describes polyphony in relation to the ‘autonomy’ with which voices express their viewpoints and perspectives. He believed in the co-existence of multiple voices with equal rights; “... a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world” (Bakhtin, 1984, quoted in Vice, 1997: 123).

Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic construction of meaning expands upon his views on active understanding and polyphony. Knowledge is perceived as dialogic in the sense that (new) meanings are co-constructed in the flow of participants’ discourse, dialogue, or conversations in a polyphonic setting. Knowledge creation, then, becomes a joint action between participants in a dialogue. In the dialogic construction of meaning, meanings are created out of past utterances and utterances are positioned in relation to one another (Vice, 1997). As Bakhtin (1981:91) puts it;

“every utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account”.

This Bakhtinian notion of dialogic knowing rejects assumptions that knowledge can be derived from monologic (i.e. single-voiced) conversations (Farmer, 1998: xiv). Thus, for Bakhtin knowledge is dialogic, created through the interaction of multiple voices in a polyphonic setting, rather than disseminated from one consciousness to another (or others).

In this section, I have outlined two themes in Bakhtin’s work, namely *active understanding* and *polyphony*. In the next section, I develop the link between these notions of active understanding and polyphony, and reflective learning in management classrooms.

## **B. Active Understanding and Polyphony in Management Learning**

Early in Literature Review, I presented and defined different forms of reflective learning in CME. In reflection, a social reality, an experience, or a situation is read from within the insight of a theory. Engagement in intellectual critique is being critical of generalized other in disembodied ways. Reflexivity is seen as an opening-up process; an instance of unsettlement of own assumptions and/or perspectives; bracketing of conventional wisdom; becoming aware of others' realities and Otherness. Now, I move on to illustrate how these three forms of reflective learning mirror Bakhtin's notion of active understanding.

According to Bakhtin (1981), a narrator's understanding is claimed active when his/her argument incorporates his/her own authentic voice, own intentions or experience, when relating to others. In a polyphonic classroom, students can relationally engage with others and others' discourses in a number of ways. A reflective student is an active learner (Hedberg, 2009); active in the process of knowledge creation (Dehler, 2009), rather than a passive recipient of expert knowledge transmitted by the sole voice of a teacher in the classroom. A student's active understanding exists as he/she negotiates others and textbooks' discourses, relating it to his/her own experience and making learning personal (Willmott, 1994; Hay et al., 2004) and meaningful (Holman, 2000). In reflection, a student is not simply repeating a textbook discourse or recalling theory. A student goes beyond others' discourses and theory as he/she introduces own experience (i.e. own voice) in his/her own discourse and so, the student's discourse become multi-voiced. Following from this, an engagement in reflection is a form of Bakhtin's active understanding. In similar vein, an intellectual critique and reflexivity can be seen as other forms of Bakhtin's active understanding.

In articulating his/her critique, a student is challenging an argument, taken-for-granted assumptions, the legitimacy of a perspective, or the validity of knowledge in others' discourse and/or texts (Mingers, 2000). This critical engagement implies a student's active understanding as he/she interrogates and opens up others' discourses and text to questioning.

If management students are observed questioning own actions and assumptions (Cunliffe, 2002); bracketing conventional wisdom (Willmott, 1994) in their classroom dialogue, then their understanding is said to be active. A reflexive doubt implies not only students' authentic voices in engaging with self and others, but also their ability to listen and respond to others' voices in their classroom dialogue. According to Vice (1997), listening to others' voices is another feature of Bakhtin's dialogism. Cunliffe (2004) argues that reflexivity, as a process of opening up to possibilities of change in ways of acting, talking or being, is concerned with granting voices (including ours) active roles. This could lead to instances of disagreements and disputations amongst students in classroom dialogue as they actively engage with each other's words and (different) views. In Bakhtin's language, these instances are essential for a students' 'ideologically becoming', to come to a new understanding, see something differently or see different things.

Therefore, whilst students' engagements in reflection, intellectual critique or reflexivity are different forms of reflective learning, they all are attempts to move beyond others' discourses and arguments, adding a new insight or meaning. These engagements present different forms of Bakhtin's active understanding, and so, exemplify Bakhtin's dialogism. Active understanding is not a simple comprehension of a textbook, theory, argument, or any other discourse. Neither is it a mere repetition of others' discourses and texts or an act of passively memorizing others' discourses and texts. In this sense, students' active understanding mirrors higher levels of learning. If this is the case, investigating the nature of students' reflection is an investigation of students' active understanding and dialogic orientation -as opposed to passive understanding and monologic orientation. This Bakhtinian phrase, 'active understanding', will be used deliberately to denote dialogic learning in which reflection, intellectual critique, or reflexivity occur as a part of it.

For students to be active learners engaging reflectively, in the sense outlined here, teachers need to construct a safe learning environment to promote these forms of engagements. This necessitates not only a change in the learning environment but also a change in students-teacher traditional relationship. In particular, the use of classroom

dialogue as a vehicle for debates and discussions (Holman et al., 1997; Cunliffe, 2002; 2009) and knowledge construction (Dehler, 2009) and the role of a teacher as a facilitator of pluralism and multi-voicedness (Currie and Knights, 2003) are emphasized in management classrooms. This should lead us to re-see management classrooms through the lens of Bakhtin's (1981) 'polyphony' or multi-voicedness, and dialogic learning through the lens of Cunliffe's (2002) 'co-authorship'. Bakhtin's idea of polyphony implies a multi-voiced, democratic setting which creates the 'condition' for active understanding (or reflective learning in this study) and dialogism.

In terms of study's design, the use of these two Bakhtinian themes to construct the proposed theoretical framework implied that I need to investigate this study's site looking for features of Bakhtin's polyphony alongside investigating students' active understanding. This, then, influenced the decision to carry out this study's analysis on two stages and to use visual tools to investigate Bakhtin's polyphony in the virtual classroom in stage one. I will elaborate more on this aspect later, in the study design section.

In this section, I have shown how Bakhtin's concepts of *active understanding* and *polyphony* are echoed in management scholars' arguments of how management students should learn. In particular, I have argued that students' reflection, intellectual critique, and reflexivity can be perceived as different forms of Bakhtin's active understanding. However, I have explained very little on how I will differentiate between these three forms of students' active understanding when interrogating data. For this, the proposed theoretical framework in the next section outlines how Bakhtin's concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, and *rhetoric discourse* can be helpful in this regard.

### **C. The Proposed Theoretical Framework**

In this section, I explain Bakhtin's concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse* and the way in which they are used to identify different forms of reflective learning in students' text-based classroom conversations. In describing the relational nature of students' texts/posts in their asynchronous conversations, I use

Bakhtin's concept of *internal dialogism*. A summary of the proposed theoretical framework can be found in Table 3.1 at the end of this section.

**Authoritative discourse:** Dialogism is more than a mere interaction and exchange of utterances between a narrator and listener (Bakhtin, 1981). Not all responses to others' discourses and texts, according to Bakhtin, imply narrators' active understanding in their conversations. Only those with a dialogic rather than a monologic orientation in their discourses are classed as active. A monologic orientation implies a passive understanding by an individual who shows little effort to elaborate, add, or interrogate others' discourses. A passive understanding can entail an authoritative reading of others' discourses and texts (Halasek, 1992). An authoritative discourse is one which is perceived by readers or listeners as untouchable and/or unquestionable;

“The authoritative word (discourse, my bracket) demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it”

(Bakhtin, 1981: 342)

Those who read authoritatively tend to ascribe to others' discourses, texts, or utterances (Bakhtin, 1981). The sources of authority in a discourse can vary, for instance it may originate from religion, tradition, acknowledged scientific truths, perceived image of the author (i.e. a famous academic, a public figure, a celebrity or a combination of these).

Students' authoritative reading of textbooks' and others' (e.g. teacher's) discourses and their ensuing passive understanding can be revealed in their online, text-based conversations. For instance, students may recite/quote by heart (Bakhtin, 1981) and/or agree with teachers' views and others' discourses without questioning. As a form of active understanding, a student could refute the authority of textbooks', scholars' or others' discourses. A student could challenge the logical soundness of an argument (i.e. critique of rhetoric), taken-for-granted assumptions (i.e. critique of tradition), the legitimacy of certain perspectives (i.e. critique of authority), or the validity of knowledge in others' discourse and/or texts (i.e. critique of objectivity) (Mingers, 2000). If this is the case, then challenging authoritative discourses by engaging in an intellectual critique imply a student's active understanding in his/her discourse or text.



**Framing context:** Active understanding is more than a simple re-voicing (or reciting) of others' perspectives, ideas and words (Bakhtin, 1981). It requires a negotiation or an assimilation of others' ideas and discourses and finding a way to relate to others in a conversation. A narrator's relational engagement to others could depend on the existence of a framing context (Bakhtin, 1981). According to Bakhtin (1981: 293), even though a narrator is using others' discourses or texts, it becomes his/hers' own words when he/she populates it with own intention and accent;

“The word in language is half someone else. It only becomes ones' own when the speaker populates it with his intention, his own content, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions”.

Adding a framing context to others' discourses and text is one way of populating discourses with one's own intention and accent. Such a context is understood as a situation, condition, or background.

In instances of reflection, a student adds his own framing context by including his/her experience to others' discourses and texts. A reflection on an experience, according to Cunliffe (2002; 2004), implies that a social reality, a past experience, or a situation of interest is read from within the insights of a theory. If this is the case, the connection that a student draws between explicit knowledge (i.e. theories and concepts) and tacit knowledge (i.e. experience) (Cunliffe, 2002) exemplifies his/her attempt to populate others' discourses and texts with his/her own authentic voice (Bakhtin, 1981). A student's framing context or experience could relate to work, personal relations, own culture or any other situation/event of interest. To be able to identify the type of framing context that a student uses in his/her text, I need to gain knowledge of his/her background as work/experience, previous education, nationality, etc. This influences the decision of method and data collection.

**Rhetoric discourse:** Active understanding can imply a different form of negotiation; the *rhetorical double-voiced discourse*, which Bakhtin (1981) describes as an 'intensely dialogized form' of discourse. Bakhtin suggests that rhetoric, the art of argument, aims to impress and persuade (Vice, 1997:70). Billig (1996) elaborates that a rhetoric discourse does not aim at victory, rather it is thought of as a form of disputation and

disagreement. Both criticism and justification are central features to a rhetoric discourse (Billig, 1996). Bakhtin claims that individuals' conflicting opinions in a rhetoric discourse are meaningful only when their disagreements can be traced back to some sort of a 'social diversity', otherwise it is a mere "tempest in a teapot" (Bakhtin, 1981: 325);

"Opposition between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia, surface manifestations of those elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with a more fundamental speech diversity" (p.326).

Billig (1996) contends that individuals' perspectives and justifications are confined by their own social contexts and, that, therefore there is no wrong or right answers. Bakhtin uses the phrase 'heteroglot forces' (or heteroglossia) to refer to the sources of this social diversity, including culture, religion, experience, profession, gender, lifestyle, etc. A rhetoric discourse involves an appreciation of others and Otherness (Bakhtin, 1981). In Chapter One, I argued that Bakhtin sees an opportunity to gain a new understanding, perspective, or worldview in an individual's struggle with others' discourses and texts (Freedman and Ball, 2004).

In a management classroom, a rhetoric discourse is meant to instigate a reflexive doubt; an opening-up process that starts *within (the) self* (Cunliffe, 2004). In Bakhtin's language, a reflexive doubt implies students' authentic voices in engaging with self and others, and their ability to listen and respond to others' voices in their classroom dialogue. A rhetoric discourse in a classroom dialogue is exemplified in instances in which students become aware of the influence of their own taken-for-granted on own perceptions and worldviews, and attend to others and Otherness. In exploring reflexive/rhetoric classroom conversations, I will be looking for instances of disagreement (Bakhtin, 1981) which involve a criticism and a justification (Billig, 1996), and where justifications are confined to some social diversity amongst students (Bakhtin, 1981; Billig, 1996). A reflexive/rhetoric conversation should aim at a change, such as broadening perspectives (Cunliffe, 2002) and involves unsettlement as in Willmott's (1994) bracketing of conventional wisdom. In this process of opening up, a student incorporates own feelings, assumptions, actions, or knowledge in talking about the here and now experience (Cunliffe, 2002).

In the rhetoric discourse, Bakhtin appears to pay more attention to the diversity of social language(s) (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin suggests that one national/single language carries within its boundary a variety of social languages, accounting for participants' social diversity. The notion of social languages suggests that the language used by students in their classroom conversations can take on a particular 'flavour' that could be traced back to their social diversity. In stances of reflexivity, I explore students' use of language and the extent to which it appears to be coloured by students' social contexts.

**Internal dialogism:** The internal dialogism of a discourse indicates a successful 'Orientation-Anticipation-Response' process (OAR). Bakhtin's uses this OAR process to describe the flow of a conversation between an addresser and an addressee. In addressing his/her words to a particular addressee, an addresser chooses a subject orientation; a topic or an issue of interest to talk about. Bakhtin explains that when the addresser chooses a subject orientation, his/her aim is to relate to the addressee's apperceptive background, beliefs and evaluative system and so, the addresser anticipates a response from the addressee.

If the addresser's subject orientation *resonates* with the addressee that the addressee responds, then the addresser's discourse is said to possess a degree of internal dialogism. Bakhtin's use of the term *resonate* does not imply 'agreeing with'. For Bakhtin, 'resonating with' is close to 'having a meaning against one's own background'. This background could be filled with a contradictory opinion or view in which case, the addresser's subject orientation resonating with the addressee does not necessarily mean that the addressee in his/her response will agree with the addresser's perspective and view.

Lemke (1990) claims that classroom discourse is most commonly described in what might be called a 'triadic dialogue' or 'IRF method' (i.e. Initiation- Response-Feedback). The IRF method can explain the structure of a conversation. For example, the teacher is asking Y a question (initiation), Y answers the question (response), then the teacher confirms or disconfirms that Y's answer is right (feedback). But, the IRF method does not attend to content of conversations or the relational nature of text. The

IRF appear to emphasise the process of taking turns in a conversation. In this study, I use Bakhtin's OAR process as outlined above to describe the relational nature of students' text when examining online classroom conversations.

This section introduced how the proposed theoretical framework will be used to identify the nature of reflective learning (i.e. reflection, intellectual critique or reflexivity) in asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations. In the next section, I describe my study design and include detail of access issues and my study's site.

<b>Theoretical Framework Based on Bakhtin's Dialogism</b>	
<b>1. Polyphony</b> (a description of a multi-voiced, democratic setting) - <i>Visual Representation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple voices in interaction</li> <li>• Autonomy of voices</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Active Understanding</b> (forms of negotiating others' discourses) - <i>Relational Analysis</i>	
<b>2.1 Challenging an authoritative discourse</b>	A student's own authentic voice is revealed in challenging others' authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). This implies an engagement in a critique of a generalized other independent from own personal involvement (Cunliffe, 2002). This intellectual critique can involve a critique of rhetoric, tradition, authority, or objectivity/validity (adapted from Mingers (2000) and Cunliffe (2002)).
<b>2.2 Framing context</b>	A student's own authentic voice is revealed as he/she appropriates others' discourses and texts by adding his/her own frame (Bakhtin, 1981) in the form an experience, a social reality or a situation of interest (Cunliffe, 2002; 2004).
<b>2.3 Rhetoric discourse</b>	A student's own authentic voice is revealed in instances of disagreement and opposition (Bakhtin, 1981), which involve a criticism and a justification (Billig, 1996) and where students' justifications are confined to some social diversity (Billig, 1981) or elements of social heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). It aims at producing a change through the unsettlement of own perspective to achieve a new understanding or the broadening of own perspective (adapted from Cunliffe, 2002). In these instances, a student incorporates own feelings, assumptions, actions, or knowledge in talking about the here and now experience (Cunliffe, 2002).
<b>Internal dialogism</b>	A way of describing the flow of a conversation (or the relational nature of students' text) using Bakhtin's (1981) orientation-anticipation-response (OAR) process. An addresser chooses a subject orientation which he/she believes will relate to the addressee's apperceptive background; beliefs and evaluative system and so anticipates a response. If a response is received, then the addresser's discourse possesses a degree of internal dialogism.

Table (3.1). Proposed theoretical framework to investigate reflective learning.

## **IV. Study Design**

### **A. Choice of Case Study and Sampling Procedures**

A case study approach is adopted to gain a rich, detailed understanding of the learning process within the context of an online management learning environment. Case study is an appropriate research approach when the phenomenon being investigated cannot be easily separated from its context (Oates, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). I have considered the choice of this study case on two levels; the online MBA programme, and the online MBA module. Drawing on Patton (2002), I applied a ‘purposive sampling’ approach when selecting my case on both levels. Purposive sampling - defined as criterion-based selection - is arguably the most common sampling procedure in qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 2002). My choice of this study’s site is influenced by the view of learning as a process of meaning construction and the theoretical framework outlined above. This means that specific features in the design and pedagogical assumptions needed to be present in my chosen case study. The assumption that classroom dialogue and interactions are essential to management students’ online learning should be reflected in an online programme design that promotes collaborative learning through the use of tools such as e-mails, discussion forums, and chatrooms. Also, students’ reflection on own experiences and practices are encouraged and considered as fundamental as textbook theories and concepts, to the pedagogical approach being applied. Since my intention is to observe online, asynchronous classroom conversations, I draw on Bryman’s (2004) idea that the privilege of gaining an access to a study site and support of a sponsor facilitating this access also played an influential role in my selection of this study case, alongside criterion outlined above. I believe my choice of both the online MBA programme and module can help me answer my research questions (Patton, 2001). This study is set in an online MBA programme offered by a UK, Russell Group management school in partnership with a for-profit provider based in the USA.

The choice of an online MBA module resets with four criteria: (a) convenience; the module subject matter does not require economic or accountancy background (b) commonality; a compulsory module taught to all students joining the online MBA

programme, (c) a non-intake module; not being the first module in the online MBA programme, and (d) consent of all participants in the online MBA module to take part in this study. The decision not to consider modules with economic or accountancy backgrounds is convenient to my educational background as a student and my professional experience as a teacher. In my decision not to consider the first online module, I draw on Griffiths et al.'s (2005) idea that for mature students, the experience of going back to student life can engender a considerable amount of pressure. Griffiths et al. (2005) explain that the immersion in a new environment where familiar routines and reference points are lost, different learning styles are needed than those accustomed to, and the use of different types of assessments constitute a source of pressure, may eventually lead to 'learning shock'. Also, Halasak (1992), who draws on Bakhtin's (1986) ideas, claims that her reflexive understanding as a postgraduate student seems to be activated later in the learning process, which gave further support to the decision of not considering the first online MBA module. As a consequence, three out of the five core MBA modules were considered for the purpose of this study. These three are: 'The Organisation in Strategic Context', 'Market Perspectives', and 'Innovation and Change' modules.

The approval of the University Committee on Research Ethics was obtained prior to the start of data collection. In negotiating the consent to take part, all potential participants in the above three core modules were sent a detailed information sheet alongside an invitation letter via e-mail. In the information sheet, potential participants were assured that they were not obliged to take part in this study, that their identity would be kept anonymous and that any contextual information that might reveal their identity would be removed if a conversation in which they had participated was selected to exemplify a learning situation. Also, in the information sheet, I explained to potential participants what would be expected from them and how and where their conversations and words might be used. Initially the information sheet stressed the observational nature of the study and the fact that I intended to carry out my observations while the class was still running (i.e. live class). It was clearly stated to potential participants that there would be no influence whatsoever on their grades in the module as a result of my study.

Over three terms in 2011 (i.e. September, October, and November terms), all participants in the targeted three modules were contacted, on a one-to-one basis via e-mail, 2-3 weeks before the start of the term inviting them to participate. However, I was unable to secure the consent of every member of a single class. Hine (2008) explains how issues of gaining participants' trust and accessibility to a study site can be problematic to an outside researcher. I believe that my failure to gain participants' trust and/or to change their perception of my image, as an outsider, may have led to this 'no access' situation. As such, I was forced to re-work my approach. In my fourth trial, a different group of students and their tutors were contacted, to ask their permission to observe another module, in which they had taken part in the past. The new group was informed that their 'closed' class would be observed for the purpose of research and that it would be their responsibility to inform the researcher if they felt unwilling to participate within a two-week time period from the date of receiving an invitation by e-mail. This time, potential participants were assured no further contact upon their consent; no disruption to their ongoing learning experience in their MBA programme, and that their consent would be sought again before their words were used in this study. Few rejections in three out of seven classes were received<sup>8</sup>. All participants in the remaining four classes in the three core MBA modules agreed to take part in this study. These were two classes in 'the Organisation in a Strategic Context' module, one class in 'Market Perspectives' module, and one class in 'Innovation and Change' module. Of these four classes, one class was chosen randomly; 'The Organisation in Strategic Context'- January 2012 term (hereafter called the OC class).

## **B. Study's Site and Background Information**

In November 2012, the management school achieved AACSB Accreditation including its online programmes. All of the management school online programmes are delivered entirely online using the Internet and the Blackboard software as a virtual learning platform. For the online MBA, an average of 30 months is required for completion and

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<sup>8</sup> The term class is equivalent here to the US term 'section', which means that in each online MBA module, students are organized in a number of groups. Each group is a section or a class. Each class is assigned an online tutor. Thus, all classes in the same module have the same start and end dates, and study the same module syllabus.



attainment of a degree. The date of the first online MBA intake goes back to 2001. This online MBA programme is believed to be one of the most established online MBA's in the UK. The overall aim of the programme is to "provide a comprehensive and high level education to managers who are partway through their careers".<sup>9</sup> According to the programme brochure, the programme learning outcomes are set to enable students to acquire knowledge and understanding of theoretical and practical aspects of general management.

**Programme structure<sup>10</sup>:** The structure of the online MBA programme requires management students to undertake and pass eight modules, of which five are compulsory and three are elective. A dissertation/ consultancy project must be submitted at the end of the programme. The online MBA programme accounts for 180 credits; eight modules (15 credits each) and a dissertation or project (60 credits). Each module runs over eight weeks, with the exception of the intake module which runs over ten weeks. The five core modules should be completed in the sequence indicated by the school before the electives.

According to a presentation prepared by the Director of Studies, classes in the online MBA modules (i.e. core and electives) are composed of a relatively small group of students, ranging from fifteen to twenty students with an average of sixteen students per class. Module materials are developed collaboratively between the two partners and classes are facilitated by online tutors. All modules on the programme are M-level (Master's level) modules. Module delivery proceeds via a series of one-week online seminars over eight weeks, each typically includes:

- Lecture notes and other learning materials (e.g. video posts) which are posted electronically to the virtual classroom on a weekly basis.
- Coursework assignments, which may include both reading assignments (e.g. book chapters and peer-reviewed articles) and practical work (e.g. discussion questions, integration question, and integration papers). Students' results

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<sup>9</sup> Quote from the management school website.

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, all information included here is found on the management school website

from their practical work are posted on a relevant discussion forum, created by online tutors. Students are also required to submit their practical work to a Turnitin link for an academic integrity check.

- Classroom discussions and group-based project assignments are facilitated and moderated by online tutors.

Communication within the virtual classroom is asynchronous (i.e. via e-mail, discussion boards, and chat rooms). Management students pursue the module in their own time, but within the weekly time-frame of each seminar. The online week starts on Thursdays (i.e. day one) and ends on Wednesday of the second following week (i.e. day seven). Every week includes at least one discussion topic -with the exception of weeks four and eight - when the topic is posted for discussion. Participation in these discussions is a compulsory requirement and forms part of the basis for assessment. Over an eight-week period covering eight online seminars, twenty-one points of assessment occur. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the assessment model applied in the online MBA modules.

Graded Element	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four	Week Five	Week Six	Week Seven	Week Eight	Weight in end of module
Discussion Question- DQ1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		30%
DQ2		✓			✓				10%
Participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20%
Integration question -IQ				✓				✓	10%
Module project				✓			✓		20%
Integration Paper-IP								✓	10%
Assessment points	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	100%(= 21 assessment points )

Table (3.2). Assessment model in online MBA modules

Students' grades are posted to the virtual classroom weekly by the class tutor. Students receive an individualized written feedback from their tutors, every week, after the end of each online seminar. An online module is said to be closed once students' grade sheets

are signed off by management school monitors as part of the module grade approval process.

**Pedagogy<sup>11</sup>:** According to the MBA programme specification, two broad principles inform the teaching and learning strategy; constructionism and collaborative enquiry. Constructionism describes a view of learning in which students construct their own unique understanding of a subject, through a process which includes social interaction. The learner can explain understandings, receive feedback from teachers and other students, clarify meanings, and reach a group consensus. The aim is to use CMC to foster the creation of a learning community which will enable dialogue and sharing of information between participants, and collaborative project work. Students are encouraged to bring to their classroom, knowledge and expertise that is outside the experience of their online tutor, and which can be shared with the group.

**Programme requirements<sup>12</sup>:** The entry requirement for the online MBA is mainly focused on academic qualifications, work experience and language. Normally a university degree in management, accounting, and economics or other social science, or scientific disciplines with honours from a UK university, or an equivalent academic qualification from a similar non-UK institution is required. Entrance to the programme normally requires a minimum of 3 years of relevant management experience. As for language requirement, applicants whose first language is not English must provide evidence of their competence in the language (e.g. IELTS or TOEFL examinations). Applicants come from all over the globe. A recent statistical report presented by the management school's Director of Studies, shows that current MBA students come from Nigeria (28%), Canada (8%), UK (6%), Saudi Arabia (6%), South Africa (6%), UAE (5%) and USA (5%). In terms of gender and age, figures show 79% of current MBA students are males, and that the average age for joining the online MBA programme is 38 years old.

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<sup>11</sup> All information included in here is found in the programme specification brochure prepared by the Management School.

<sup>12</sup> All information included in here is retrieved from the programme requirements sections on management school website and from a presentation prepared by the management school director of studies.

**Support and preparedness:** New students joining the online programmes are offered different levels of support. Within ‘The Centre for Student Success’, is a link to a website that is accessible by online students at: (<http://success.ohcampus.com/>). Students are offered a wide range of information about online study and the support available to help them adapt and get started. Students can use the Center for Student Success to access a number of quick links including: New Students, Programme Information, Student Handbook, Support, and Resources links. In the New Students web link, for instance, students can find a summary of what happens between admission and the end of the intake MBA module. More details can be found in appendix (A). Students are also provided with tutorial videos prepared as part of student support. Between being admitted as an online student and the second week of the intake module, students remain in regular contact with their enrolment advisor, after which each student is assigned to a student advisor from the student support team. During these first two weeks of the intake module, also called induction weeks, students are introduced to online study and receive important information regarding academic writing, citation and referencing. A technical support team is also available to help online students, via telephone or e-mail, with any technical issues - logging in problems, library access, email set-up, etc - they may encounter before and during their online study.

### **C. Ethnographic Orientation:** *Complete observer*

As part of this research approach, and drawing on Rigg and Trehan’s (2004) and Ferreday et al.’s (2006) social (relational) constructionist position, my intention is to carry out field observations to the OC classroom conversations. The term ethnography itself is subject to controversy (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). For some, according to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), it refers to a philosophical paradigm and for others it implies the use of a method.

Initially, the approach could be conceived as carrying out virtual ethnography (e.g. Ferreday et al., 2006; Hine, 2000), involving a classical ‘being in the (virtual) field’ orientation. However, as a research method, virtual ethnography is still a recent development (Hine, 2000). With its immaturity as a research method on its own, I am reluctant to call my approach *virtual ethnography*. I do believe, however, that carrying

out some observation on a virtual study site can provoke us to break away from our conventional understanding of “study field” as a geographically bounded research site and towards a virtual encounter of it. Virtual ethnography, according to Hine (2008:257), “... transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the internet”.

In carrying out my observations, I share with ethnographers the assumption that the social phenomenon of interest is being shaped and constructed by the involved social actors (Pole and Morrison, 2003). An ethnographer is expected to observe behaviour, listen to what is said in conversations, and ask questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Bryman, 2004). Yet, in my approach, I observe what is said in classroom conversations but I do not interact with my study’s participants or ask questions. Neither do I take any part of classroom activities (Saunders et al., 2007). The approach devised here subsumes to one ethnographic orientation, whereby I observe what is said in classroom conversations but remain a total researcher or a complete observer and do not participate in the social (learning) context being observed. The complete observer role entirely removes a researcher from social interaction with participants (Gold, 1958). The role of complete observer was also referred to eavesdropping (Gold, 1958). Thus, this study’s approach does not take into account participants’ offline world nor allow for participants’ perspectives of their learning to be accounted for.

Nevertheless, it is an approach that fits in well with the use of Bakhtin’s work on dialogism, where Bakhtin investigates the dialogic-monologic orientations in text without having to interact with either the narrator or the listener. In my attempt to find a way to be present in this study (virtual) field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Hine, 2008), assuming a total observer role has its own benefits. It reduces the possibility of distracting participants, of adding to their anxiety and sense of discomfort in being observed by an outsider. The act of lurking - observing with no participation - is a commonly accepted social behaviour within virtual settings (Beaulieu, 2004; Chen and Chang, 2011).

Most commonly, becoming an outsider is criticized for either failing to explain why things happen (Easterby-Smith et al., 2006) or misunderstanding the observed (Gold,

1958). However, it is not my intention to pose a ‘why’ question or to answer one. The aim of this study is to explore the potential of an online, asynchronous MBA learning environment to promote management students’ reflections in their online classroom conversations. This leads to the observation of online classroom dialogue in an attempt to describe the nature of learning which occurs in this asynchronous, text-based learning environment. As such, my method can be called a case study with ethnographic orientation.

In this section, I have explained how my proposed research method can help answer the research question. For the purpose of this study I will act as a complete observer of the OC classroom dialogue. In the next section, I elaborate on the process of data collection.

#### **D. Data Collection**

In this study, I limit my observation to weeks one and four for a number of reasons. First, the learning objectives and the design of learning tasks in weeks one and four are different<sup>13</sup>. Second, in week one, the OC management students are required to submit only one written assignment in response to a discussion question posted by their online tutor on the relevant discussion forum. It is my assumption that classroom conversations can appear more focused if taking place in relation to one discussion question. This meant less effort and time spent reading weekly readings and students’ assignments on my part. Third, in week four, the OC management students are required to submit a written reflection paper about their learning. These reflection papers help me become familiar with students’ backgrounds, perspectives, experiences and/or practices. They also help with observing the development/ change in students’ understandings, if any. Although observations will be carried out in both weeks, only the content of classroom conversations in week one will be analyzed. In this study, the week one classroom conversations constitute my primary source of data. Secondary sources include students’ weekly readings, reflection papers, written assignments, end of module feedback and students’ uploaded biographies.

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<sup>13</sup> Weeks one and four learning objectives will be outlined in the next chapter.

## **E. Unit of Analysis**

The claim that the OC classroom conversations are different from a speech communication because the first is ‘assessed’ while the second takes place ‘naturally’ and hence, the first cannot be treated as a chain of communication is not meaningful. Students’ assessed, text-based classroom conversations do not have pre-specified directions, and neither can their content be predicted in advance. Similar to conversations in face-to-face classrooms, the OC classroom conversations evolve around a topic or an issue of interest within a particular subject matter in the virtual classroom. In this study, students’ assessed, text-based classroom conversations are treated in a similar vein to speech communication.

According to Bakhtin (1981), every word, sentence, or utterance is inherently dialogic in nature (Shotter, 1993; Bloome and Egan-Robertson, 1993). Utterances are not made in isolation (Cunliffe, 2000) and are bounded by a change in speaking subjects (Bakhtin, 1981; Shotter, 1993), with meaning derived from ‘what went before and what will come later’ (Bloome and Egan-Robertson, 1993:309). Thus, in order to investigate learning as a process of meaning construction, the unit of analysis is a classroom conversation. This reflects a focus on a chain of text or posts exchanged between at least two participants on the week one discussion forum. A chain of related text makes up one classroom conversation. Each chain of related text in the OC classroom presents us with a unique episode between its participants and as such, will be analyzed as one unit. By the end of week one, all episodes (i.e. all conversations) make up classroom dialogue. Having defined my unit of analysis, I will now cover the tools used in the analysis.

## **F. Analysis Tools**

This study analysis will be carried out in two stages. The main idea underlying this two-stage analysis rests with Bakhtin’s (1981) claim that a polyphonic setting is a condition for dialogism and that polyphony and dialogism operate together. *Polyphony* is a description of a setting which allows for dialogism. For Bakhtin, polyphony implies multi-voicedness and autonomy of voices to speak their views. This leads to two stages of analysis. The first should enable us to describe and present the OC polyphonic setting.

For this, visual tools are used. The second should enable us to examine students' active understanding. For this, a relational analysis based on the proposed framework, outlined before, is used.

### **1. Visual representations of the engagement of the OC students in classroom conversations**

In this first stage, two visual tools are used to present interpretations of Bakhtin's 'polyphony' in the OC classroom. Visual or pictorial representations are figurative illustrations that can be an 'inner picture' or a 'fabrication' (Langer, 1957). An inner picture is a subjective, projected record of a sense-experience created basically for one's own sake. A fabrication is an impression communicated by one to an audience (Stiles, 2004). In this study, visual representations are used as a type of fabrication, where the focus is on communicating an impression to the reader.

Visual representations can include pictures, photographs, drawings and maps, or diagrams (Thorpe and Cornelisson, 2003). In organizational settings, Thorpe and Cornelisson (2003) argue that visual tools are helpful in describing, discussing, and understanding a problem. Stiles (2004) claims that the use of visual images as a technique to collect data from respondents in research can provide insights to enhance understanding and surface latent tensions. Although the authors have referred to the use of visual representation in different contexts, visual tools are used in this study with the same intent. Drawing on my ontological stance, the visual representations produced in this stage are meant to promote a dialogic interaction with readers rather than a presentation of facts.

The first tool, according to Thorpe and Cornelisson (2002), can be referred to as a *visual metaphor*. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) suggest that the role of metaphors is concerned with "the understanding of one kind of thing in terms of another." In this study, I use a visual, non-verbal metaphor. A visual metaphor is a symbolic drawing, used to elicit the view around an event, a situation, or an issue of concern (Thorpe and Cornelisson, 2002). According to Ortony (1975), the use of non-verbal metaphors in this study is an attempt to suggest, rather than literally state, an understanding. Stiles (2004) asserts that



the use of image-based metaphors emphasises ‘imaginative knowledge’ in inviting one to think of an object as though it is something quite different. For instance, Morgan’s (1993) use of visual metaphors to represent organizations as cash cows, dogs, question marks or stars is well-reported. In this study, a visual metaphor presents my own sensemaking and construction of Bakhtin’s polyphony in the OC classroom. Alongside this visual presentation, I present an explanation, drawing on my perception of the peculiarities of the setting and the view of online management learning as intersubjective, situated and socially-constructed.

The decision to use a second visual tool is based on the intention to offer an interpretation of the setting from a different perspective. This serves to open up the first interpretation to questioning. The choice of a *sociogram*, as a second visual tool, rests with its commonality in observing social interactions among students in higher education ( e.g. Baldwin et al., 1997) and in online learning in particular (e.g. De Laat et al., 2007). It is also chosen as a mean of summarizing and organizing data (De Nooy et al., 2005), preparing for the second stage of this study’s analysis, and provides readers with a general sense of classroom interactions. According to De Nooy et al. (2005), a sociogram helps readers understand and visualize data that could be otherwise troublesome.

In her study, Dysthe (2002) used a ‘communicogram’ (see appendix D), to reflect on the high degree of ‘dialogicality’ or dialogism she found in online, text-based classroom dialogue. Concerned with issue of dialogicality, Dysthe examines how each student’s utterances explicitly or implicitly referred to what another fellow student had said, and hence, her use of a ‘communicogram’ to describe it. In this study, the interpretation of dialogism is different from Dysthe’s view. The dialogicality or the dialogic orientation of participants requires more than a student’s reference to another’s idea or utterances. Instead, it requires the investigation of participants’ orientations (monologic vs. dialogic) and understanding (active vs. passive) in the sense outlined before. Two participants could be exchanging messages on a discussion board but make no efforts to go beyond their weekly readings, so no new insights or meanings are added. In this study, this situation reflects participants’ passive understanding and monologic

orientation, and so exemplifies a ‘no-dialogism’ instance but in Dysthe’s study, participants will appear connected on a communicogram. The decision to refrain from using a communicogram is meant to avoid the possibility of confusing the relational nature of students’ texts for Bakhtin’s dialogism. I now turn to describe how a sociogram will be used, and the limitations of this use within this study research approach.

A sociogram is used to describe and visualize the interactivity and freedom with which the OC participants interact and engage in their online classroom conversations. A sociogram is a “graphical representation of group structure” and it is the basis for the visualization of social networks and identifying patterns (De Nooy et al., 2005). For the week one classroom conversations, a ‘two-mode network’ is used to exemplify the view of the OC classroom as a network of social ties. The two-mode network presents participants’ engagement with each other through their classroom conversations. The OC classroom participants appear as *actors*, and the week one classroom conversations appear as *events* on a sociogram (see figure 3.1). A two-mode network or affiliation networks “consists of at least two sets of vertices such that affiliations connect vertices from different sets only” (De Nooy et al., 2005:103).

A vertex or a node is the smallest unit in a network and will be used, here, to represent two different sets; participants and classroom conversations (see figure 3.1). Affiliations are ties connecting a participant from the first set to a conversation in the second set. In this study, affiliations are lines on a sociogram (De Nooy et al., 2005), implying the engagement of a participant in a particular classroom conversation. Drawing on De Nooy et al. (2005), the use of multiple lines from a participant vertex implies the engagement of this participant in multiple classroom conversations. In Figure 3.1, actor/participant 2 is involved in two events/conversations (4&3). To draw a sociogram, the week one classroom conversations and participants are identified, and then coded in preparation for entry into Pajek software. Pajek is a program for analysis and visualization of social networks (De Nooy et al., 2005). However, the use of a sociogram in a dialogic research approach is not without its own critiques.

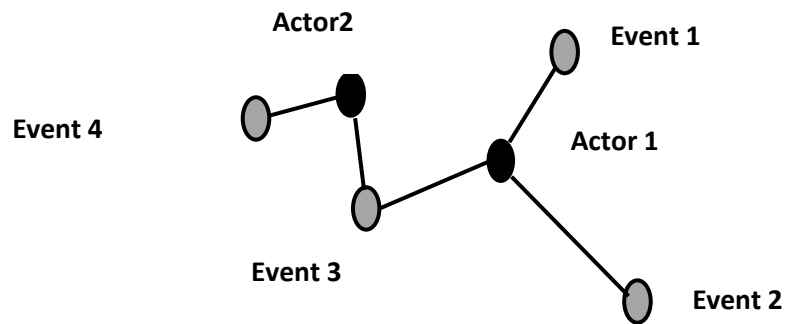


Figure (3.1). An example of a two- mode network of actors and events

The sociogram's visual appeal helps to read and summarize data that could otherwise be troublesome to transmit but it:

- *cannot* claim a description of the nature of students' understanding which is provoked in a particular classroom conversation,
- has an apparent tendency to *quantify* data. Although the use of sociograms promotes the view of online learning as a social process, it limits its account of learning to some quantitative assessments. For instance, the number of classroom conversations per week can easily be observed in a sociogram. Yet, using it as an indicator of more or less learning reflects a rather objectivist, detached stand in investigating online management learning,
- offers a rather *static view* of participants' interactions. It presents interactions as if taking place at one point of time and does not necessarily reflect the relational nature of text within an observed classroom conversation,
- ignores the presence of *lurkers* in the OC classroom, and
- leaves less opportunity for a researcher's own interpretation and sensemaking.

Whilst the use of a sociogram has its limitations, as outlined above, its use is devised to fit in with the proposed theoretical framework and ontological stance in this study. Morgan and Smircich (1980) state that, any given technique most often has a variety of

uses, depending on a researcher's stance and underlying assumptions. A sociogram is used as a visualization tool, bringing a network perspective with which to view the OC polyphonic setting. However, the examination of Bakhtin's polyphony is insufficient to claim dialogism and active understanding, leading to the second stage of the analysis.

## **2. A relational analysis of the content of the OC classroom conversations**

In the second stage of analysis, the framework proposed and based on Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse*, and *internal dialogism*, is used to investigate students' active understanding in the sense outlined before (i.e. a summary of the proposed framework is found in Table 3.1, p. 83).

This study poses the question of whether an online, asynchronous MBA learning environment can promote management students' reflection. I have chosen to present and interpret seven episodes which best describe the nature of learning in the OC classroom and/or exemplify different learning features in the online learning setting. These episodes will help the reader develop an understanding of the potential of asynchronous learning environments in management education.

In choosing these episodes, I make no claim of being neutral, concurring with the stance of Rigg and Trehan (2004). Rather, my intention is to present my own socially constructed interpretation, influenced by my own understanding of theory and literature, interactions with colleagues, and my own set of values, beliefs, and experience of what constitutes an opportunity (or not) for participants' learning in these episodes. Every episode is presented exactly as it is appeared on the OC classroom discussion forum. No attempt to edit participants' words will take place, except to remove contextual information that may reveal the identity of study participants. Every episode is followed by a description and an analysis. Also, an argument is raised in relation to presented episodes.

## **V. Conclusion**

In the literature review, I argued that learning is a dialogic, responsive process. To investigate learning as a process of meaning construction, a mix of classroom

observations and document analysis has been considered in the spirit of Shotter's (2006) 'Witness-Thinking' approach. The study focuses on the observation of text-based, classroom conversations in a core module in an online MBA programme that is offered by a UK management school. Two stages of analysis are used. The first stage includes the use of visual tools to present interpretations of Bakhtin's polyphony in the OC setting. In the second stage, a relational analysis is carried out using a proposed framework that is based on Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse*, and *internal dialogism*, to investigate the nature of reflective learning. The next chapter elaborates on the process of data analysis.

## Chapter Four: Data Analysis

### I. Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the observed setting, followed by a two stage-analysis. The intention is to provide the reader with a sense of the OC virtual classroom and its participants. I present a number of screen shots of the OC virtual classroom as a step-by-step process to access the OC week one discussion forum. I also include learning objectives and assignment questions in weeks one and four as these will be considered later in this study's findings and discussion.

In the Methodology, I described this study analysis as a two-stage process. In the visual analysis stage, I first attend to the observed polyphonic feature in the OC classroom setting through the use of a visual metaphor and a sociogram. The aim is to present an interpretation of the complexity and flux involved in participants' interactions in their asynchronous classroom conversations. In the second stage, I present a relational analysis of seven episodes. Each episode presents an asynchronous conversation on the OC week one discussion forum. Each episode exemplifies a unique conversational moment among its participants and illustrates an observed feature.

Before the start of this study's analysis, I would like to attend to what constitutes 'a' conversational moment in an asynchronous setting and what a 'conversation closure' means. First, the use of 'a' conversational moment in reference to a classroom conversation is *not* meant to imply a moment in real time. In the Literature Review, I pointed out that asynchronous learning settings promote text-based communications in the virtual classroom, which do not take place in real time. In the OC classroom, conversations are usually extended over a number of days and could witness the engagement of new participants and/or the disengagement of those who were once engaged. There is no limit on how long an asynchronous classroom conversation will last, within its one week limit.

My use of 'a' conversational moment in reference to a particular asynchronous classroom conversation is meant to consider the relational nature of text or posts exchanged in this particular conversation, even though this exchange of text may take

place over a number of moments and/or days. Whether a particular classroom conversation lasts for one day, two days or more is not of a concern here. Bakhtin's (1981) concern with the element of time in speech communications appears to be confined to the *relational nature* of words/utterances; its connection to past utterances and its consideration of future ones. The focus in analyzing a participant's texts is based on its relation to a past text and its consideration of a future one.

Second, the phrase 'conversation closure' is used when a post made by one participant, in a particular conversational moment, can no longer trigger a response from others in the OC classroom. In this sense, closure indicates a 'finalization' or an 'end' to a particular conversation rather than a 'settled' status on the subject matter of the conversation.

This chapter is organized in four sections. The purpose of the first section is to help the reader get a sense of the OC setting. The second section offers two visual representations to describe the OC polyphonic setting. The third section attends to four features which best describe the nature of learning in an asynchronous learning environment. Under each feature, one or two episodes are presented. Finally, the fourth section includes some general comments on observing the OC classroom conversations. The terms 'text' and 'post' are used interchangeably to denote a participant's text-based message on the OC discussion forum.

## **II. Getting Started - *the OC classroom***

The OC is the second core module in the online MBA programme. According to the programme specification the module is designed around two major levels. The first focuses on organisational level issues and problems, such as how an organisation should be designed and what strategy it should follow. The second focuses on individual and group issues such as how to evaluate and reward people, use teams effectively, and make effective decisions. Table 4.1 details the OC module learning objectives in weeks one and four.

Weeks	Learning Objectives
<b>Week (1)</b>	On completion of this week, students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse industry attractiveness by employing the fundamentals of industry structure</li> <li>• Explain the interface between industry structure and firm positioning and highlight how that interface influences organisational performance</li> <li>• Examine ways in which firms can operate profitably in unattractive industries</li> </ul>
<b>Week (4)</b>	On completion of this week, students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss differences in planned/analytical approaches to strategy with emergent strategy processes.</li> <li>• Examine whether either approach reflects <u>your own</u> practical experiences.</li> <li>• Discuss how both approaches compare with regard to legitimizing managerial decisions and <u>gaining support from key stakeholders</u></li> </ul>

Table (4.1). Learning objectives assigned to weeks one and four.

The OC eight-week duration commenced in January 2012 and ended in February 2012. At the beginning of the class module, seventeen students registered but only fourteen students completed the module; three dropped out within the first two weeks. The OC class included four students from Nigeria, two from UK, two from Mexico, and one student from each of Liberia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands and Egypt. Approximately 64 % of students in The OC class were males. Upon the completion of this module, students' assessments reflected different levels of achievement; four students received an 'A' grade, eight students received a 'B' grade, one student received a 'C' grade, and one student received a 'D' grade.

Table 4.2 presents students' essay questions, DQ and IQ, in weeks one and four respectively, for which students are required to submit initial responses in the relevant week's discussion forum.



Week	Discussion Question (DQ) /Integration Question (IQ)
<b>Week (1)</b>	<p>Review the Cola Wars case, as well as the article “Five Competitive Forces that Shape Strategy”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the role of the following key components of the soft drinks industry value chain: concentrate producers, bottlers and retailers.</li> <li>• For each of the key value chain components, assess the power of each of the five forces in the industry: that is, how powerful are the buyers, suppliers and substitutes? How formidable are the barriers to entry and how intense is the rivalry?</li> <li>• Your follow-on response should provide evidence that you have <u>critically reflected</u> on the material by questioning assumptions, revealing new personal insights, and probing and/or posing questions for further investigation.</li> </ul>
<b>Week (4)</b>	<p>To facilitate your practice of <u>critical reflection and synthesis</u>, in this week’s discussion you will individually analyze the advantages and disadvantages of planned/analytical and emergent approaches to strategy. Like in the previous week, you are urged to bring <u>your own particular organizational and socio-political and cultural context into the discussion</u>. Your focus should be on the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are differences between analytical/planned and emergent approaches?</li> <li>b. To which extent does either (or a mix of these) <u>reflect your practical experience</u>?</li> <li>c. Which benefits do you see in either approach for managing a firm and for legitimizing your actions and gaining support from different stakeholders?</li> </ol>

Table (4.2). The OC module DQ and IQ in the observed weeks.

In the OC week one discussion forum, the total number of text messages is 134 text exchanged between fifteen participants (i.e. fourteen students and their online tutor). A step-by-step description of the process to access the observed week one discussion forum follows in the next paragraph. In all screen shots presented later in this section, participants’ real names are hidden with tags to protect their anonymity. All of the study’s participants are given pseudo names which appear on all of the tags in the forthcoming screen shots and in the episodes presented later in the relational analysis.

A default screen, including the word ‘Announcements’ will appear once one is logged into the OC classroom (see Figure 4.1). To be able to log into the OC virtual classroom, both students and their tutor need to be self-enrolled into the OC classroom. The ‘Announcements’ mainly include all notification or remarks posted, usually by the OC

online tutor, over module duration. This can include announcements in the form of reminders, welcome notes, or the weekly summary.

Over this module duration, Vince, the tutor, posted a number of announcements which includes: “Contact the Instructor”, “Post Your Personal Introduction”, “Welcome-- Getting Started Recap of a few things”, “Article search and Referencing tools”, “Grades & degree classification”, “Project word count”, “Font Sizes, Attachments, Graphics”, “Append your initials to your posts”, and “Goodbye & best wishes”. Figure 4.1 is a screen shot, showing the last announcement in the OC classroom; “Goodbye & best wishes”. In the announcement, Vince expresses his appreciation for class interactions, and his reflections on the debates and the learning that took place over module duration. Vince ends his announcement with a statement about the usefulness of gaining a broad strategic perspective as students proceed with their studies of different business activities.



Figure (4.1). A screen shot from the OC classroom Announcements

In Figure 4.1, a number of links available to the students to facilitate their online navigation of the OC classroom can be found on the left hand side bar. Just below the “**Announcements**” on the top left, there is a “**Module Introduction**” navigation menu, which includes a list of the following resources:

- Syllabus; includes links to related information on *Module Aims, Module Learning Outcomes, Learning Resources, Overview of Module Work, Assessment, and Syllabus By Week.*
- Module Tools; includes links to related information on *Academic Honesty Declaration, Programme Resources, and Citation Reminder.*

- Discussion Board; allows a student to navigate all of the OC discussion forums taking place from the beginning to the end of the OC class module.
- Groups; includes a list of tools/facilities designed to help members of the same group to interact with each other.
- Live Chat; allows students to have synchronous/live chat with each other in the classroom. This facility is designed to promote more informal and un-assessed interactions among students.
- Contact Instructor; allows students to contact class tutor (or any of his/her classmates) via e-mail.

On selection of the “Discussion Board” option from the “Module Introduction” navigation menu, the OC's different discussion forums become visible (Figure 4.2). There are twelve different discussion forums. These are: *Week 01- 08* forums, *General Chat forum*, *Questions for your Instructor*, *Academic Honesty Declaration*, and *Post your Personal Introduction* forums. Only the OC students’ interactions in Week 01-08 forums are considered for the assessment of students’ participation.

Next to each forum, there is a counter which displays the total number of posts or texts exchanged among participants. The total number of participants engaged in this particular forum is also displayed. For instance, there are 134 texts exchanged in the week one discussion forum and 114 text exchanged in week eight. In the “Academic Honesty Declaration” forum, students post the statement "I agree to and accept this declaration" which acknowledges that the students have read the declaration and agree with its content. In the “Post your Personal Introduction” forum, students and their online tutor upload their biographies, which are then visible to all participants in the OC classroom.

The screenshot displays the OC Discussion Board interface. On the left is a navigation sidebar with sections for 'Announcements', 'Module Introduction', and 'Week 1' through 'Week 5'. The main content area is titled 'DISCUSSION BOARD' and features a search bar and a table of forum topics.

Display Order	Forum	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
1	<a href="#">Post Your Personal Introduction</a> Please post a short introduction of yourself to your classmates to get to know you better.	35	23	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
2	<a href="#">Academic Honesty Declaration</a> Please read the Academic Honesty Declaration on the Discussion Board and post a thread to the message board that states, "I agree to and accept this declaration." This posting to the thread acknowledges that you have read the declaration and agree with the contents.	16	16	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
3	<a href="#">General Chat</a>	1	1	1	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
4	<a href="#">Questions for Your Instructor</a> <b>Need Help? Ask me!</b>	23	23	4	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
5	<a href="#">Week 01 Forum</a>	134	0	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
6	<a href="#">Week 02 Forum</a>	176	176	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
7	<a href="#">Week 03 Forum</a>	131	131	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
8	<a href="#">Week 04 Forum</a>	111	99	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
9	<a href="#">Week 05 Forum</a>	182	182	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
10	<a href="#">Week 06 Forum</a>	119	118	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
11	<a href="#">Week 07 Forum</a>	108	108	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy
12	<a href="#">Week 08 Forum</a>	114	113	15	Modify	Manage	Remove	Copy

Figure (4.2). A screen shot from the OC Discussion Board resource.

To observe the week one classroom conversations, the [Week 01 Forum](#) link is selected and the screen switches to the image in Figure 4.3.

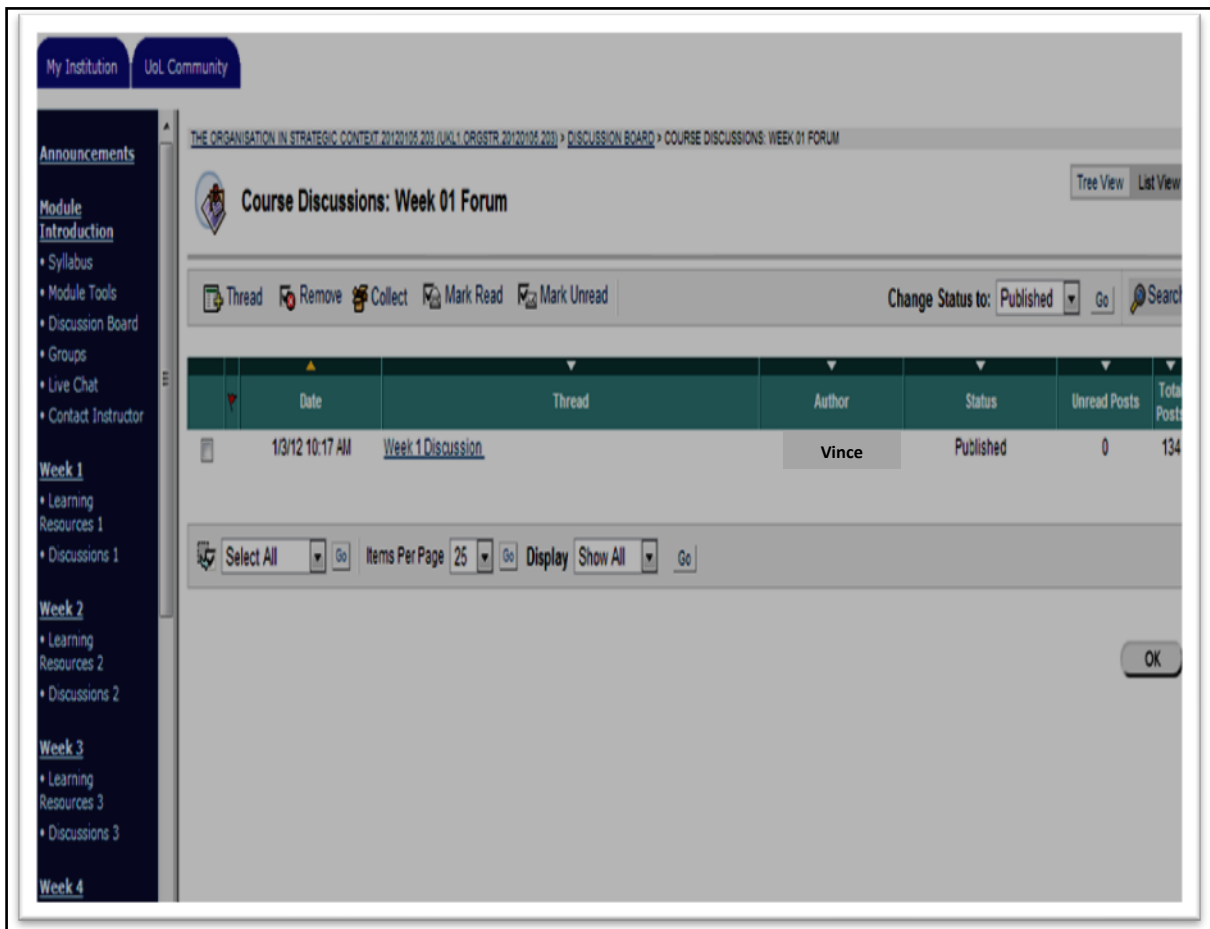


Figure (4.3). A screen shot from the OC Week 01Forum.

In Figure 4.3, the total number of texts is presented alongside the forum author's name (i.e. Vince, the tutor) and the time stamp of forum creation under the label Date. Vince created the forum on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2012 at 10:17 am. In choosing the [Week 1 Discussion](#) link in this screen, the thread detail in week one discussion forum becomes visible as shown in Figure 4.4.

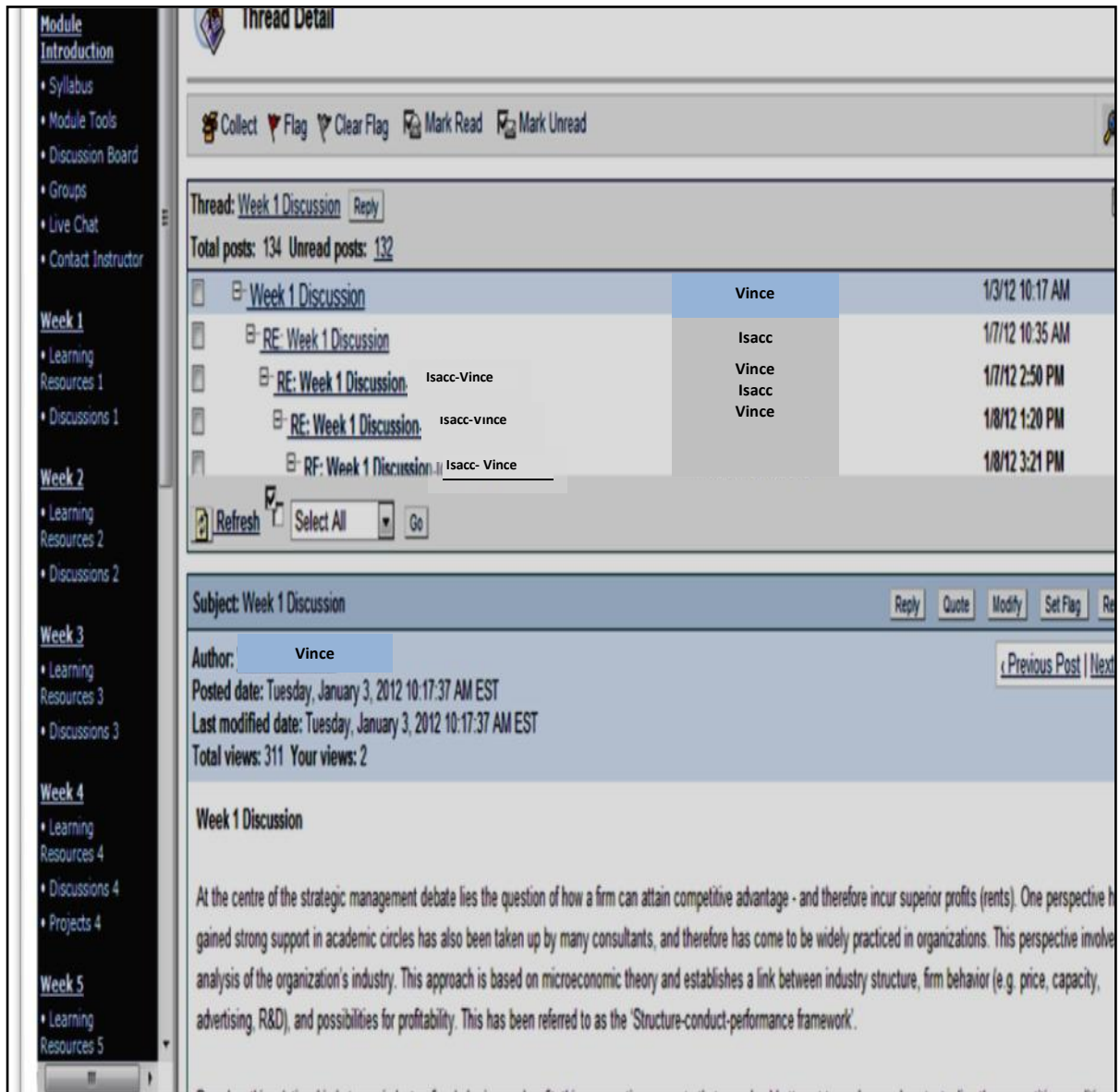


Figure (4.4). A screen shot from the OC Thread Detail in the week one discussion forum.

Figure 4.4 illustrates a partial view of the “Thread Detail” in the week one discussion forum in the first half of the screen. The “Thread Detail” appears hierarchically structured. This hierarchical structure is meant to reflect how each text (i.e. child post) relates to a particular previous text (i.e. parent post). Each text is preceded by a

minus/plus sign which is used to indicate whether this text has attracted any response from others in the OC classroom. If a text attracts a response, then this response appears listed at a lower indented level and so on. Once a text is highlighted in the first half of the screen, its content becomes visible in the second half of the screen, with a scroll option.

The aim of this section was to help the reader become familiar with the OC virtual classroom. In the next section, a two-stage analysis is detailed.

### **III. Visual Representations of the OC Asynchronous Classroom Conversations**

This section attends to the first stage of the analysis. The aim is to provide a general sense of participants' interactions and engagement in classroom conversations in week one.<sup>14</sup> To this end, I offer two representations of participants' interactions and engagement in asynchronous classroom conversations, using a visual metaphor and a sociogram.

#### **A. A Visual Metaphor to Observe Bakhtin's Polyphony in the OC Classroom**

When I first accessed the OC virtual classroom, I developed an impression of structure and neatness in observing this 'parent-child', hierarchical structure of participants' texts on the week one discussion forum. It appeared as if the OC participants were taking turns in each conversation. I imagined that I would be able to sort a whole week's discussion forum into a number of classroom conversations with a lot of ease and in quite a short time. This was not the case. The OC classroom conversations appear to the observer as if conversations follow one another. It is in attempting to organize these conversations, marking who addressed whom about what and when, that it becomes difficult and sometimes confusing.

In asynchronous classroom conversations, organized turn taking is illusory. I developed this sense when I observed the time stamp on participants' texts. For instance, a participant could be engaged in more than one classroom conversation on the same day (i.e. in parallel), or engaged first in one conversation, then moves on to a second when

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<sup>14</sup> The use of the term 'participants' hereafter denotes both the OC students and their online tutor.



the first comes to closure (i.e. sequentially). There was no one right or common way in which participants engaged in online classroom conversations. In this sense, participants are not ‘quiet’ until others finish their conversations. Nor do they engage in one conversation at a time. Rather, they engage in multiple conversations whenever they wish and with whomever they want. In few instances, a participant linked his/her text (i.e. child post) to a wrong parent post. In these instances, I relocate the participant’s text - in my analysis - to what I perceive as the right parent post by attending to the contents of texts.

My initial perception of structuredness and neatness quickly changed to a sense of complexity and flux in observing the OC classroom’s interactions and conversations. Participants are engaging in and disengaging from different conversations at different points of time over the week. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), this observed flux is ‘favourable’ because it implies a democratic setting, where participants have the autonomy to engage and/or disengage whenever they want. However, because of these multiple-party conversations and party-like situation, it is also a complex setting. It is this sense of noisiness and messiness that inevitably acts in parallel to the OC polyphonic setting. It was sometimes difficult to keep track of ‘all’ classroom conversations which occur in the week. There were *forty-four* classroom conversations within the reported one hundred and thirty-four texts in week one.

The OC students most often started their weekly discussions after posting their DQ-initial response on the relevant discussion forum<sup>15</sup>. This left students with five days or less (Saturday/Sunday to Wednesday) to engage with their peers and online tutor in classroom dialogue. Considering they had to submit their assignments on time, engage in classroom dialogue, read others’ texts and conversations, and then craft their own responses in this period, time quickly became an issue. It appeared to overwhelm students who had to combine full-time jobs with their studies and other social responsibilities;

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<sup>15</sup> A DQ-initial response refers to a student’s written assignment in response to the week one discussion question. For example, Terry’s DQ -initial response refers to Terry’s written assignment in response to week one discussion question.

“The number of individual contributions was not controlled and I was pretty overwhelmed”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

“I found 6000 word for the final Module Project, too long for such a small period of time having to deal also with many other personal and professional responsibilities”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

“Actually, DQ2 in weeks 2 and 4 makes me nervous. Every time there is little time period between DQ1 and DQ2, thus, there is nearly no time to prepare for the second DQ. It happens to me during the 1st and 2nd module. It may be my personal problem, but it happened to me twice”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

Figure 4.5 is a visual metaphor, presenting my interpretation and sensemaking of the ‘flux’ and ‘messiness’ I observed and/or felt in the OC classroom discussion forum.

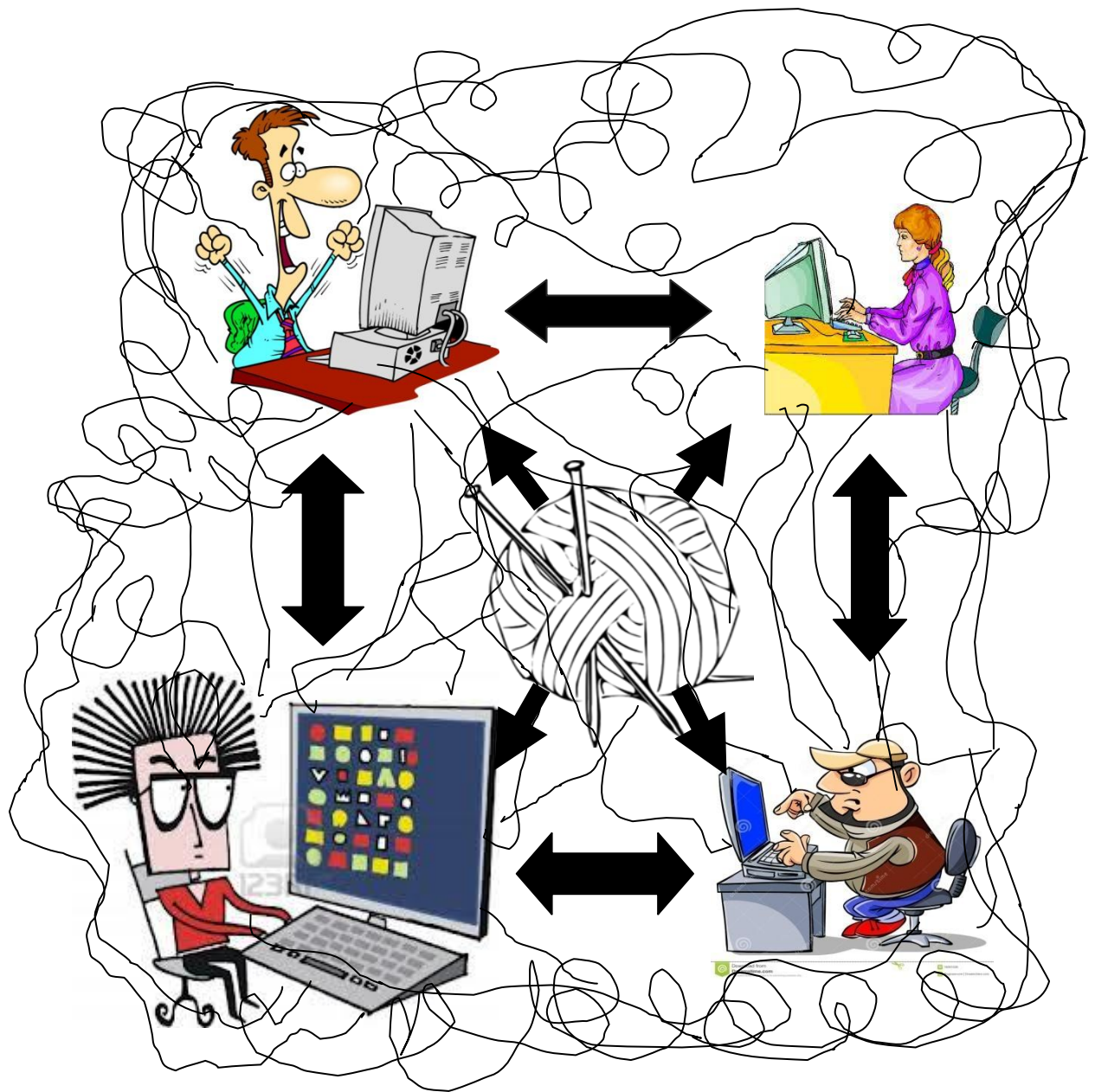


Figure (4.5). A visual metaphor of the OC classroom polyphonic setting.

The ball of wool is intended to symbolize the OC classroom discussion forum in week one. The knitting thread is used to denote conversations in which participants in the OC classroom are engaged with one another. Each of the many threads denotes a

conversation. The knitting threads appear to connect participants randomly, but actually it denotes participants' freedom to engage in conversations of their choice. This mirrors a favourable polyphonic setting in which voices express their viewpoints and perspectives freely. However, the greater the number of crossing threads, the greater the sense of noisiness and messiness, and the difficulty in tracing conversations. Whilst the OC classroom setting is polyphonic and democratic, it is also messy and noisy.

The six double-edged arrows symbolize participants' engagement with others in classroom conversations and, so emphasize the relational nature of participants' texts on a discussion forum. The four participants are meant to exemplify four possibilities. The student may engage more in a particular conversation (e.g. some conversations involve the exchange of seven texts between participants). In another conversation, the student may engage less (e.g. some conversations involve the exchange of two texts between participants). In a third conversation, the student may spend more time lurking; reading and observing<sup>16</sup>. In a fourth conversation, the student may choose not to respond to a text addressed to him/her (e.g. some text attracts no response, failing to relate to others in the classroom).

Having described my interpretation and sensemaking of the OC classroom, I sought feedback from five academic colleagues in different management areas to check whether my description made sense to others, but this remains largely my construction. A question is then raised: to what extent does this construction fit in with the OC (polyphonic) setting? It then appears useful to provide another perspective in interpreting the OC polyphonic setting. The literature on the use of social network analysis and sociograms may be useful in this regard.

## **B. A Sociogram to Observe Bakhtin's Polyphony in The OC Classroom**

Students' online interactions with each other embed them in a network of social relationships in the OC virtual classroom. The use of a sociogram can help us envisage different conversational moments in observing participants' multiple-party

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<sup>16</sup> An assumption I made building on arguments of lurkers' learning in online classrooms (e.g. Chen and Chang, 2011 ). At the end of this chapter I present an example of a lurker student.

conversations. Figure 4.6 uses sociogram symbols to present Monica, an OC student's engagement in two conversations; one with Vince and Isaac, and another with Terry and Nick.

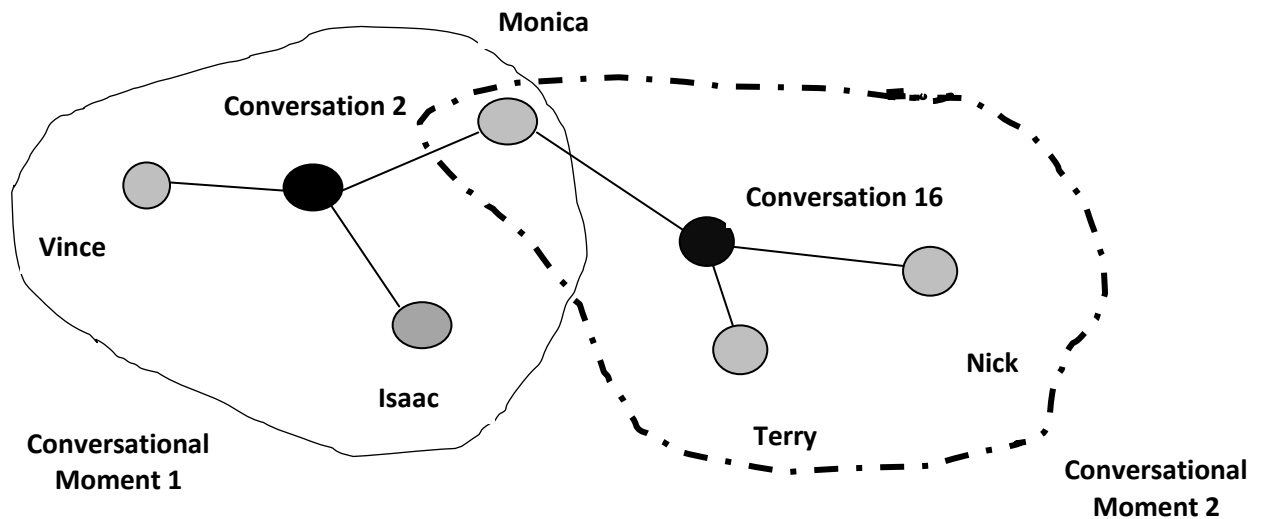


Figure (4.6). Multiple-party conversations in the OC classroom using sociogram symbols.

In Figure 4.7, I use a sociogram to visualize the engagement of the OC participants in multiple-party conversations in the week one discussion forum. The sociogram is drawn with the help of Pajek software. In preparation for the use of Pajek software, I color coded week one classroom conversations and organized them in a table format. Each colour coded conversational moment is recoded in terms of its participants, the number of posts made by each participant and the particular DQ-initial response under which a conversation is threaded (see appendix B for more illustration). Each conversation is assigned a letter 'C' and a number to distinguish it from other conversations in week one.

I depended on my judgment and intuition in few instances to make a number of decisions in indentifying conversations. For instance, not all posts begin with a named participant being addressed, 'Dear Isacc' or 'Hi Monica'. However, the addressee in a post can be identified by attending to the content of the conversation itself and the post's link to a parent post. In another instance, I decided to relocate one post to two classroom

conversations and where the addresser appears to be responding to two addressees in the same post. Students' posts which attracted no response were excluded from this visual presentation. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), one distinguishing feature which helps in identifying a conversation is the change in participants' roles in a conversation. In certain instances, the addresser in a past post becomes the addressee in the current post and so on.

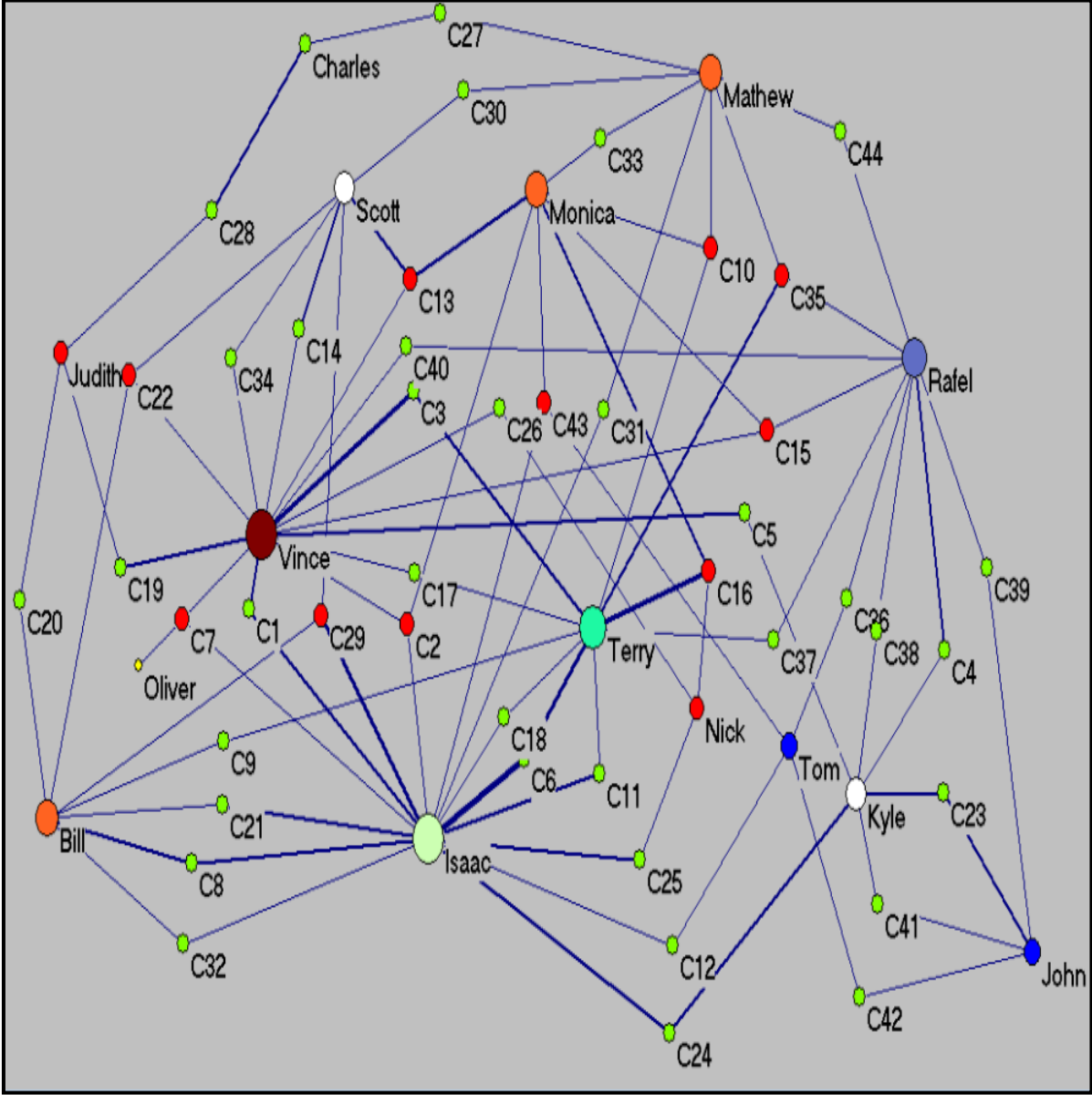


Figure (4.7). A sociogram of the OC participants' engagement in an online classroom dialogue.

In Figure 4.7, each conversation appears on the sociogram with its own unique label. Participants are marked with their pseudo names and both conversations and participants' vertices appear as coloured nodes. Participants' vertices with similar coloured nodes indicate participants' engagement in a similar *number* of conversations but not necessarily the same ones. For instance, both Judith and Nick engage in three conversational moments and hence, appear as red coloured nodes.

The different sizes of participant nodes indicate the number of conversation in which the participant has taken part. For instance, Vince, the tutor, and Isaac, are two participants engaging in most of the conversations in week one (presented with large sized nodes) while Oliver appears to be the least engaged participant; only participating in one conversation (i.e. C7). Conversations' nodes appear as either green or red coloured nodes, depending on the total number of participants engaging in each. A green coloured conversation node indicates a conversational moment between two participants while a red coloured one indicates a conversational moment flowing among three participants. From the figure, it is clear that most of the week one's classroom conversations involve two participants.

The lines connecting a participant with a conversation are given different weights depending on a number of posts made by a participant in each conversation. For example, the number of posts made by Isaac contributing to conversation six (C6) is higher than his contribution in conversation two (C2). Also, we can tell which participants appear to be more closely connected. For instance, Isaac seems to be closely connected to Bill, as they engage in four conversational moments in the week one discussion forum. A one-mode network can be extracted from this two-mode network (see appendix C) to visualize with whom participants are engaged in week one.

Participants' engagement in different conversations in the OC classroom mirrors Bakhtin's polyphonic setting. In the so called 'polyphonic' classroom, voices are given the autonomy to choose who to interact with, which conversations to engage in, and how many responsive texts to make in each chosen conversational moment. The use of the

sociogram to depict the OC polyphonic setting creates an impression of complexity as the number of conversations, participants, and crossing lines are observed.

Because the sociogram employs a specific set of symbols and functions to summarize and organize data, its use is straight forward and does not allow a researcher to communicate impressions or intuition. For instance, it does not communicate this sense of messiness or noisiness in tracking a single conversation. Nor does it reflect the relational nature of participants' texts in each conversation. The use of a sociogram is helpful in reproducing participants' engagements in asynchronous classroom conversations based on the actual number of conversations which occur. A list of the number of conversations in which each participant is engaged is found in appendix E. In this sense, it organizes and summarizes data. It, also, presents us with a different interpretation of Bakhtin's polyphony in the OC classroom.

In the next section, I attend to the features which describe the nature of learning in the OC classroom conversation, using the proposed framework based on Bakhtin's dialogism (see summary in Table 3.1, p. 83).

#### **IV. Observed Dialogic-Monologic Features in the OC Classroom Conversations**

In this section of the analysis, I attend to the content of the OC asynchronous classroom conversations in week one to investigate the nature of students' learning by using Bakhtin's concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse* and *internal dialogism*.

The process of analysis involved spending time trying to get to know participants' backgrounds, not only through their uploaded biographies but also through their written assignments and reflections in weeks one and four. For instance, I took notes whenever an assessed work offered me some insight into the author's background. This served the purpose of developing an understanding of participants' contexts; an essential element in investigating students' active understanding and/or reflective learning, according to Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism.



To understand participants' conversations in week one, I had to complete their weekly reading assignments and in some instances, other external sources cited in their texts. Even though there was no time spent in transcription, the writing up and presentation parts of the analysis was unexpectedly lengthy. The week one discussion forum was a very rich setting, and decisions had to be made with regard to the main features which best describe the nature of learning in the OC classroom. The analysis under each of the observed feature had to be condensed so I decided to use one or two episodes to illustrate each feature.

I decided to use 'different' episodes to exemplify a relevant feature because I found it difficult to use one rich episode to exemplify different features concurrently. Although it is possible to follow this approach in analysis, there is a risk of creating confusion for the reader when using the same episode to exemplify different features. This alternative approach separates features into different sections, with different episodes for simplicity.

The features were constructed and re-constructed throughout the process of analysis and writing up. This continuous construction and re-construction process is reflected in the way episodes are numbered (see Table 4.3). Features that best describe the nature of students' learning in an asynchronous learning environment are presented in the following order: Bakhtin's 'Orientation-Anticipation-Response', Proximate of Monologic and Dialogic Orientations, Rhetoric Arresting Moments and Social Language, and Forms of Dialogic-Orientation and Meaning Co-construction.

Observed Feature	Episodes	Presentation Style
<b>A. Bakhtin’s ‘Orientation-Anticipation-Response’.</b>	One and Six	1. Argument, 2. Episode One, description, and analysis. 3. Episode Six ,description and analysis
<b>B. Proximate of Monologic and Dialogic Orientations.</b>	Two and Seven	1. Episode Two, description, and analysis. 2. Episode Seven, description, and analysis. 3. Argument
<b>C. Rhetoric Arresting Moments and Social Language.</b>	Four and Five	1. Episode Four, description, and analysis. 2. Episode Five, description, and analysis. 3. Argument
<b>D. Forms of Dialogic-Orientation and Meaning Co-construction.</b>	Three	1. Argument, 2. Episode Three, description, and analysis.

Table (4.3). Observed features and episodes summary table.

Under each episode, I present a description of what the conversational moment is about, an analysis based on the proposed theoretical framework, and an argument constructed from within my observations and understanding of the relevant management education literature. In Table 4.3, features A and D are perceived as building on theory and/or others’ arguments and so arguments in light of these features are presented first. Features B and C are perceived as triggering some new insights and so arguments in light of these features are presented towards the end.

**A. Bakhtin’s ‘Orientation-Anticipation-Response’ Process in Describing the Flow of the OC Classroom Conversations**

**Argument:** In describing the flow of a conversation or the relational nature of words in a (speech) conversation, Bakhtin emphasizes the ‘orientation-anticipation-response’ process (OAR). In initiating and/or extending a conversation, an addresser chooses a ‘subject orientation’ towards an addressee and anticipates a response in return. Subject orientation is meant to refer to the particular issue, idea, attitude, or interest that the

addresser engages with in his/her text and assumes that it will *resonate* with the addressee. If it does resonate with the addressee's background, beliefs, or value system - whether in agreement or contestation, then the addressee will respond and the addresser's anticipation is met. In his/her response, the addressee picks up on the addresser's subject orientation to either extend or adjust it. I use this Bakhtinian lens to describe the flow of asynchronous classroom conversations.

The following are two episodes exemplifying the OAR process in two different conversational moments. Episodes One and Six present us with two classroom conversations in which participants' active understanding (in episode One) and passive understanding (in episode Six) are dialogically (or relationally) constructed.

### **Episode One**

#### **1. Vince wrote on January 7, 2012 at 2:50 PM EST:**

Hi Isaac,  
What role do barriers to entry play in this power game among the forces?  
All the best,  
Vince

#### **2. Isaac wrote on January 8, 2012 at 1:20 PM EST:**

Hi,  
I believe the main role of the barriers is to discourage new entrants, thereby preventing competition and increase market share.  
We have a similar situation in Nigeria in the financial sector. Capital requirement of Banks was increased to 25 billion naira from 2 billion naira in the later part of 2006 which is an enormous sum of money. This showed interplay of Government regulations and capital requirement which are 2 of the seven entry barriers.  
Competition became rife and there was no room for smaller banks. Since then, we have not witnessed the entry of any new bank due to this entry barrier.  
For the banks that recapitalized and remained in the industry, the fact that the product and services were similar meant that the possibility of substitution by customers was quite high. This led banks to up their quality of service to customer to beat one another.  
Regards  
Isaac

#### **3. Vince wrote on January 8, 2012 at 3:21 PM EST:**

Hi Isaac,  
Good answer.  
If we combine Coke and Pepsi, barriers to entry are very strong for others and not because of the obvious reasons. Their brand serves as a major source of power and creates entry barriers for

others. Brand, image, visibility, relations, etc. create power, because consumer demand puts pressure on channel and suppliers to deal with the successful company. So, advantages create barriers for your competitors. That is the whole point of the game between five forces.

All the best,  
Vince

#### 4. Isaac wrote on January 9, 2012 at 8:38 AM EST:

Hi Vince,  
I agree with your point of view.  
Many thanks  
Isaac

**Description:** This episode is triggered by Vince, the tutor's responsive post to Isaac's week one DQ - initial response. It runs over four texts exchanged between two participants; *Isaac* and *Vince*. Vince, in addressing Isaac, poses the question of what role 'entry barriers' plays in Porter's five competitive forces.<sup>17</sup> In his experience, Isaac believes that the role of entry barriers is to limit competition and increase the market share of existing industry incumbents if relatively small incumbents were forced to exit the industry. Isaac brings an example from the banking industry in Nigeria, where new entrants (i.e. new banks) fail to cope with the increase in the capital requirement and imposed government regulation. However, Isaac continues, the situation in the Nigerian banking industry seems to work in favour of customers and as existing incumbents in banking industry compete on better service quality. Vince praises his student's response and adds that entry barriers could also be as less visible and intangible as a brand name and/or existing relationships network with others in the same industry. Vince believes that industry incumbents in their search for a strategic advantage are actually creating barriers for new entrants. The conversation between Vince and Isaac closes with Isaac's text expressing agreement with his tutor's view.

**Analysis:** Drawing on Bakhtin's OAR, this episode describes how one student's voice and active understanding are relationally constructed within an ongoing OAR process.

In text one, Vince sets his subject orientation clear. His subject orientation revolves around the role of entry barriers in securing power to existing industry incumbents. In

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Porter's competitive forces include suppliers' power, buyers' power, competitors'/existing incumbents' rivalry, substitutes' power and new entrants' threat.

choosing his subject orientation, Vince anticipates a response from his addressee; Isaac. This anticipation by Vince is foregrounded in: (a) attempting to have a reading or an imagination of Isaac's future response- which has not been said yet in the moment of text one, and (b) choosing this subject orientation 'the role of entry barriers in securing power to existing industry incumbents' based on his reading. In his engagement with (a) and (b), Vince addresses his text to Isaac. In eliciting a response from Isaac, Vince's anticipation is satisfied as his subject orientation resonates with Isaac's beliefs, value system and background, and his discourse is said to possess a degree of internal dialogism.

In text two, Isaac picks up on Vince's subject orientation; the role of entry barriers in securing power to existing industry incumbent, and brings an example from his own organization which is the Nigerian banking industry. Isaac adds a new insight to the conversation as he mentions that entry barriers do not only prevent competition from new entrants -according to weekly reading- but can expel smaller incumbent banks which fail to cope. This leads to an increase in the market shares of large incumbent banks, increasing competition among these large incumbent banks on service quality. Isaac's authentic voice and active understanding of his weekly reading and of Vince's discourse are evident as he brings his own contextual experience to the conversation. In other words, Isaac's active understanding is described as going beyond the simple comprehension of others' discourses.

Isaac's active understanding is relationally constructed within an ongoing OAR process. Isaac's interest remains broadly in line with Vince's subject orientation of entry barriers and power, but it slithers away from the entry barrier's role in securing power to the nature of entry barriers and its implication on an industry. He brings his experience of two barriers from within his particular context (i.e. "Government regulations and capital requirement which are 2 of the seven entry barriers"). Note how the choice of Isaac's subject orientation appears relevant to his social context.

To respond to Vince's text, Isaac has a reading of Vince's future response, which has not been said yet in the moment of text two. Based on his reading, Isaac chooses his subject orientation and anticipates a response from Vince. As Isaac receives a response

to his second text from Vince, his subject orientation resonates with Vince and his discourse is said to possess a degree of internal dialogism.

In text three, Vince builds on Isaac's subject orientation of the nature of entry barriers, suggesting some examples such as a brand name and existing relationships with others in the industry as other types of entry barriers. For Vince, the competitive advantages implied in an incumbent's brand name, image, or existing relationships with others in the industry constitute entry barriers to new entrants. Thus, Vince's voice is revealed when he adds a new insight (i.e. competitive advantages are entry barriers for others) to the conversation. Thus, participants' active understanding in their conversations is relationally constructed within Bakhtin's ongoing OAR process. The next episode exemplifies another conversational moment where a participant's passive understanding is relationally constructed within Bakhtin's OAR.

### **Episode Six**

#### **1. Tom wrote on January 11, 2012 at 8:46 AM EST:**

Dear John,

Your DQ submission is very detailed and concise. I just want us to consider this poser from the penultimate paragraph in your submission where you quoted Greenwald and Kahn saying "A competitive advantage is something a firm can do that rivals cannot match. It either generates higher demand or leads lower costs".

From the quote above, can a competitive advantage be lost to another industry player? I want us to share our thoughts on these, so we can all learn.

Regards,

Tom

#### **2. John wrote on January 11, 2012 at 7:34 PM EST:**

Hi Tom:

In fact I think it could be possible when the new player brings innovative application which could bring income increases or cost reductions.

**Description:** This episode is triggered by Tom's responsive text to John's week one DQ - initial response. It runs over two texts exchanged between *Tom* and *John*. Tom comments on John's endorsement to Greenwald and Kahn's (2005) discourse that an organization's competitive advantage cannot be replicated by rivals. Tom asks John whether he believes that a competitive advantage can be lost to another industry player. In his response, John affirms that this is possible if a new entrant to an industry can

come up with a new development with less cost and more profits. With John's response in text two, this conversation comes to closure.

**Analysis:** This episode exemplifies how the flow of a classroom conversation can be described using Bakhtin's OAR process, although its participants assume a rather passive role in their learning.

In text one, Tom sets his subject orientation clear. His subject orientation revolves around the sustainability of a competitive advantage of an existing industry incumbent. Tom has a reading of John's future response which he uses to construct his subject orientation. Tom anticipates a response from John. With John's response in text two, Tom's discourse is said to possess a degree of internal dialogism. Although Tom quotes John's discourse, he engages with it less actively (i.e. "I just want us to consider this poser from the penultimate paragraph in your submission where you quoted....."). He seeks a further clarification on John's view on his subject orientation, but does not populate his words/question with his own argument, view or interpretation. He simply does not tell John why he thought it is possible for a competitive advantage to be lost to another industry player. Did he have a personal experience of a similar situation? What is 'his' perspective on this issue? Tom goes "I want us to share our thoughts on these", but he does not share his own thoughts and perspective. Tom's understanding appears passive; a mere comprehension of others' discourses. He puts less effort in elaborating, extending or adding a new insight to the conversation.

In text two, John picks up on Tom's subject orientation of the sustainability of a competitive advantage. John's response implies a passive understanding of Tom's discourse. John expresses his view but with minimal effort put to elaborate it. John does not use any examples or refer to an experience in support of his perspective. John's voice is not clearly heard in his discourse. For instance, he does not tell Tom (or other participants in the OC classroom) what he means by an "innovative application which could bring income increases or cost reductions". In this sense, John's words contribute less to the subject conversed about.

## **B. A Proximate of Monologic and Dialogic Orientations in the OC Classroom Conversations**

This feature is exemplified using two episodes; episode Two and episode Seven. Each presents a conversation which can be placed somewhere in the middle of a Bakhtinian continuum of two ends; monologism vs. dialogism. An argument is raised after presenting the description and the analysis of both episodes.

### **Episode Two**

#### **1. Monica wrote on January 9, 2012 at 12:40 PM EST:**

Hi Isaac,

You are saying in your topic that 'Incumbents will compete between themselves and keep prices down thereby discouraging new entrants when they compare costs to price'. I agree with you in that point. But, at the same time, Michael Porter (2008) in his article mentioned that 'Rivalry is especially destructive to profitability if it gravitates solely to price competition transfers profits directly from an industry to its customers'. From my perspective, it is a very sensitive point, in that companies must give the right (not suitable for the moment, but the right) decision in aim to find the best balance between level of price and the profits gifted to customers.

Anyway, it was a very interesting research made by you, with various analysis within the costs and profits.

Best regards,

Monica

Reference list:

Porter, M.E. (2008/1979) 'The five competitive forces that shape strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, January: 23-41, (R0801E). Retrieved from <http://sfxhosted.exlibrisgroup.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/lpu?title=harvard+business+review&volume=86&issue=1&spage=78&date=2008>

#### **2. Vince wrote on January 9, 2012 at 1:52 PM EST:**

Hi Monica and Isaac,

Well, economics theory says that if entry barriers are not strong and there are some profits, there is always an incentive for new firms to enter and undercut the price. With globalization, the phenomenon even takes a global character, i.e. you might be able to source products or materials from hitherto unknown sources.

All the best,

Vince

#### **3. Isaac wrote on January 10, 2012 at 5:06 AM EST:**

Hi Monica,

Thanks for your post. I agree that strong rivalry has the tendency of eroding profitability within an industry. That is surely one of the setbacks of rivalry. On the other side, in an ideal situation, it affords consumers and customers the luxury of better quality of products and services as competitors strive to satisfy consumers.

The cola wars provided consumers with good value for money to retain their market share. As



Coke and Pepsi are quite similar, failure to meet a particular standard would have easily eroded either the market share or profitability of either Coke or Pepsi.

I agree it's sensitive and a balance between price and profits must be made.

Regards

Isaac

**Description:** This episode is triggered by Monica's responsive text to Isaac's week one DQ- initial response. It runs over three posts exchanged among three participants; *Monica, Isaac, and Vince*. Monica expresses her agreement with Isaac's argument that existing industry incumbents can create entry barriers for new entrants. Monica argues that existing industry incumbents can discourage new entrants from entering an industry market by cutting down their product prices, making it less profitable for new entrants. Yet, she appears to disagree with a price-based competition strategy. She argues that the decision to cut down a product price requires some sort of sensitivity or else the company risks filling up customers' pockets with 'gifted' savings and emptying their own. Vince addresses both Monica and Isaac. He suggests that a price cut strategy may not be a free choice but rather an imposed one. He assumes a situation where weak entry barriers combined with high profits in an industry afford an incentive for attracting new entrants, who can later impose price cuts by outsourcing cheaper input material. Isaac expresses his agreement (i.e. "I agree") with Monica. He believes that cutting down the price on its own can erode profitability for a company. Isaac also brings customers' welfare to the argument. He argues that price-based competition in an industry makes it possible for customers to receive good quality products for affordable prices. Isaac uses a Coke and Pepsi case study to argue that Coke and Pepsi had to manage their price levels while meeting customers' expectations of quality. If they were not successful in meeting customers' expectations of quality, Isaac continues, their market share and/or profitability would have suffered.

**Analysis:** In this episode, I attend to how participants' different orientations (monologic vs. dialogic) is mirrored in their efforts to go (or not) beyond their weekly readings in their classroom conversation. I also show how one participant's orientation can shift/change from one learning situation to another.

In text one, Monica begins her response by quoting Isaac's words, placing it between quotation marks. Monica claims that when competition among exiting industry

incumbents is based solely on price, it could be destructive to industry incumbents' profitability and cites others' discourse in support (i.e. Porter's discourse). Monica's subject orientation is focused on the issue of a price-based competitive strategy and its implications on industry incumbents' profitability. Monica's text implies a less dialogic (or more monologic) orientation. Note how Monica uses a direct quotation from Isaac's discourse in his DQ-initial response and from Porter's discourse to set out her subject orientation. But, it is not the act of quoting and/or citing itself that features Monica's less dialogic and passive understanding in this conversational moment. Rather, it is in the absence of her own intentions, experience, and context infusions that Monica's passive understanding is relationally constructed with her conversation with Isaac.

I illustrate further on Monica's less dialogic orientation and passive use of a quote from Porter's discourse by contrasting her orientation to that of another student, Bill, who uses the same quote. The following is part of Bill's responsive text to Isaac's text three in another conversational moment. In his text, Bill explains what kind of costs could be incurred when a price-based competitive strategy is in action, putting a company profits at stake;

“Now, by shifting the perspective to the producer or supplier of goods, this is going to be viewed mainly as destructive and as such negative because profitability is at stake. Just because he will be competing with the rivals to win the market, costs will be incurred through advertising campaigns, adjusting service delivery to meet clients' requirements and in the end he will find his would-be profits being transferred to the customers. “Rivalry is especially destructive to profitability if it gravitates solely to price because price competition transfers profits directly from industry to customers” (Porter, 2008)”

(Bill wrote in January 10, 2012 at 4:39)

In contrasting Bill and Monica's use of the same quote from Porter's discourse, Bill's use appears to be more dialogic in the way he lists these examples of the costs that could incur when an existing industry incumbent decides to use a price-based competitive strategy. He puts more effort in elaborating on his perspective compared to Monica's orientation. Monica's orientation is less dialogic and Bill's orientation is more dialogic. However, Bill does not bring an example from own context, challenge others' discourses, or engage in a reflexive doubt.

I also discuss Monica's orientation by contrasting this monologic orientation in episode Two with her orientation in week four IQ- initial response. According to her uploaded biography on Blackboard, Monica's work experience is confined to the field of 'finance' in general. Monica's subject orientation of price-based competition and its impact on profitability seem relevant to her finance background (i.e. social context and/or professional experience). Although she is less engaged with this context and background in episode Two in week one, she appears more engaged with it in week four IQ- initial response. The quote below is from her week four IQ - initial response, where she reflects on a past experience within her organization. She speaks of a crisis situation in her organization where growth was mistaken for profitability and strategizing implied a flawed focus on operational effectiveness. Once more, she quotes from Porter's discourse;

“There was the overlapping between the notions of operational effectiveness and strategic development. Porter (1996) argues that ‘strategic agenda is the right place for defining a unique position, making clear trade-offs, and tightening fits’ (Porter, 1996:78). Especially, during the crisis, the operational effectiveness of the company substitutes the notion of ‘strategy’. Being better than rivals, stay alive when rivals have sunk off, all of those actions imply the operational effectiveness, not the strategic positioning. Unfortunately, the Company has made other serious faults. Before the crisis, the core goal of the Company was growth of activities. But, we did not foresee the trap of such actions. Growth does not mean profitability”

(Monica's week four IQ- initial response, 2012)

In her week four IQ - initial response, Monica shifts her orientation (and understanding) to a more dialogic position. Her authentic voice of speaking is present in her discourse. The quote above exemplifies one instance where a management student uses theory and textbooks' discourses to make sense of own experience. This exemplifies an instance of reflection in which Monica adds her organization's experience during a crisis period as a framing context to Porter's discourse of confusing profitability and operational effectiveness for a strategy. In doing so, Porter's discourse becomes meaningful and personal to Monica's learning.

In this sense, Monica's discourse shows an engagement with her own intentions and/or social context. Monica uses Porter's discourse to gain insights into an experience. She perceives two misconceptions; (1) operational effectiveness for strategy, and (2) growth

for profitability. The connection between own organizational experience and weekly reading suggests that Monica can be classed as an active learner, constructing her learning. Note Monica's act of quoting Porter's discourse in her week four IQ - initial response. This time her act of quoting is claimed to be 'active'.

I now revisit the analysis of episode Two. In text three, Isaac's discourse appears more dialogic compared to Monica's in text one. Isaac puts in an effort to go beyond Porter's discourse as he brings the 'Cola Wars' case study as a framing context to Porter's and Monica's discourses. By bringing the 'Cola Wars' case study, Isaac adds a new insight to the conversation. For Isaac, price-based-competition implies that an appropriate level of quality is maintained as well (i.e. affordable quality). In this instance, Isaac's dialogism lies in his use of the 'Cola Wars' case study as a framing context to others' discourses, bringing a new meaning to the conversation (i.e. a price-based competition in an industry means affordable quality for customers). In this episode, Isaac's understanding is assumed to be active as he reflects on the 'Cola Wars' case study.

In this episode, Monica perceives price-based competition as *a threat* to a company's profitability, and Isaac views price-based competition as *an opportunity* for customers. Yet, Monica's view remains largely 'an opinion' with little effort made to persuade her addressee/audience. Her learning can be described as comprehending and/or a mere repetition of reading materials.

In text two, Vince, the tutor, addresses both Isaac and Monica in his text but fails to attract a response from either addressee. Vince extends on Monica's subject orientation of price-based competition and profitability, being concerned with profitability in case of weak entry barriers. Vince's text also shows an effort to go beyond others' discourses. He adds that price-based competition can be *imposed* rather than *chosen* and illustrates his perspective by relating it to the context of globalization and the practice of outsourcing.

In this episode, episode Two, two participants (i.e. Isaac and Vince) are assumed to be active learners, adding new meanings to others' discourses and their orientation is dialogic. The third participant (i.e. Monica) can be classed as a passive learner,

contributing nothing new and her orientation is monologic. The next episode will be used to exemplify another form of this monologic-dialogic proximate in the OC classroom conversation.

### Episode Seven

#### **A. Terry wrote on January 9, 2012 at 6:09 PM EST:**

Dear Vince and Monika,

I have to agree with you, Vince. Size does matter - always.

Bigger companies have more chance to compete, to empower barriers, and face rivalry. They have more power to better the quality and maintain themselves on the market for longer. They have more financial basis to support more losses without declaring bankrupt.

"a small company simply cannot compete with a large company" (Free Academic Writing & Research Help, Aug 14, 2011).

Dear Monica, you mentioned: "the soft drink industry is the most profitable industries in the world". I am sorry but I will have to disagree with that. I do not hold the knowledge to tell you which one is the most profitable one and although soft drinks are very profitable, there are many others to consider: diamond extraction (in Africa), oil extraction (in Canada, Africa and Antarctica), microchip suppliers (as there are only two on the world, their bargain power is huge), racing horses' industry, etc... It will all depends on who runs the business and the opportunities they will have to grow. Pepsi-cola had declared bankrupt three times in history. (Ying, Jennifer. 2009) and even tried to be sold to Coca-cola, who refused to put an offer for it. It will all depends on many factors, although soft drinks industry does have high profit margins, I do not believe it is the most profitable in the world. According to the BizVault.co.uk, the most profitable are: 1. British petroleum, 2. Banking, 3. Tesco's form of shopping (big supermarkets and wall marts), 5. E-Books. And according to Ranker (2009): they are: from 1 to 6: companies related to industries of Petroleum and natural gas, 7. aircraft, 8. videogames, computer hardware and publishing (Microsoft) 9. Automobile, motor and passenger car (Toyota) and at least 10. Chocolate, coca products (nestle).

Do you agree with me? I would like to hear your opinion as well.

Terry

References:

<http://www.thebizvault.co.uk/.2008-2010>. Last accessed on January 9,2012

Free Academic Writing & Research Help. 'Some people prefer to work for a lager company.

Other prefer to work for a small one.' 2011. Available at:<http://www.essayforum.com/writing-feedback-3/some-people-prefer-work-lager-company-other-prefer-work-30093/>(last accessed on January 9, 2012)

Ranker, 2009. 'Most Profitable Businesses In The World'. Available at: <http://www.ranker.com/list/most-profitable-businesses-in-the-world/business-and-company-info>. (last accessed on January 9,2012)

Ying, Jenifer. May 8, 2009.'Guth v. Loft: The Story of Pepsi-Cola and the Corporate Opportunity Doctrine'. University of Pennsylvania Law School. Available

at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1414478](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1414478). (Last accessed on January 9,2012)

#### **2. Monica wrote on January 10, 2012 at 2:01 PM EST:**

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your comment. The notice that soft drink industry is the most profitable industry of the world is not mine, actually :) Michal Porter (2008) in his article gave the graphic, where the most profitable industry is the security brokers/dealers sector (40.9%), the second is the soft drink industry (37,6%). That data given for the period between (1992-2006), and was prepared according to the average returned of invested capital ratio (ROIC). Only for that reason I included that data to my response :)

Best regards,

Monica.

Reference list:

Porter, M.E. (2008/1979) 'The five competitive forces that shape strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, January: 23-41, (R0801E). Retrieved from <http://sfxhosted.exlibrisgroup.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/lpu?title=harvard+business+review&volume=86&issue=1&spage=78&date=200>

### **3. Terry wrote on January 10, 2012 at 4:20 PM EST:**

Dear Monica,

Thank you so much in informing the source of your information. I did not notice this when I read porter's article. That is what this course is all about - critical thinking. I still do not agree this is the most profitable industry even with a genius like Porter affirming it (and thanks I am not the only one).

Can you also let me know what page did Porter mention that information? I would like to have a re-read on that. I have done a search but could not find. Thanks

Terry

**Description** Terry's first text in episode Seven is made in response to Vince's text. Initially, Vince was commenting on Monica's week one DQ - initial response. In his text, Vince is concerned about the issue of organization size and its implication on power (i.e. not part of this episode).

This episode runs over three texts exchanged between *Terry* and *Monica*. Terry, who addresses both Monica and Vince in text one, agrees with Vince's view in the first part of her text and disagrees with Monica's in the second. Terry agrees that companies with a well-established brand name, are powerful, can maintain quality-based competition, increase entry barriers and are able to tolerate some losses without going bankrupt. In the second part of her text, Terry disagrees with Monica's affirmation (i.e. in Monica's DQ - initial response) that the soft drink industry is the most profitable industry in the world. Terry suggests a number of alternate industries that could be perceived as profitable industries. Terry believes that profitability depends on a number of elements, such as leaders' vision and industry growth opportunities. Terry cites other ranking schemes and where the first ranking positions do not include the soft drink industry. In defense of her affirmation, Monica cites Porter's discourse in support. Monica explains

the criteria used in ranking (i.e. average return to invested capital ratio). Terry's response, whilst acknowledging Porter's discourse, maintains a critical stance and disagreement with Porter's perspective. Then this conversation unexpectedly comes to closure without any clear indications.

**Analysis:** This episode shows how participants' different orientations (monologic vs. dialogic) is mirrored in their efforts to go (or not) beyond their readings in their classroom conversation. What is different in this episode from episode Two, which is presented before under the same feature, is the nature of Terry's active understanding which I turn now to explain further. I start this analysis by focusing on the second part of Terry's text one.

Terry's subject orientation is focused on the question of what constitutes the most profitable industries. Terry expresses her disagreement (i.e. "I am sorry but I will have to disagree with that") with Monica's perspective on this subject orientation. In her texts, one and three, Terry's dialogic orientation resets with her efforts to: (a) challenge Monica's discourse and the affirmation "...the soft drink industry is the most profitable industries in the world...", without assuming the position of *the* knowledgeable author (i.e. "I do not hold the knowledge to tell you which one is the most profitable one and although soft drinks are very profitable"), and (b) dispute the authority of Porter's discourse (i.e. "I still do not agree this is the most profitable industry even with a genius like Porter affirming it"). Terry refuses to ascribe to the authority of another discourse just because it is the discourse of a well-known scholar. She opens up Porter's discourse to questioning, elaborates on her perspective and brings others' discourses in support. Terry's interrogation of others' discourses implies her active understanding as she engages in an instance of intellectual critique.

On the Contrary, Monica's discourse in text two shows her allegiance to Porter's discourse and authoritative reading (i.e. "Only for that reason I included that data to my response"). Monica's authoritative reading implies some admiration and /or respect for the author and his discourse, leaving his discourse untouched, unexplored and unquestioned. Monica in her text two repeats Porter's discourse but does not go beyond it. She does say that this is not her discourse (i.e. "not mine actually") but she makes no

attempt to make the words of others her own. Monica's authoritative reading and monologic orientation denote her passive understanding.

**Argument in relation to episodes Two and Seven:** Online learning literature speaks of both a dialogic, responsive view of online learning as well as a passive, unreflective view. This suggest, according to Bakhtin, either dialogism or monologism; active understanding or passive understanding. No mention is made of conversations in which participants' discourses and texts show different (dialogic-monologic) orientations, but these are the most commonly observed type of conversations in the OC classroom.

Participants in the OC classroom conversations are different in their dialogic-monologic orientations. With the exception of one observed instance (i.e. episode Six), there appear to be no purely monologic conversations in the week one OC classroom conversations. For a classroom conversation to be claimed as totally monologic, all participants involved need to demonstrate passive understanding and monologic orientation in their discourses. Episodes Two and Seven exemplify conversational moments where participants' orientations appear to be different from each other and where the whole conversation can be placed somewhere in the middle of a Bakhtinian (dialogic) continuum. The use of the term 'proximate' denotes those conversational moments where participants show different orientations in a particular conversation. The term is also used to describe the possible shifts in one student's orientation in different learning situations. Monica's orientation shifts from less dialogic in week one to more dialogic in week four, and so Monica's orientation in general can be called a proximate of monologic and dialogic orientations.

A monologic orientation is observed in the way students' texts and discourses seem to be dominated by others' voices, discourses and intentions rather than their own authentic voice. A student with monologic orientation appears to exert little effort in constructing a new insight, clarifying or interrogating others' discourses. Drawing on Bakhtin, passive students with monologic orientations show no movement beyond others' discourses in their own texts. Active students with dialogic orientation do make an effort to take over the words of others and intertwine them with their own words and intentions. In episodes Two and Seven, this includes adding a situation of interest (i.e.



use of case study) as a framing context to others' discourse in instances of reflection, and challenging the authority of others' discourses in instances of intellectual critique.

### **C. Rhetoric Arresting Moments and Social Language(s) in the OC Classroom Conversations**

This feature is exemplified using episodes Four and Five. Each presents a rhetoric/reflexive conversational moment in which participants' disagreements and justification are confined to participants' particular contexts. An argument is raised after presenting the description and the analysis of both episodes.

#### **Episode Four**

##### **1. Isaac wrote on January 8, 2012 at 1:35 PM EST:**

Hi Terry,  
Hope you had a great weekend. From your post, you relate the intensity of rivalry to the availability of substitutes and growth of the industry.  
I tend to agree with you but do you think other factors can intensify rivalry? Please what are your views on rivalry? Would you think rivalry is a good or bad thing for an industry?  
Regards  
Isaac

##### **2. Terry wrote on January 8, 2012 at 4:27 PM EST:**

Dear Isaac,  
I feel honoured that my post has created so many answers and I am more than happy to reply to all of them.  
The profit motive which makes the rivalry may bring up the evil as well as the good. The company raises and fixes prices but the result is not as expected: Competitor comes with a product which sells at a lower price. Since shoppers always seek maximum value, only the lower price product sells, while the company's profits turn into losses. 99 times out of a 100 competition works, when it doesn't, government steps in to prevent monopolist attempts. I believe Rivalry is always a good thing to the customer, as it level and stop abusive and excessive prices and force industries to better the quality of products as well as create substitute items (ipad and tablet), but fierce rivalry such as Coke x Pepsi, Apple x Microsoft, Pirelli and Goodyear can be a lost to the company as the fight for markets can influence on employees, salaries, benefits and stress itself, there can also happen a loss of an area, resulting on losses of profits and jobs (example of Rover in UK),  
Hope that helps.  
Terry

##### **3. Isaac wrote on January 9, 2012 at 8:34 AM EST:**

Hi Terry,  
Your response surely helps and throws more light on rivalry. And I agree when you say rivalry is

a good thing for the customer as in most cases, it improves efficiency, service delivery and quality of products.

I have views on rivalry pertaining to other industries such as the financial sector. Rivalry also has the tendency of blinding competitors and all they think of is enhancing market share and profitability. This is one of the reasons for the crash of the mortgage industry in the United States of America. Many customers lost their homes due to the intensity of this rivalry and crave for profitability thereby approving sub- prime mortgages. Though some were bailed out, at the end of it all, customers took the brunt of it.

In this regard, I will believe rivalry may have some negatives if left unchecked and unregulated. Please what do you think?

Regards

Isaac

#### **4. Terry wrote on January 9, 2012 at 4:39 PM EST:**

Dear Isaac,

First, sorry for the long answer - I tend to right too much to try to make clear.

I agree with you until certain degree - rivalry can blind only the one already blinded with rage and greedy.

As a new entry on a market, I have to realize my profits will be low until I can gain the market. That will make me as a substitute for already existing products, but I will not be any threat to quality products that already have gained the customer. I will give some examples (maybe you don't know the brands).

Valentino's clothes - will always be a valentino - there is no bargain on that and no substitutes at the moment and it will take time to get any substitutes - the same as Arabian horses for racing, Mitsubishi or Jaguar (before the break down), Adidas or Nike, Coca or Pepsi. They are winners - customers go for them for the quality not the price - these are big companies that will not let their substitutes threats passed unchecked or unregulated, on contraire, they will obtain as much barriers as they can, also using law, government, etc... They made what we called the monopoly power "It is different from legal monopoly, which is seen as total market share of the largest firms." (Vince, 2012) Mexico case was one example, where Pepsi saw Coca winning market and used the government and law to denunciate monopoly and stop Coca-Cola's growth. (noticias.uol.com.br, 2007)

Smaller brands can create this kind of pricing I spoke about: Carrefour cola's are always competing in price with Jumbo or Extra's fizzy drinks - if one goes down, the other lower their prices even more or level the prices - but they have to be careful as legal price leveling is illegal in Brazil. Horses as quarter horse or appaloosa (substitutes), Skoda or Peugeot, Primark clothes, etc... they are so called white brands - whoever cannot afford quality or the named brand goes for the substitutes, which can be any, and usually goes for the cheapest ones.

Regarding the Mortgages in USA, what happened had nothing to do with five forces or rivalry. What happened was the crises hit USA (as it is hitting UK). All prices in everything (including salaries) went down (I don't have a raise for 3 years), therefore, the mortgages came down. Due to lack of employment and difficulty to pay off debts, banks stopped lending money so easily. - when I first came to UK all you needed to buy a house was a job, a address, name and bank account - Banks started to ask for some kind of financial stability and savings as well as deposit upfront. Sales went down, offer went up. As salaries and incomes went down as well as prices of goods, the mortgages were higher than the original price paid for. For example: I bought my house for £130.000. I still have to pay £110.000 but it now worth only £106.000 in the market. My mortgage is £800 per month. If my salary goes lower or I lose my job I won't be able to pay off my mortgage and my debt will worth more than my house. That was what happened in USA and in Portugal. People are selling houses for £1.00 just to get rid of mortgage or debt. (or late

fees and taxes). It is another matter.

Reference:

<http://noticias.uol.com.br/ultnot/efe/2007/05/27/ult1807u37043.jhtm>. (2007). 'Tribunal mexicano ratifica sanção à Coca-Cola por práticas de monopólio' (Last Accessed on January 7, 2012)

#### **5. Isaac wrote on January 10, 2012 at 5:05 AM EST:**

Hi Terry,

While I agree that rivalry has a lot of positives in terms of service efficiency and quality of products, I am still of the opinion it can have negatives just as I outlined earlier. The relationship between rivalry and profits is still quite visible to me in the financial sector.

The example I gave concerning mortgages is also very prevalent in Nigeria. We had so many banks competing to be the biggest in Nigeria in terms of profitability, balance sheet and size of assets. Due process was hardly followed in disbursing loans. This was aimed at making a lot of interest income to have the highest profits and be considered biggest bank. The lack of due process led to monumental non performing loans (bad loans) resulting in losses for most of those banks and further eroding their capital thereby running them out of the business of banking or being acquired by other banks. Now in my view, this rivalry has led to losses (or lower profits) rather than profits and this is the reason I see tendency of negative effects of tense rivalry if left unchecked. This is just my view on this and I may be wrong.

Please was I able to clarify to you my view on this? Please are you opposed to this view?

Regards

Isaac

#### **6. Terry wrote on January 10, 2012 at 4:37 PM EST:**

Dear Isaac,

Thank you so much for clarifying your view. I do understand now and have to admit that I am not up-to-date or even aware of the economy in Nigeria (I know I should be - ashamed of me - sorry!) I am a little selfish, I have to say! I involve only with south, Central and North America, Europe, China, Japan and Australia. That is my market in advertising at the moment and with all going on, I cannot find time to follow anything else - I knooooowww - I really should! Therefore I cannot give a true opinion on mortgage situation on Nigeria, so what I will do is to provide my general, although very humble opinion.

I do believe we are talking about different theories here. While I spoke about coca-cola and Pepsi, jaguar, etc.. You are talking about general view of the market. It is very important to differentiate. The difference between Macroeconomics is the general view of the merchant while Microeconomics looks at the economy in details, the behaviour of individual firms, and the behaviour of individual consumers. We see things that others would not see as we look the economy for each individual detail – that is where the name comes from: microeconomics – looking through a microscope.

The profit motive has been the base of any industry.

In this challenging times, business demands new thinking.

Under what I understood regarding mortgage and rivalry, you are mentioning the base of Macroeconomics:

Price goes up – demand goes down – quality goes up to get more customers

Price goes down (sales) – demands goes up – quality goes down due to volume goes up

I am talking about Microeconomics, Oligopolies and game theory

Two firms – they have to worry about the pricing the other has. Firm A can maintain or lower the price – that will influence the profit. They have to decide the dominant strategy – maintain or

lower prices?

Study the price leadership from a dominant producer – how the dominant producer thinks through the problem of setting the price with a market filled with other smaller producers? I hope that clarified for both of us, so in resume - I agree with you on Macroeconomics and I have some points which could start a interesting and long discussion on Microeconomics - where rivalry would not be that simple as having a negative or positive side.

Terry

**7. Isaac wrote on January 11, 2012 at 8:21 AM EST:**

Hi Terry,

No love lost. We all have situations peculiar to our environments. I also do not think I know that much about most countries as well.

I understand your take on the relationship between rivalry and profits from the price standpoint. For instance, due to the reach of coke and Pepsi, whatever margins of profits they make may be sufficient given the fact they have a very huge consumer base. They could work together to lower prices to a level where no new entrant can dare due to high capital cost. This effectively extinguishes the threat of new entrants and external rivalry outside the 2 giants minimized.

I presume this is your line of thought and I agree with you.

Regards

Isaac

**Description:** Episode Four is triggered by Isaac’s response to Terry’s week one DQ - initial response. This conversation runs over seven texts exchanged between *Terry* and *Isaac*. It exemplifies a rhetoric/reflexive conversational moment in which participants disagree with each other views. Core to their disagreement, is the subject orientation of whether rivalry among existing industry incumbents is a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ thing. Isaac raised this question in his text one to Terry.

In her reply, Terry explains that intense rivalry could be both a bad thing and a good thing. She argues that it could be bad thing, if industry incumbents compete on product prices only. This may lead to a situation where existing industry incumbents incur losses if customers are more driven to a product’s low price rather than its quality and may, as a result, require government intervention to avoid the occurrence of a monopoly situation. Yet, she argues that even in this scenario customers are the ultimate winners (i.e. “I believe Rivalry is always a good thing to the customer”). For customers, price-based competition means that prices are forced down, quality is improved and substitutes are made available. In text four, Terry sets quality products (or big brand products as Valentino, Nike, Jaguar, etc.) aside from this argument. Terry limits her view of the negative side of price-based competition to what she termed “small” or

“white brands,” which could be easily substituted with other lower-priced products. Terry gives examples of what she called “white brands” (i.e. “Horses as quarter horse or appaloosa (substitutes), Skoda or Peugeot, Primark clothes, etc...”).

From within the context of banking industry in Nigeria and mortgage business in USA, Isaac argues a different perspective in texts three and five. Isaac argues that rivalry is not always good to the customers. He argues that when Nigerian banks were competing to appear the biggest in terms of large assets value and high profits on their balance sheets, they became more lenient in following the procedures of granting loans. Isaac states that the aim of Nigerian banks was to accumulate increasing amounts of interest income which led the banks to incur losses due to a huge number of bad loans. Some Nigerian banks were forced out of business or acquired by other banks. Isaac interprets the crash of mortgage business in USA as similar to the Nigerian banks situation. He argues that customers could not pay back their loans and most ended up losing their homes.

Towards the end of this conversation in text six, Terry attends to their (hers and Isaac’s) different stances (i.e. “I do believe we are talking about different theories”). She attributes their different perspectives to different analytical stands (macro vs. micro level of analysis). Terry assumes that her argument rests with looking at the rivalry issue by observing the behavior of individual firms while Isaac’s argument pertains to observing the behavior of an industrial section within an economy. In text seven, Isaac seems to agree with Terry’s interpretation.

**Analysis:** In this episode, I attend to how participants’ disagreements and different perspectives can lead them to an ‘arresting moment’, where they appreciate the other view. In this episode, participants appear more interested in broadening their perspectives than achieving a resolution to their disagreement. I also attend to the use of language or participants’ social languages and the extent to which it appears flavoured by participants’ professions and backgrounds.

In text one, Isaac’s subject orientation is the issue of rivalry; whether it is a good or a bad thing. In text two, Terry illustrates her perspective (i.e. “...rivalry may bring up the evil as well as the good”). Although she makes some effort to explain her perspective in

text two, her active understanding is clearer in text four where she elaborates on the perspective she presented in text two. She adds more details and examples to support her perspective. Terry categorizes products as “quality products” (stronger brand names), and “smaller brands”. Terry limits her perspective on the issue of intense rivalry to smaller brands which are more sensitive to competitors’ price reductions. Rivalry for smaller brands is evil, Terry continues, and may lead to business loss. But from customers’ point of view, rivalry is always a good thing because it leads to cheaper products. In text four, Terry draws on her marketing and advertising backgrounds and knowledge of different regional markets (e.g. UK, Mexico, and USA) including Brazil, her home country. In this instance, Terry’s background, profession and experience (i.e. social context) marks her ability to engage actively with Isaac’s subject orientation. Terry’s own social context is clearly present in her perspective and justification, only after Isaac in text three expresses a counter perspective.

According to Bakhtin, Isaac’s perspective in text three resonates with Terry’s own social context. In text four, Terry draws upon her social context to express and justifies her disagreement. In other words, it was not until Isaac explained that he believes that rivalry could be evil to both the industry incumbents and customers that Terry is motivated to engage further with her social context to support her opposing perspective. In this sense, Terry’s texts two and four show her struggle with Isaac’s discourse. According to Bakhtin, this creates an opportunity for Terry to gain a new understanding or worldview. Isaac uses his own work experience in the Nigerian banking industry to justify his perspective. It is evil to Nigerian banks because it led them to give bad loans in the blind, and it is evil to customers because they could not pay back their debts to the banks.

Both Terry and Isaac draw on their own ‘social contexts’ to justify their opposing perspectives on the issue of rivalry. In their discourses, Terry’s and Isaac’s active understanding exemplifies one form of negotiation, namely the rhetoric discourse. This conversation surfaced participants’ disagreement not only on the issue of rivalry but also on interpreting the USA sub-prime mortgage crisis. While Terry believes that the USA mortgage crisis is the result of an economic recession (i.e. “All prices in everything

(including salaries) went down (I don't have a raise for 3 years) therefore, the mortgages came down"), Isaac claims that the mortgage crisis is caused by the lenders' craving for profitability, and bad credit decisions.

In text six, Terry reflexively speaks of her need to develop knowledge of markets outside of her current "market in advertising". She goes on to recognize her inability to give an opinion in particular contexts (i.e. Nigerian context). In this instance, Terry becomes aware of *the* self-limitations (i.e. "That is my market in advertising at the moment and with all going on, I cannot find time to follow anything else - I knooooowww- I really should!"). Terry appreciates Isaac's different view (i.e. "I agree with you on Macroeconomics"). Terry shows more tolerant to Isaac's perspective. She interprets their different perspectives as pertaining to different levels of analysis (i.e. "I do believe we are talking about different theories here"). Terry's discourse in text six exemplifies a reflexive practice in which a student engages critically with the self and others in the here-and-now experience. She appears to be critically assessing her claim of knowledge and self limitation (i.e. "Therefore I cannot give a true opinion"). Terry is becoming aware that her perspective is influenced by her current knowledge of particular markets as a result of her marketing and advertising profession. In Terry's statement, "I do understand now", there is an indication that her struggle with Isaac's discourse has led to a new understanding. Then, Terry goes on to speak of her own (conflicting) emotions (i.e. "ashamed of me...I am a little selfish") in realizing that she needs to build knowledge of other (unfamiliar) markets.

In text seven, Isaac agrees with Terry's interpretation of their different angles and levels of analysis. In his statement, "We all have situations peculiar to our environments. I also do not think I know that much about most countries as well", Isaac is becoming aware of the influence of own "peculiar" contexts on own perspectives and interpretations. The conversation between Isaac and Terry comes to a close with a 'no right - no wrong' answer situation.

In terms of language, the selectivity in the use of terms could be claimed peculiar to participants' own professions in a few instances. Terry's use of "shoppers" (in text two) and "white brands" (in text four) appears to be more specific to the marketing and

advertising profession. Also, Isaac's use of "disbursing loans" and "non performing loans" (in text five) appears to be more specific to the finance/banking profession. However, there is not enough evidence to claim that there is a 'fundamental' diversity in participants' social language. Episode Five exemplifies a different reflexive conversational moment which is triggered as a result of participants' different language use.

### **Episode Five**

#### **1. Vince wrote on January 7, 2012 at 2:54 PM EST:**

Hi Terry,

It is interesting that you quote oil and gas industry. Having access to unique minerals, metals or even markets itself makes an advantage over others and creates some kind of monopoly power.

As per economics theory, no profits would come unless there is some such monopoly power.

All the best,

Vince

#### **2. Terry wrote on January 8, 2012 at 4:14 PM EST:**

Dear Vince,

I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor, but I am sure if I am wrong, you will point me to the right direction.

Rivalry is a health proposal to customers, but not such a good idea for suppliers (or companies) as they will have to work harder, better the products and sometimes, lower the prices.

In most countries, monopoly is illegal and fiercely fought by the government. The case I mentioned in Mexico had been stopped and Coca-Cola was fined by monopoly.

You say: "As per economics theory, no profits would come unless there is some such monopoly".

I have to disagree with this affirmation. On my assignment I mention oligopolies or I mention gas and oil as examples of rivalry - there are many companies of gas (heating fuel) and some of oil (fuel), avoiding monopolies. When they come together to create price monopolies, the government intervene creating barriers in order to preserve the bargain power of the customer (buyer) and stop exploitive price raises. "A discriminating monopoly is extracting consumer surplus and turning it into extra supernormal profit." (Rilley, Geoff. 2006).

In the studied case (Coke x Pepsi) the case was to Monopoly in the beginning, but it became Oligopoly (or Duopoly in some cases). I know that in principle, oligopoly's profits could never be higher than monopoly's. Although, let's not forget that Monopoly could also reduce profits (by driving away too many customers) as it happened when Brazil was only opened to Petrobras. But where will the oligopoly's profits appear?

Let's consider four hypotheses on oligopoly pricing:

1. Oligopoly firms could conspire and collaborate to each other and charge the monopoly price to have the monopoly profits, which is considered illegal in many countries (Brazil for example)
2. Oligopoly firms could compete on price in order to level the price and profits to the same as those of a competitive industry - as Pepsi and Coke (they have similar prices, but higher the "white brands")
3. Oligopoly price and profits could be between the monopoly and competitive ends of the scale,



which would reduce the profits, but raise the competitive power.

4. Oligopoly prices and profits could be "indeterminate", within the range and are unpredictable, which is too risky.

I am aware that if an oligopolistic firm achieves economy of scale while other firms don't, then in the long run, this firm will be a monopoly. But it is also important to remember that rivalry will always exist and although monopoly might exist, it will end as nowadays there will always be a substitute for any profit business, even on microchips (the fewest suppliers on global market).

References:

Riley, Geoff. (2006). 'Price Discrimination.' A2 Markets & Market Systems, Eton College. September, 2006. Available at:

<http://tutor2u.net/economics/revision-notes/a2-micro-price-discrimination.html> (last accessed on January 8, 2012)

### 3. Vince wrote on January 9, 2012 at 2:12 PM EST:

Hi Terry,

"I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor, but I am sure if I am wrong, you will point me to the right direction."

You are welcome. Discussion is an important part of our learning paradigm.

"Rivalry is a health proposal to customers, but not such a good idea for suppliers (or companies) as they will have to work harder, better the products and sometimes, lower the prices."

I have said so, where I quoted Brandenburger & Nalebuff's co-optation

The five forces are supposed to push and pull so as to get more advantage for themselves and reduce one another's profit. They do not compete in a product/market segment though.

However, it is not necessary that the forces reduce one another's profit (win-lose logic). It is opposed to saving costs and improving value and the logic of co-optation of Harvard/Yale professors Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1997).

"In most countries, monopoly is illegal and fiercely fought by the government. The case I mentioned in Mexico had been stopped and Coca-Cola was fined by monopoly.

You say: "As per economics theory, no profits would come unless there is some such monopoly".

I have to disagree with this affirmation. On my assignment I mention oligopolies or I mention gas and oil as examples of rivalry - there are many companies of gas (heating fuel) and some of oil (fuel), avoiding monopolies. When they come together to create price monopolies, the government intervenes creating barriers in order to preserve the bargain power of the customer (buyer) and stop exploitive price raises. "A discriminating monopoly is extracting consumer surplus and turning it into extra supernormal profit." (Riley, Geoff. 2006)."

For economics theory, brand, image, access to channels, access to raw materials, size, etc. all create some kind of monopoly power and without some such advantage, a firm cannot make any profits. Monopoly here means something you have that others cannot have easily. It is different from legal monopoly, which is seen as total market share of the largest firms.

In the studied case (Coke x Pepsi) the case was to Monopoly in the beginning, but it became Oligopoly (or Duopoly in some cases). I know that in principle, oligopoly's profits could never be higher than monopoly's. Although, let's not forget that Monopoly could also reduce profits (by driving away too many customers) as it happened when Brazil was only opened to Petrobras. But where will the oligopoly's profits appear?

This is the case of legal monopoly, not some monopoly power which causes profits. All profits are caused since you do something special or unique; even if it is doing something in a new context, e.g. having an Italian restaurant where there was none and there was a latent demand.

All the best,

Vince

**4. Terry wrote on January 9, 2012 at 4:03 PM EST:**

Dear Vince,

Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation - everything is clearer and easier now. Thanks so much for clarifying the monopolies differences - that was much appreciated and useful. I always used the term monopoly only on its legal meaning - knowing there is another meaning was much helpful. I do feel I learn something (or many things) new on this course everyday and your way to instruct is very clear and pleasant - it really get through.

Thanks,

Terry

**5. Vince wrote on January 10, 2012 at 3:29 PM EST:**

Hi Terry,

In fact, every human entity looks for power, i.e. control of money, resources, people, knowledge, etc. So, it is natural that each of the five forces will do so. Even a child cries to have power over you and you scold her for the same reason. All communication has the purpose of influencing others (power games). There is nothing wrong in that, unless something unethical or directly win-lose is involved.

All the best,

Vince

**Description:** This episode is triggered by Vince, the tutor's text to Terry's week one DQ - initial response. It runs over five texts exchanged between *Vince* and *Terry*. This episode exemplifies a rhetoric/reflexive conversational moment, in which participants' disagreement with each other views pertains to their (different) language-use. Vince initiates this conversation by commenting on Terry's use of oil and gas industry in her week one DQ - initial response as an example of an industry where buyers' negotiating power is relatively high. In his response, Vince claims that having some advantages over competitors can grant an existing industry incumbent a monopoly power which results in reducing buyers' negotiating power and increases profits.

In an apologetic manner (i.e. "I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor"), Terry expresses her disagreement with Vince's perspective (or so she thinks) and argues that 'monopoly' is illegal. In Mexico, Terry continues, Coca-Cola was found guilty of monopoly practice. She adds that some monopolies may not bring about the expected profits, as in the case of Petrobras, a Brazilian multinational energy corporation which sought monopoly in Brazil's oil industry but failed to attract customers and hence, did not enjoy any monopoly profits. Terry then outlines possible sources of profits in an

oligopoly situation, where a small number of industry incumbents dominate the market, but she remains with the supposition that both oligopoly and monopoly case scenarios could be defeated as rivalry and industry substitutes will always exist for any profitable business.

In text three, Vince brings to Terry's attention the different use of the term 'monopoly'. Vince uses the expression 'monopoly power' to indicate competitive advantages enjoyed by an existing industry incumbent compared to competitors rather than 'legal monopoly'. Vince explains that 'monopoly power' includes advantages as in "brand, image, access to channels, access to raw materials, size, etc." and that these advantages give an existing industry incumbent power over competitors in the same industry. In text four, Terry becomes aware of her 'different' use of the term monopoly. In text five, Vince reinforces the idea that possessing an advantage is like a power held over others then this conversation comes to closure.

**Analysis:** Similar to episode Four, Vince and Terry's disagreements in episode Five can be traced back to some social diversity. But this social diversity takes the form of a traditional use of language. In particular, the disagreement between Vince and Terry rests with the different use of the term 'monopoly', which becomes observable in participants' responses to one another.

In text one, Vince's subject orientation is that advantages afford some monopoly power over competitors. Note how Vince makes sense of the phrase 'monopoly power' (i.e. "Having access to unique minerals, metals or even markets itself makes an advantage over others and creates some kind of monopoly power") and uses a reference to economic theory to affirm the importance of this 'monopoly power' in securing profits.

In text two, Terry disagrees with Vince's perspective (i.e. "I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor") and draws on experiences from the energy industry in Brazil and Coca-Cola Company in Mexico. Terry brings her own social context to dispute the idea that monopoly is encouraged on the grounds of more profits. Yet, Terry's active understanding of a 'monopoly' situation is confined by her traditional, taken-for-granted use of the term itself. Terry did not notice how Vince's sensemaking

of the term is different from hers. Vince uses the term to refer to ‘advantages’ and Terry uses it to refer to a ‘situation where the market is dominated by one or few companies’. In text three, Vince explains the different uses of the term monopoly and the meanings constructed within each use (i.e. “Monopoly here means something you have that others cannot have easily. It is different from legal monopoly, which is seen as total market share of the largest firms”).

Text four exemplifies an ‘aha moment’, in which Terry begins her response by her statement: “Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation”. Terry appears ‘struck’ by Vince’s illustration. Terry is able to go on now; moved to re-think her use of language, realizing that her understanding and interpretation is confined by her own taken-for-granted ways of talking. This suggests that in text two Terry is ‘being stopped’; her understanding is problematized by her tutor’s opposing perspective. She feels unable to go on. But then in text four, she understands and she can go on (i.e. “...-everything is clearer and easier now”).

In this episode, Terry’s engagement in a reflexive conversation with Vince (and herself) is provoked as she re-thinks her taken-for-granted ways of talking and opens up to other uses and meanings different from hers’.

**Argument in relation to episode Four and Five:** Rhetoric/reflexive conversations in virtual classrooms are evoked from within participants’ disputation and disagreements. It is only when participants come to realize that their oppositions are confined to some social diversity such as experience, background, culture, or ways of talking that the possibility of opening up and broadening perspectives is created in their conversations. Students experiencing a reflexive instance show sensitivity to others’ views.

Reflexive conversational moments, where participants struggle with Otherness, create an opportunity to go on. These conversational moments exemplify arresting moments, in which a student becomes aware of the impact of own context and the taken-for-granted use of language on one’s understanding and interpretation. In these instances, a student is moved to re-position himself/herself in a lived experience; to re-see in a new perspective.

## **D. Forms of Dialogic Orientation and Meaning Co-construction in the OC Classroom Conversations.**

**Argument:** Bakhtin's theory of dialogism suggests that a participant's active understanding is provoked in a conversation when he/she uses his/her own words, intentions, and voice to retell others' discourse. In this sense, dialogism implies different forms of negotiation. In the previous episodes, I presented participants' efforts to broaden one's perspective, and to clarify on, question, extend, or add a framing context to others' discourses. In these dialogic practices, participants engage in reflection, intellectual critique, and reflexivity in the OC classroom. However, I did not attend to the process of meaning construction and where all involved participants can be classed as active learners. The aim in this section is to focus on this process of meaning construction from within participants' relational engagement and forms of negotiation to others' texts and discourses.

### **Episode Three**

#### **1. Kyle wrote on January 8, 2012 at 8:03 AM EST:**

Hi Terry,

I find your post very interesting and I totally agree with your analysis. Overall it is important for incumbents to secure an industry's market share by creating a competitive environment with strict entry barriers, however this may have also some disadvantages.

According to Roger Enrico, former CEO of Pepsi cited in Yoffie, D. & Slind, M. (2006) study "If the Coca Cola Company didn't exist, we'd pray for someone to invent them. And on the other side of the fence, I am sure the folks at Coke would say that nothing contributes as much to the present-day success of Coca Cola Company than Pepsi".

A healthy competition can work to a company's advantage by keeping them alert, investing in new machinery, technologies and R&D, new marketing strategies, and by also adapting new ideas. Moreover new entries, instead of shrinking the market share might open the market by introducing a new product within the same category. For example, a new flavor of Coca Cola or Pepsi, Vitamin Water, or Orange Juice with Calcium, etc. which have open the market and contributed in the in the industry's growth.

For this reason it is vital each force to be approached and analyzed individually taking into consideration all possible stakeholders involved in the process in order to formulate a solid strategy.

Reference:

Yoffie, D. & Slind, M. (2006) 'Cola wars continue: Coke and Pepsi in 2006', Harvard Business Review, (706447). Retrieved from:<http://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cb/pl/9807336/9807338/c8b6e6fe642e870f0cc14cf20b15b725>. (Last Accessed on January 7, 2012)

#### **2. Rafael wrote on January 8, 2012 at 2:55 PM EST:**

Hello Terry, Kyle, and class

I would like to add that even for us as consumers is better to have more and better products to choose from, having more supply, down prices and quality improves.

By contrast, in Mexico there are still companies (monopolies) who do not have competitors, taking advantage of the situation on the market doing what they want, higher prices and political opportunists. Especially in the telecommunications industry (aircraft, telephony, etc), and consumers have to pay because does not have other alternatives.

Of course from the point of view that interest us, as a strategic management, I think nowadays should make sense in consumer preferences. The consumer habits are constantly changing because is becoming more aware of their health, and I believe is where we should focus in the end consumer, finally is who make the statistics. Strategists should plan that organizations act differently to achieve competitive and be responsible. (Mckernan, 1997, p. 796).

References:

Mckernan, P. (1997) "Strategy past; strategy futures ", Long Range Planning, Vol. 30, October, pp. 790-798. Available

from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/science/article/pii/S0024630197000800>

### 3. Vince wrote on January 8, 2012 at 3:24 PM EST:

Hi Kyle and Terry,

You touch upon my favourite topic. Winning in a business sense is not necessarily a zero-sum game, where others lose. I would rather believe in Brandenburger & Nalebuff's co-opetition. I also believe in healthy competition, preferably that which minimizes the win lose outcomes.

The five forces are supposed to push and pull so as to get more advantage for themselves and reduce one another's profit. They do not compete in a product/market segment though.

However, it is not necessary that the forces reduce one another's' profit (win-lose logic). It is opposed to saving costs and improving value and the logic of co-opetition of Harvard/Yale professors Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1997). Since we have the technology to connect and work together why not do it? See Japanese collaborative networks, for example.

All the best,

Vince,

References

Brandenburger, A.M. and Nalebuff, B.J. (1997). Co-Opetition: A Revolution Mindset That Combines Competition and Cooperation: The Game Theory Strategy That's Changing the Game of Business. Currency Doubleday, ISBN-13: 978-0385479509.

**Description:** This episode is triggered by Kyle's responsive text to Terry's week one DQ - initial response. It runs over three texts exchanged between three participants; *Kyle, Rafael* and *Vince*. In text one, although Kyle expresses his agreement with Terry's point of view that protecting market share by creating strict entry barriers is essential for industry incumbents, he goes on to discuss the issue of strict entry barriers from another perspective. Kyle believes that strict entry barriers can have disadvantages as well. In his opinion, it could threaten 'healthy competition'. A healthy competitive environment, according to Kyle, is one where existing industry incumbents are motivated to invest in R&D activities including innovation (in marketing strategy, technology). A healthy

competitive environment, Kyle continues, offers opportunities for industry growth. Rafael supports Kyle's idea of healthy competition by illustrating consumers' perspectives on having a competitive environment. According to Rafael, consumers favour having more competitors producing the same product because it reflects positively on price levels, quality and product availability. Rafael brings an example from telecommunication industry in Mexico, where customers lack the luxury of choosing from viable substitutes and are obliged to pay for the monopoly. Vince, the tutor, also supports Kyle's idea of healthy competition. Vince argues that Porter's five forces in an industry are in a continuous pull and push situation, where the success of one force does not necessarily mean creating losses for the other forces. For Vince, the push and pull situation is about the ability to save costs and/or improve product quality. At the end of his text, Vince questions the interpretation of healthy competition in terms of win-loss logic rather than competitor's co-opetition. Vince believes that competitors' co-opetition can be facilitated via the recent advances in communication technology. This conversation comes to a close unexpectedly. There was no clear indication of moving towards conversation closure.

**Analysis:** In this episode, I would like to attend to how participants' different dialogic orientations inform the process of meaning co-construction. I will also attend to participants' use of the statement 'I agree' when they are actually expressing their disagreement.

In text one, Kyle's dialogic orientation is observed in the way he appears to appreciate Terry's discourse but does not really agree with it (I will turn to explain this in detail later). His use of a quote is assumed to be active as he gives Terry examples to support and clarify his perspective.

Before moving on to elaborate on the process of meaning construction which this episode exemplifies, I first investigate Kyle's and Terry's perspectives on what constitute organization strategy and link this to Kyle's statement, "I totally agree with your analysis", in his text one to Terry. In her week one DQ - initial response, Terry

shares her perspective on strategy which involves creating strict entry barriers while acting responsibly not to create a monopoly situation;

“Under my opinion, it is vital to avoid new entrances, create barriers. Rivalry is limited by barriers to entry which will be influenced by the access to distribution and resources. As strategists we have to analyse if it is easy for new market’s possibility of entrances and create barriers by any means (licensing or patents are just some examples). As responsible managers and strategists we have also to be careful to avoid the barriers to become monopolies as when Coca cola lent fridges in Mexico asking for sales exclusivities (UoL Ultimas Noticias. 2007)”

(Terry’s week one DQ - initial response, 2012)

Kyle, who is involved in the advertising industry, had a different perspective on organization strategy. In his week four IQ - initial response, Kyle assumes that strategy aims at gaining a competitive advantage which requires flexibility and ability to adjust practices in a fast-paced environment;

“Due to the nature of the advertising industry which is a fast paced environment, where new technologies, trends, social and economic factors and consumer insights change constantly, can have a great impact on the business if they are not followed closely. So it is very important, in order to keep a competitive advantage, to be flexible and be able to adjust your strategy accordingly without getting out of track and without affecting your long term intentions in the company and vision about the company”

(Kyle’s week four IQ - initial response, 2012)

In episode Three, Kyle’s view of competition as ‘healthy’ rests with his belief that competition keeps industrial companies ‘alert’; able to cope with new developments. His belief appears influenced by his own professional experience in the advertising industry. As implied in his week four IQ- initial response, maintaining good strategy implies flexibility and adaptability to changes in the environment. In this sense, creating strict entry barriers limits competition, which in turn leads to less motivation to adapt to changes and new developments in the industry.

This further investigation of Terry’s and Kyle’s perspectives on strategy points out a disagreement rather an agreement – irrespective of Kyle’s statement, “I totally agree with your analysis” in his text one to Terry. This is an issue of ambiguous perspectives and language use that will be raised in the Discussion chapter. I will now illustrate the process of meaning construction in episode Three.



In text one, whilst Kyle appreciates the analysis presented by Terry in her week one DQ - initial response, he interrogates the idea of 'strict entry barriers' further. He argues that competition triggers development efforts and industry growth and its absence places a company at a disadvantage. Kyle's understanding is claimed active as he brings his own intention and perspective to Terry's discourse of creating strict entry barriers. Kyle also brings others' discourses (i.e. Yoffie and Slind's (2006)) to reflect on the Coke Cola and Pepsi's situation. Kyle offers some examples of developmental efforts (e.g. investments in machinery, technologies, R&D, and new products) which are instigated by having a competitive environment. Kyle is classed as an active learner in this conversation.

In text two, Kyle's subject orientation of healthy competition resonates with Rafael's background and experience. Rafael builds on Kyle's subject orientation of healthy competition and brings consumers' perspective to the conversation (i.e. "I would like to add that ..."). Drawing on Bakhtin, Rafael's dialogic orientation and his active understanding are evident in his efforts to: (a) extend his addressee's subject orientation of healthy competition but from a different perspective (i.e. consumer perspective), and (b) bring his own social/cultural context as he reflects on his experience as a consumer of services supplied by some monopolistic service providers in the telecommunications industry in Mexico. Rafael is classed as an active learner in this conversation.

In the third text, Kyle's subject orientation also resonates with Vince's interests and apperceptive background (i.e. "You touch upon my favourite topic"). For Vince, healthy competition leads to a co-opetition situation, where competitors coordinate efforts to save cost and/or improve quality, rather than a win-loss situation. Vince's dialogic orientation and active understanding lie in his effort to interweave Kyle's discourse with his own perspective and view of co-opetition, not competition. Vince also cites others' discourse (i.e. Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1997)) and uses the example of Japanese collaborative networks to clarify his perspective of competitors' coordination. Vince, the tutor, acts as an active learner in this conversation.

To sum up, this episode exemplifies participants' use of different forms of negotiation in their relational engagements:

- Kyle appreciates Terry's idea but interrogates it in light of his perspective on organization strategy,
- Rafael agrees with and extends Kyle's perspective, reflecting on his social context to add a consumer perspective to the conversation, and
- Vince agrees with Kyle's perspective but presents his own interpretation of a healthy competitive environment.

In attendance to the process of meaning co-construction in this conversation, the following insights and/or meanings are provoked in participants' text:

- competition as healthy (text one),
- healthy competition as a motive that triggers a company's developmental efforts and boosts industry growth (text one),
- healthy competition as a support mechanism to consumers' welfare (text two), and
- healthy competition as in competitors' co-opetition not competition (text three).

None of these constructions were discussed in Terry's week one DQ - initial response or in weekly readings. These are only constructed from within participants' dialogic, active engagements with each other in this classroom conversation. These constructions exemplify Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogic knowing' which is evoked in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment. This episode also exemplifies a third type of knowing; participants' situated knowing or practical knowing from within.

In this episode, each participant anticipated that his subject orientation would resonate with Terry's interests and background. Nevertheless, they received no response from Terry.

## V. General Observations; *A final Comment*

In this chapter, I used the proposed framework which is based on Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse*, and *internal dialogism* to understand and describe learning as a process of meaning construction, and where reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity occur as a part of it.

Students are most often observed engaging with an experience that is brought about from their organizations and/or cultures. They also engage with situations of interest such as the Cola Wars case study. This suggests that reflection is the most common form of students' dialogic orientation and active understanding in the OC classroom. Reflexive conversational moments, in which students open up to possibilities of change, and instances of intellectual critique are less common in the OC classroom. Most of the OC classroom conversations appear as a proximate of monologic-dialogic orientations. Participants' construction of meanings is observed in conversational moments where all participants involved in a conversation adopt a dialogic orientation in their texts and can be classed as active learners.

All participants' texts which trigger no response are also removed from this relational analysis (i.e. six texts). These are looked at as instances of a lack of response and/or failure of dialogue. These texts, according to Bakhtin, are *non-living words*; words that no one relates to. For instance, below is Judith's text to Kyle in response to his week one DQ - initial response;

Dear Kyle,

Thank you for sharing this very nice and clear piece of work. I agree with you that Coca-Cola is such an established brand that it can offset possible disadvantages linked to the width of the CSD market.

I wanted to react on a point you make about power of suppliers in the CSD industry. I know it is a very minor point, but I disagree with you when you state that since concentrate producers require few inputs, they can rely on a wide range of different suppliers if needed. In my opinion, the power of suppliers is very low because the inputs needed are very basic and abundant, not because they are very few. However, knowing that you have much more experience in that field, I would like to have your opinion.

Thank you in advance

Judith

(Judith wrote on January 11, 2012 at 12:46 AM)

In this text, Judith justifies her disagreement with Kyle's perspective on the power of suppliers in soft drinks industry. Yet, Kyle does not respond. This exemplifies an instance where a dialogue between students fails.

There are other instances where a participant's text in an ongoing conversation does not attract a response. In stage one of this analysis, it is difficult to identify these instances. An example of these instances is found in episode Two where Vince's text does not attract a response from other participants in the conversation, and in episode Three where all participants addressed Terry in their texts but she did not respond.

Asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations can stop unexpectedly; with no prior indication of reaching closure in the same manner a speech conversation would (e.g. episodes Three and Seven). In other conversational moments, conversation closure is prepared for. In episode One, for example, coming to closure appears to be expected and prepared for.

In the OC classroom, participants are observed reflecting on other learning situations, using their peers' words and discourses in their texts. Participants may even quote and cite the names of their peers in their responses. In one instance it indicated lurkers' learning; learning by reading and/or observing others' responses and text. An example is found in a conversation between Terry, Monica, and Nick in response to Monica's week one DQ - initial response. Terry refers to Rafael's discourse in her text;

"I must not dare say it is impossible to have new entrants, but I will borrow the words of our fellow student, Rafael: "would be almost impossible to enter at this time without much of the infrastructure" (Rafael, 2012)."

(Terry wrote on January 10, 2012 at 5:24 PM)

Another example is found in a conversation between Monica, Mathew and Terry in response to Terry's week one DQ - initial response. Monica refers to another classroom conversation (i.e. episode Four in this study), where she appears to be a lurker participant;

"At the previous posts, Isaac and Terry have a talk about fierce of rivalry, and its positive and negative effects"

(Monica wrote on January 10, 2012 at 1:53 PM)

Few students express their disagreement with the tutor, Vince's perspective;

"I have to say that I only partly agree with you. I hope you don't mind"

(Judith wrote on January 9, 2012 at 12:56 AM)

“I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor”

(Terry wrote on January 8, 2012 at 4:14 PM, presented in episode Five)

Drawing on this two-stage analysis, the OC polyphonic setting promotes management students’ dialogic and monologic orientations in their classroom dialogue. While some students appear as actors with different levels of engagement on the sociogram, their orientations in text can be similar. For instance, Monica and Tom appear as actors with different levels of engagement (seven and four conversations respectively, see appendix E). Yet, they can be classed as passive learners, showing a monologic orientation in particular classroom conversations. This supports Bakhtin’s assertion that the freedom awarded to multiple consciousnesses to voice perspectives does not guarantee their dialogic orientations.

In the visual metaphor presented in stage one, I identified four possibilities that exemplify students’ simultaneous engagement and disengagement in classroom conversation. Terry is a student who is observed engaging with others’ texts in some conversations (i.e. episodes Seven, Four and Five), yet chooses not to respond in other conversations (i.e. episode Three). Monica is another student who is observed engaging with others’ texts in some conversations (i.e. episodes Seven and Two) but chooses to be a lurker in conversation between Isaac and Terry, as outlined in this section.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to present the reader with features that best describe the nature of learning in the observed OC asynchronous classroom, using a two-stage analysis. In the first stage, I used visual tools. A visual metaphor and a sociogram offer interpretations of Bakhtin’s polyphony in the observed OC classroom. In the second stage, I observed four features of the OC classroom conversations. These are: (a) Bakhtin’s ‘orientation-anticipation-response’ process, (b) a proximate of monologic and dialogic orientations, (c) rhetoric arresting moments and social language, and (d) forms of dialogic-orientation and meaning co-construction in the OC classroom conversations. For each observed feature, I have used one or two episodes to exemplify this feature. I

presented a description, an analysis, and an argument for episodes presented in each feature.

The next chapter discusses how this study's findings and the theoretical framework used have helped to answer this study's question and achieve objectives.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Findings

### I. Introduction

In the Literature Review, I argued that the exploration of management students' instances of reflection from within their classroom dialogue, written assessed work, or any other classroom activity is carried out by few in the field of management education (e.g. Cunliffe 2002; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006). There is a need for more empirical research investigating the nature of students' reflective learning from within practice. The issue is exacerbated when management students learn in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment that is most frequently perceived as a passive context. This study aims to investigate whether learning in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment necessarily means promoting passive engagements with others' discourses, devoid of reflective learning.

I drew on the work of both Shotter (1996) and Cunliffe (2002a) to advocate carrying out a management education research that is concerned with exploring learning as a dialogic, responsive process. This suggests a view of learning as a process of meaning construction amongst its participants (i.e. students and teacher) in a management classroom. Then, I proposed that the work of Bakhtin (1981) would help us construct a theoretical framework to understand and explain learning that is dialogic, and where reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity occur as a part of it. In the Methodology, I expanded upon the themes I introduced in the Literature Review. I proposed the use of Bakhtin's concepts of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context*, *rhetoric discourse*, and *internal dialogism* to give us some insights into what to look for when investigating students' reflections in asynchronous classroom conversations. In the Analysis, I used the proposed framework to identify and interpret instances of reflection from within students' asynchronous classroom conversations by using seven episodes as exemplars. These seven episodes were organized under four features that best describe the nature of learning in the virtual classroom.

In this chapter, my intention is to discuss the features and observations I outlined in the Analysis. In carrying out a relational analysis and presenting it in the manner outlined

before it was not possible to investigate language-use in instances of simple reflection on an experience, because I did not attend to simple reflection as a stand-alone feature. In discussing my findings, I feel it is essential to draw on the use of language in instances of simple reflection and as I bring data from different episodes.

This chapter is organized in six sections. In the first five sections, I introduce data in the form of quotes from students' conversations, or from secondary data sources (online MBA programme website, OC module specifications/objectives, and end of module feedback) which have been presented before in the Methodology or the Analysis chapters. Where a quote is used, the number of the episode and the text will be included. The addresser's name is written in **bold** to make it easier for the reader to find the quote whenever it is referred to it again in the discussion.

In the first section, I begin with a discussion of my findings with regard to students' criticality and active understanding which is observed in the online MBA classroom. Second, I discuss my findings within a broader context including online tutor's practices, aspects of online programme/module design and the learning assumptions underlying the use of participative approaches of teaching. Third, I discuss the observed shifts in students' monologic orientation in relation to the design of an online MBA. Fourth, I relate the view of learning as a co-authorship to the dialogic construction of meanings in the OC polyphonic classroom. In the fifth section, I present interpretations to instances where opportunities to construct dialogic learning are lost. Finally, in the sixth section, I include some methodological reflections. This chapter closes with a conclusion which draws on this study's objectives, to summarize findings.

## **II. Student's Dialogism and the Nature of Criticality in an Online, Asynchronous MBA Environment**

Bakhtin (1981) emphasizes the difference between monologic and dialogic features of a dialogue. In his description of a narrator's dialogic orientation, Bakhtin believes that a narrator is willing to listen, respond, and exchange intentions and ideas within the structure of his/her dialogue (Vice, 1997). A dialogic orientation implies an active



understanding on a narrator's part; finding a way to relate and engage with others' discourses and ideas, whether in agreement or disagreement (Shotter, 1993).

Bakhtin (1981) in the realm of dialogism introduces us to the *internally persuasive* discourse or *double-voiced* discourse; a discourse where the narrator uses his/her own words to retell or assimilate others' text and discourses. It is in this attempt to negotiate others' discourses and/or relate to others, that a narrator's orientation is said to be *dialogic* and his/her understanding is claimed to be *active*. For Bakhtin (1981), one way of negotiating others' words or discourses included adding a framing context to others' discourse. Refuting to ascribe to what might be perceived as authoritative discourses is another way of showing a narrators' active understanding to others' discourses. There is also the engagement in an intensely dialogized form of discourse called the rhetorical, double-voiced discourse which surfaces some social diversity between individuals (Bakhtin, 1981). These three forms of negotiating others' discourses denote a narrator's active understanding. Table 5.1 presents some empirical illustrations of reflective learning using Bakhtin's ideas of active understanding (i.e. framing context, challenging an authoritative discourse, and rhetoric discourse) and which are discussed in detail in sections A and B.

<b>Empirical Illustrations of Reflective Learning using Bakhtin's Dialogism</b>	
<b>Framing context</b>	<p>- A student's own authentic voice is revealed as he/she appropriates others' discourses and texts by adding his/her own frame (Bakhtin, 1981) in the form of an experience, a social reality, or a situation of interest (Cunliffe, 2002; 2004).</p> <p><b>Work experience:</b>  <b>e.g.</b> "We have a similar situation in Nigeria in the financial sector. Capital requirement of Banks was increased to 25 billion naira from 2 billion naira in the later part of 2006 which is an enormous sum off money. This showed interplay of Government regulations and capital requirement which are 2 of the seven entry barriers".</p> <p><b>A situation of interest:</b>  <b>e.g.</b> "The cola wars provided consumers with good value for money to retain their market share. As Coke and Pepsi are quite similar, failure to meet a particular standard would have easily eroded either the market share or profitability of either Coke or Pepsi".</p> <p><b>e.g.</b> "At the previous posts, Isaac and Terry have a talk about fierce of rivalry, and its positive and negative effects".</p> <p><b>A social reality:</b>  <b>e.g.</b> "By contrast, in Mexico there are still companies (monopolies) who do not have competitors, taking advantage of the situation on the market doing what they want, higher prices and political opportunists. Especially in the telecommunications industry (aircraft, telephony, etc), and consumers have to pay because does not have other alternatives".</p>
<b>Challenging an authoritative discourse</b>	<p>- A student's own authentic voice is revealed in challenging others' authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). This implies an engagement in a critique of a generalized other independent from own personal involvement (Cunliffe, 2002). This intellectual critique can involve a critique of rhetoric, tradition, authority, or objectivity/validity (adapted from Mingers (2000) and Cunliffe (2002)).</p> <p><b>A critique of rhetoric:</b>  <b>e.g.</b> "I am sorry but I will have to disagree with that. I do not hold the knowledge to tell you which one is the most profitable one and although soft drinks are very profitable, there are many others to consider... It will all depends on who runs the business and the opportunities they will have to grow ... according to Ranker (2009): they are: from 1 to 6: companies related to industries of Petroleum and natural gas, 7. aircraft, 8. videogames, computer hardware and publishing (Microsoft) 9. Automobile, motor and passenger car (Toyota) and at least 10. Chocolate, coca products (nestle)".</p> <p><b>A critique of authority:</b>  <b>e.g.</b> "I still do not agree this is the most profitable industry even with a genius like Porter affirming it".</p>
<b>Rhetoric discourse</b>	<p>- A student's own authentic voice is revealed in instances of disagreement and opposition (Bakhtin, 1981) which involve a criticism and a justification (Billig, 1996) and where students' justifications are confined to some social diversity (Billig, 1996) or elements of social heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). It aims at</p>

	<p>producing a change through the unsettlement of own perspective to achieve a new understanding or the broadening of own perspective (adapted from Cunliffe, 2002). In these instances, a student incorporates own feelings, assumptions, actions, or knowledge in talking about the here and now experience (Cunliffe, 2002).</p> <p>- <i>The quote below is from a conversation where participants become aware that their claim of knowledge and perspectives are confined to own social context. Terry incorporates her feelings in assessing her current state of knowledge;</i></p> <p><b>e.g. Terry:</b> “Thank you so much for clarifying your view. <u>I do understand now</u> and have to admit that I am not up-to-date or even aware of the economy in Nigeria (I know I should be - <u>ashamed of me</u> - sorry!) I am a <u>little selfish</u>, I have to say! <u>I involve only with south, Central and North America, Europe, China, Japan and Australia</u>. That is my market in advertising at the moment and with all going on, I cannot find time to follow anything else - I knooooowww - I really should! Therefore <u>I cannot give a true opinion</u> on mortgage situation on Nigeria, so what I will do is to provide my general, although very humble opinion. I do believe we are talking about different theories here...I hope that clarified for both of us, so in resume - I agree with you on Macroeconomics...”</p> <p><b>Isaac:</b> “No love lost. We <u>all have situations peculiar to our environments</u>. <u>I also do not think I know that much</u> about most countries as well...”</p> <p>- <i>In the quote below, Terry is speaking of her own taken-of- granted use of language;</i></p> <p><b>e.g. Terry:</b> “...I always used the term monopoly <u>only on its legal meaning</u> - knowing there is <u>another meaning</u> was much helpful. I do feel I learn something (or many things) new on this course everyday”</p> <p>- A student appears to be ‘<i>struck</i>’ whenever he/she is able to go on after an ‘unsettlement’ and this may or may not involve an utterance of surprise.</p> <p><b>e.g. Terry:</b> “<u>I do understand now</u>”.</p> <p><b>e.g. Terry:</b> “Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation - <u>everything is clearer and easier now</u>”.</p>
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Table (5.1). Empirical illustrations of reflective learning using Bakhtin’s dialogism

### A. Reflection and Intellectual Critique

Adding a framing context includes the use of a situation, condition, or background by which the words of others’ become ours (Bakhtin, 1981). In the OC classroom, adding a framing context to others’ discourses is the most common dialogic practice in students’ asynchronous classroom conversations. Students’ use of framing contexts included a reflection of an experience, a practice or a situation. This echoes Cunliffe’s (2002; 2004)

observation that a simple reflection on an experience is the most common form of reflective learning in management classrooms.

In their reflections, management students negotiate theory and others' discourses. That is, management students make a theory's discourse their own by adding their own experience to it as a framing context. This suggests that in instances of reflection, learning from academic discourses becomes personally meaningful (Willmott, 1994; Holman, 2000; Hay et al., 2004) in the virtual classroom. A reflective student draws a connection between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Cunliffe, 2002) in their online classroom conversations. In instances of reflection in the virtual classroom, learning from academic discourse is no longer abstract and unrelated (Leung and Kember, 2003).

Using others' discourses to look back on an experience (Mezirow, 1998), affords the reflective student a reading into this experience or situation from within the insight of a theory (Cunliffe, 2002; 2004). In the OC classroom, students' reflections were most often related to their work experience and/or organizational practices. In episode One, **Isaac** interprets his experience of the Nigerian banking industry from within the insights of Porter's discourse of an industry's five competitive forces;

**Isaac:** "We have a similar situation in Nigeria in the financial sector. Capital requirement of Banks was increased to 25 billion naira from 2 billion naira in the later part of 2006 which is an enormous sum off money. This showed interplay of Government regulations and capital requirement which are 2 of the seven entry barriers".

(text two in episode One)

**Monica**, in her week four IQ initial response, uses Porter's discourse about confusing operational effectiveness for a strategy to interpret a past 'crisis situation' in her company;

**Monica:** "Especially, during the crisis, the operational effectiveness of the company substitutes the notion of 'strategy'. Being better than rivals, stay alive when rivals have sunk off, all of those actions imply the operational effectiveness, not the strategic positioning"

(week four IQ- initial response)

The OC students also reflect on the Cola Wars case study; a situation of interest. In episode Two, **Isaac** uses the Cola Wars case study as a context for his reflection, to

bring a new insight into his conversation. The conversation was about the impact of strong rivalry on a company's profitability and price levels;

**Isaac:** "The cola wars provided consumers with good value for money to retain their market share. As Coke and Pepsi are quite similar, failure to meet a particular standard would have easily eroded either the market share or profitability of either Coke or Pepsi"

(text three in episode Two)

Other students reflect on some practices from their own cultures (i.e. social reality).

**Rafael**, in episode Three, brings his experience as a Mexican consumer to negotiate Kyle's discourse about healthy competition. He argues that consumers favour a situation where a number of competitors produce the same product;

**Rafael:** "By contrast, in Mexico there are still companies (monopolies) who do not have competitors, taking advantage of the situation on the market doing what they want, higher prices and political opportunists. Especially in the telecommunications industry (aircraft, telephony, etc)., and consumers have to pay because does not have other alternatives."

(text two in episode Three)

A few students used other learning situations in which they participated or lurked to illustrate and/or support their perspectives and ideas. In the general observations section in the Analysis, **Monica** reflects on her colleagues' conversation in her text to Mathew. The conversation was about the issue of fierce rivalry;

**Monica:** "At the previous posts, Isaac and Terry have a talk about fierce of rivalry, and its positive and negative effects"

(general observations section)

This is an instance where a student (i.e. Monica) makes her invisible aspect of participation i.e. lurking (Chen and Chang, 2011) in a past conversational moment visible to others in the classroom. Dysthe (2002) argues that lurking can result in learning because it initiates an 'internal' dialogue with the self. In this study, lurking is also claimed to be learning when it becomes visible in a reflective conversation with others in the classroom.

Students' frequent engagement in reflections suggests that learning in online management classrooms can be more than simply understanding (Gray, 2007); more than a recall of facts and/or memorizing (Brown, 2000). Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), it

denotes students' active understanding in which their authentic voices are revealed in their use of own reflections.

Because learning is viewed as a dialogic process, we can use Bakhtin's (1981) OAR process and ideas of the relational nature of text to describe how a student's reflection is provoked in a classroom conversation<sup>18</sup>. Drawing on Bakhtin, a student's reflection is triggered by his/her addresser's subject orientation. For instance, in episode One, **Vince** sets his subject orientation in his question to **Isaac** about the role of entry barriers in securing power for existing industry incumbents. It is this subject orientation that triggers Isaac's reflection on his experience of the banking industry in Nigeria;

**Vince:** "What role do barrier to entry play in this power game among the forces?"

**Isaac:** "I believe the main role of the barriers is to discourage new entrants, thereby preventing competition and increase market share. We have a similar situation in Nigeria in the financial sector. Capital requirement of Banks was increased to 25 billion naira from 2 billion naira in the later part of 2006 which is an enormous sum of money. This showed interplay of Government regulations and capital requirement which are 2 of the seven entry barriers. ...."  
(texts one and two in episode One)

Because students in their reflections usually seek a new reading of an experience from within the insight of an academic discourse, their language-use can be influenced by the 'academic speech genre' (Cunliffe, 2002). For Bakhtin (1981), there are different social languages within a single language which account for the social diversity amongst individuals (e.g. profession, culture, gender...etc). In instances of simple reflection, there was not enough evidence to assert either the domination of the academic genre or the peculiarity of students' use of language in their texts. For instance, as underlined in the above quotes, Isaac uses the term 'entry barriers' and Monica uses the terms 'operational effectiveness', 'rivals', and 'strategic positioning'. These are terms that were initially used by Porter in his (academic) discourse. However, there were also other instances of reflection where a student's use of language does not appear to be influenced by the 'academic speech genre' (e.g. see quote of Rafael's reflection).

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<sup>18</sup> Orientation-anticipation-response (OAR) process: In a speech communication, an addresser chooses an orientation towards the addressee. A subject orientation is meant to refer to an issue or a topic of interest. If such an orientation resonates with the addressee's apperceptive background, whether in agreement or disagreement, then the addresser's words are said to possess a degree of *internal dialogism* in receiving a response (Bakhtin, 1981).

In contrast to instances of reflection, engagement in intellectual critique is observed less often in the OC classroom. In episode Seven, **Terry**, who addresses **Monica**, engages in a critique of Porter's discourse about the most profitable industries;

**Monica** (in her week one DQ - initial response): "...the soft drink industry is the most profitable industries in the world..."

**Terry:** "I am sorry but I will have to disagree with that. I do not hold the knowledge to tell you which one is the most profitable one and although soft drinks are very profitable, there are many others to consider ... It will all depends on who runs the business and the opportunities they will have to grow ... It will all depends on many factors, although soft drinks industry does have high profit margins, I do not believe it is the most profitable in the world ... according to Ranker (2009): they are: from 1 to 6: companies related to industries of Petroleum and natural gas, 7. aircraft, 8. videogames, computer hardware and publishing (Microsoft) 9. Automobile, motor and passenger car (Toyota) and at least 10. Chocolate, coca products (nestle)"

"I did not notice this when I read Porter's article. That is what this course is all about - critical thinking. I still do not agree this is the most profitable industry even with a genius like Porter affirming it"

(texts one and three in episode Seven)

Drawing on Bakhtin's idea of authoritative discourse, Terry does not ascribe to the authority of Porter's discourse but rather, questions it and justifies her position accordingly. Terry's dialogism and authentic voice is revealed in her critique, which according to Mingers (2000) is a critique of both rhetoric and authority. In her texts, Terry questions the logical soundness of Porter's discourse by presenting her own perspective and bringing others' discourses into the argument (i.e. a critique of rhetoric). Then, she rejects the legitimacy of a discourse based on the authority of its "genius" author (i.e. a critique of authority). This exemplifies an instance where a student's active understanding is not confined to some wrong or right answers in a textbook or academic discourse. This echoes Currie and Knights' (2003) assertion that a shift from a knowledge transmission model should promote a 'no right or wrong answer', whether through the authority of a teacher or a textbook.

Bakhtin's OAR process can also be used to describe how Terry's critique is triggered in her response to Monica. **Monica's** subject orientation (i.e. soft drink industry as one of the most profitable industries) has a meaning against Terry's background. But, Terry's

background in terms of professional experience and knowledge of different markets suggests a contradictory view.

Terry's critique, whilst reflecting her active understanding and dialogic orientation, questions an idea (i.e. what constitutes a profitable industry) as an outside observer (Cunliffe, 2002). In other words, according to Cunliffe (2002), Terry's engagement in intellectual critique appears disembodied as her critique is directed towards a generalized other. Intellectual critique does not offer the student (Terry in this instance) a way to go on; to change; to gain a different understanding or a new perspective (Cunliffe, 2002). Drawing on Mezirow (1998), there was no observed change because Terry's critique appears to be a form of problem posing; an objective reframing examining the validity of Porter's discourse. Terry's critique is devoid from her own personal involvement (Cunliffe 2002). As Terry becomes more critical, her learning can be described as active, critical and reflective but un-emancipatory.

In this conversation, there was no observed intervention from Vince, the tutor. This raises the question of whether his intervention would have influenced the nature of the learning taking place in this particular conversation in the manner described by Cunliffe (2002). In her teaching practice, Cunliffe was able to help her student shift his learning from a simple reflection on an experience using Maslow's hierarchy of needs to a more reflexive engagement about the nature of theories and the assumption that they represent reality. I will draw on the practices of the online tutor later. In the next section, I describe other conversational moments where a 'change' in a student's perspective is observed, leading to reflective, emancipatory learning in the virtual classroom.

## **B. Reflexivity; a Change?**

In this study, I used my understanding of the rhetoric discourse according to both Bakhtin (1981) and Billig (1996) to analyze and interpret what I called 'arresting' (Wittgenstein, 1953) or 'moving' (Shotter, 199) moments in the OC classroom. As Shotter (1993:123) points out, a rhetorical discourse has the potential of allowing individuals to re-position themselves in relation to their situation, to re-see it in a new perspective. According to Boud et al. (1985) and Mezirow (1991), becoming more



critical leads to a change in understanding or perspective (Cope, 2003). This involves problematizing own views and realities and initiating a reflexive doubt. It is in this sense that a change in management students is encountered in the OC classroom. It is also in this sense of granting voices (including own voice) an active role that management students appear to engage in a reflexive/ rhetoric discourse.

In the OC classroom, there were few instances in which management students appear to open up to possibilities of change; becoming more tolerant to perspectives different than their own. Bakhtin suggests that the rhetoric discourse aims at impressing and persuading (Vice, 1997:70); it does not aim for victory (Billig, 1996). In describing the essence of a rhetoric discourse, Billig (1996) points to two elements; *criticism* and *justification*. As such, the rhetoric discourse is born in instances of *disagreements* and where there are ‘no right or wrong’ answers. In these instances, disagreements remain unsettled as participants’ justifications are confined to their own social contexts (Billig, 1996), social diversity, or elements of social heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). Episodes Four and Five exemplify students’ reflexive conversations where their rhetoric engagements imply their active understanding.

In episode Four, **Terry** and **Isaac’s** disagreement remains unsettled, with no right or wrong answers. Their conversation indicates an awareness of the influence of own contexts on constructing (different) understandings and interpretations;

**Terry:** “Thank you so much for clarifying your view. I do understand now and have to admit that I am not up-to-date or even aware of the economy in Nigeria (I know I should be - ashamed of me - sorry!) I am a little selfish, I have to say! I involve only with south, Central and North America, Europe, China, Japan and Australia. That is my market in advertising at the moment and with all going on, I cannot find time to follow anything else - I knooooowww - I really should! Therefore I cannot give a true opinion on mortgage situation on Nigeria, so what I will do is to provide my general, although very humble opinion. I do believe we are talking about different theories here... I hope that clarified for both of us, so in resume - I agree with you on Macroeconomics...”

**Isaac:** “No love lost. We all have situations peculiar to our environments. I also do not think I know that much about most countries as well...”

(texts six and seven in episode Four)

Terry and Isaac hold opposing views about whether rivalry among existing industry incumbents is a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ thing. The conversation proceeds with each participant

reflecting on his/her own professional and/or cultural experience to justify own perspective. Terry brings her own marketing and advertising background and experience to support her view on the issue of rivalry. Terry, who is a Brazilian, includes different examples of brands and products in different regional markets including the UK, Mexico, USA, and Brazil, in her text. Isaac, who is a Nigerian, uses his professional and cultural experience in both the Nigerian banking and mortgage industries to justify his counter opinion on the issue of rivalry. Towards the end of their conversation, Terry expresses her understanding of Isaac's view and negotiates their different perspectives in light of a micro- or macro-level of analysis.

In the above quotes, Terry speaks reflexively of becoming aware that her perspective is influenced by her knowledge of particular markets as a result of her marketing and advertising profession (i.e. own social context). Terry realizes that she cannot possibly claim knowledge of other markets and that she is unable to offer a 'true' opinion. Isaac's opening up involves problematizing own views by recognizing the influence of 'peculiar' contexts on shaping own perspectives and understanding. Both appear to be aware of the limitation of own knowledge. In their reflexive conversation, students broaden their perspectives (Cunliffe, 2004) and are moved (Shotter, 1993) to think outside of the traditional ways of being, doing, or talking (Cunliffe, 2002).

The student in a reflexive conversation starts with incorporating the self in a lived experience; incorporating own feelings, assumptions, actions, or knowledge (Cunliffe, 2004); an inside-out approach (Cunliffe, 2002). Terry speaks of her own (conflicting) emotions (i.e. feelings of shame and selfishness) in re-assessing her current state of knowledge, realizing that she needs to gain knowledge of other (unfamiliar) markets;

"I do understand now.... I am not up-to-date or even aware of the economy in Nigeria.. ..I am a little selfish, I have to say! I involve only with south, Central and North America, Europe, China, Japan and Australia. That is my market in advertising at the moment and with all going on, I cannot find time to follow anything else - I knooooowww - I really should"

(Terry in episode Four)

Isaac also appears to re-asses his claim of knowledge;

"I also do not think I know that much about most countries as well"

(Isaac in episode Four)

In doing so, both Terry and Isaac speak in more embodied ways from within the here and now experience (Cunliffe, 2002).

In episode Five, the disagreement between **Vince**, the tutor, and **Terry** is embedded in the different uses of the term ‘monopoly’, which is observed in participants’ responses to each other as they illustrate their understanding and how they make sense of the term;

**Vince:** “...This is the case of legal monopoly, not some monopoly power which causes profits. All profits are caused since you do something special or unique; even if it is doing something in a new context, e.g. having an Italian restaurant where there was none and there was a latent demand.”

**Terry:** “Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation - everything is clearer and easier now. Thanks so much for clarifying the monopolies differences - that was much appreciated and useful. I always used the term monopoly only on its legal meaning - knowing there is another meaning was much helpful. I do feel I learn something (or many things) new on this course everyday....”

(texts three and four in episode Five)

Terry justifies her perspective that monopoly is unacceptable, illegal, and does not always results in profits by drawing on the monopolistic practices of the Coca-Cola Company in Mexico and Petrobras in the Brazilian oil industry. Terry’s active understanding and use of the term ‘monopoly’ is confined to particular social contexts. Vince’s illustration of his sensemaking of the term ‘monopoly’ is evident in his use of some examples (e.g. brand, image, access to channels, access to raw materials, size) as a source of monopoly power. Vince’s use of monopoly power is meant to denote competitive advantages enjoyed by an existing industry incumbent. Terry perceives Vince’s subject orientation (i.e. monopoly power is something good) as contradictory to her understanding and perspective - or so she thinks.

Vince’s illustration of the different use of the term monopoly in ‘illegal monopoly’ versus ‘monopoly power’ triggers Terry’s reflexive conversation. Terry appears to be struck; moved to think of the different meanings and uses of the term monopoly (i.e. “Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation”). She appears reflexive about her taken-for-granted use of language and how it impacts her interpretation of Vince’s discourse in the here and now experience (i.e. “I used the term monopoly only on its legal meaning- Knowing there is another meaning was much helpful. I do feel I learn something (or

many things) new on this course everyday”). In doing so, Terry speaks in more embodied ways (Cunliffe 2002).

This rhetoric/reflexive conversational moment is brought about by participants’ different language-use. I find in this particular conversation an illustration of Bakhtin’s (1981:293) claim that words have meaning only in a *living conversation* and that words become ours, gaining the meanings we intend them to, when we populate it with our own intentions;

“The word in language is half someone else. It only becomes ones’ own when the speaker populates it with his intention, his own content, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions”

Vince’s use of the term monopoly is meant to show his interpretation of the term as a competitive advantage and Terry’s use of the term is meant to show her interpretation of the term as the event of market domination by few incumbents. It is only in the flow of their conversation that the word monopoly gains different meanings (Bakhtin, 1981).

Perspectives on the concept of reflexivity in management education includes probing more deeply to question own assumptions and beliefs (e.g. Raelin, 2007); going beneath the surface to challenge the -taken-for-granted- of what appears to be real (e.g. Dehler, 2009), involving a change in behaviour (e.g. Hay et al., 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006). Yet, these thoughtful perspectives on what constitutes reflexivity in management classrooms do not offer adequate descriptions of the nature of the ‘rhetoric, arresting moments’ in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment. So, how we can best describe those (few) instances?

Online reflexive conversations in the OC classroom appear to be instances of ‘unsettlement’ (Cunliffe, 2004); disagreement or confusion. It shows participants’ ability to bracket conventional wisdom (Willmott, 1994), where conventional wisdom is interpreted as traditional ways of *seeing* (e.g. Isaac’s perspective on rivalry within a Nigerian context in episode Four) and *talking* (Terry’s traditional use of the term monopoly to refer to the event of market domination by few companies in episode Five). The OC rhetoric, arresting moments are similar to having instances of complicated understanding (Dehler, 2009; Bartunek et al., 1983), where participants see and interpret

an issue or a situation from more than one perspective (e.g. issue of rivalry from a micro-level and macro-level in episode Four and monopoly as in monopoly power and illegal monopoly in episode Five).

In the OC classroom, online reflexive conversations are born in instances of disagreement, which can be traced back to some social diversity (Bakhtin, 1981). In episode Four, Terry's marketing and advertising profession within the UK, Mexico, USA, and Brazil markets, and Isaac's banking profession in Nigeria, constitute a social diversity in terms of profession and culture. It is in this social diversity that disagreements among participants appear to be more than a tempest in a teapot (Bakhtin, 1981) because it leads to an appreciation of others and Otherness. In episode Five, the social diversity is comprised of participants' backgrounds. There is an academic who uses economic theory in the background of his conversations and a practitioner who uses own experiences, practices and social reality in the background of her conversations, and thus the influence on their taken-for-granted use of language.

This is not to claim that all observed instances of disagreement in the OC classroom are reflexive in nature. According to Jacobs and Heracleous (2005), the opportunity to see different things or to see things differently can emerge if disagreement amongst individuals is seen as an opportunity for learning (and change). So, how in these instances of reflexivity students' dialogic practices support the view of 'disagreements' as a 'learning opportunity'?

Jacobs and Heracleous (2005:343) argue that the shift to first person data "facilitates the process of discovery and acknowledging the limits of one's own". This is observed in the OC classroom as students experiencing instances of reflexivity appear to be talking in more embodied ways. Also, students appear to be 'struck' but, it does not necessarily need to be expressed in terms of an utterance of surprise (e.g. "Uau!!" Terry in episode Five). An utterance of surprise is claimed to be an indicator of introspective reflective moments amongst its participants (Jacobs and Heracleous, 2005). However, in the OC classroom, a student appears to be 'struck' whenever she is able to go on after an 'unsettlement' which may or may not involve an utterance of surprise.

“I do understand now”

(Terry in episode Four)

“Uau!!! What a wonderful explanation - everything is clearer and easier now”

(Terry in episode Five)

Thus, gaining a new perspective or understanding in an asynchronous, reflexive classroom conversation can be described using Wittgenstein’s (1953: no. 154) words;

“..try not to think of understanding as a ‘mental process’ at all....But ask yourself : in what sort of case , in what kind of circumstances, do we say , ‘Now I know how to go on’.

For Bakhtin (1981), the diversity of social language in a polyphonic setting is inevitable. Bakhtin speaks of the term ‘heteroglossia’, refuting assumptions about the unity of the language we speak. The language we speak/write is not a neutral medium; it is somehow flavoured with our own social diversity (e.g. professions, age group, gender, culture, class, or religion). Although students in these instances become aware of their social diversity in their conversations, it is difficult to claim that their use of language is different or that it accounts for their social differences.

Reflexive conversations in the OC classroom are not frequent. Two out of forty-four classroom conversations are claimed to be reflexive and only two students’ learning can be claimed to be reflective, emancipatory learning; learning that can result in some form of change on an individual level. To an extent this finding concurs with previous studies which claim that becoming critical is not for everyone (Carson and Fisher, 2006) and that they are meant to be few instances rather than provoked excessively (Hedberg, 2009).

This study’s findings echo the assertion that encouraging management students’ reflections does not automatically instigate criticality in classrooms (Hedberg, 2009). It is rather thought of as a stepping-stone to invoke criticality in the classroom (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999; Cunliffe, 2002; Cotter and Cullen, 2012).

In this section, I have described the nature of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity in online management classrooms as experienced by online MBA students, using their asynchronous, text-based conversations as empirical evidence. Instances of

intellectual critique and reflexivity are not common in the observed setting. Online students appear to engage more frequently in simple reflection in their conversations. Their reflections involved bringing in an experience, a social reality or a situation of interest to their texts and conversations. Online reflexive conversations are instances of ‘unsettlement’ involving a disagreement which aimed at bracketing conventional ways of seeing and talking. Instances of intellectual critique involved a critique towards the logical soundness of others’ discourses and the legitimacy of a discourse. In the next section, I examine the relatively limited criticality which I outlined here in relation to tutor’s practices, aspects in online programme/module design and the learning assumptions which underlie the use of participative approaches of teaching.

### **III. Inconsistencies in the Online MBA Classroom**

Reflective learning needs to be facilitated by educators (Gray, 2007), and deliberately and purposefully built into classroom structure and teaching approach (Hedberg, 2009). This suggests consistency in efforts to build reflective learning throughout the education offered by the online MBA programme. First, I will address the issue of consistency in relation to the online tutor’s dialogic practices.

#### **A. Online Tutor’s Practices**

Raelin (2007) argues that critical educators should, among other tasks, be concerned with reinforcing the value of students’ knowledge; not letting them assume it is inferior to academic discourse, and asking questions with no preconceived answers, while suspending some of their presuppositions about the answer. In his online facilitation, Vince, the tutor, appears to praise the use of different contexts in students’ responses and asks questions with no preconceived answers in his conversation with them.

In episode One, **Vince** asks Isaac a probing question; “What role do barriers to entry play in this power game among the forces?”(text one in episode One). In this conversation, Isaac’s response shows engagement in a simple reflection on his own Nigerian banking experience. In response to Isaac’s reflection, Vince goes “Good answer” (text three in episode One). Vince created a dialogic opportunity for Isaac’s reflection (Cunliffe 2002; Ramsey, 2008), reinforcing the value of Isaac’s practice-

knowledge (Raelin, 2007). In a conventional knowledge transmission model, the tutor would have acted as the sole dispenser of knowledge to passive students (Raelin, 2007), where the teacher talks and the students listen - meekly (Gutiérrez, 2002). A number of online management educators (e.g. Ramsey, 2003; Brower, 2003) advocate a ‘stand back’ or a ‘silence is golden’ principle, whereby they limit their online intervention and presence as ‘the expert’ who dispenses wisdom in the classroom.

In Currie and Knights’ (2003) view, classroom dialogue is meant to promote pluralism and difference, and a ‘no right or wrong answers’ atmosphere. In his conversation with the OC students, Vince encourages disagreements with his perspective and introduces insights from a different perspective;

“You are welcome. Discussion is an important part of our learning paradigm”

(text three in episode Five)

“Well, economics theory says that...”

(text two in episode Two)

“...saving costs and improving value and the logic of co-opetition. Since we have the technology to connect and work together why not do it? See Japanese collaborative networks, for example”.

(text three in episode Three)

However, Currie and Knights’ (2003) study also points out that this approach within a conventional curriculum can fall short of realizing criticality in classrooms. The importance of Currie and Knights’ (2003) findings to this study is that the authors carried out their study in the context of a master level programme that involved international students. The OC classroom involved students from Nigeria, UK, Mexico, Liberia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands and Egypt.

Critical scholars who advocate the use of participative approaches, and classroom dialogue in particular, to instigate criticality hold a different perspective about the role of critical educators in classrooms. Cunliffe (2002) and Ramsey (2008) contend that educators need to attend to the importance of their dialogic practices in influencing the nature of learning in their classrooms conversations. Equally important to the issue or subject being conversed about, Ramsey (2008) argues, is how educators in their



responses to their students influence what happens next in their conversations with students. This perspective suggests that an online tutor's dialogic practices can either support or nullify what the students are instructed to do in virtual classrooms. In the week one classroom dialogue, the OC students are instructed to engage in critical reflection in their classroom conversations but they engage in instances of intellectual critique and reflexivity less often.

Online reflexive conversations are born in instances of disagreement amongst participants. Instances of disagreement appear to be rich soil within which reflexivity can be provoked. This suggests that online tutors should pay particular attention to these instances in their facilitation of online classroom dialogue. However, reading instances of disagreement in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment is not always an easy task due to ambiguous perspectives and use of language. I use part of my analysis in episode Three to illustrate my claim.

In this episode, I interpreted this conversation as involving a disagreement between Kyle and Terry. I have shown through my analysis of Terry's week one DQ-initial response, and Kyle's week four IQ-initial response and uploaded biography that both hold different views about strategizing. Terry perceives strategizing as creating strict entry barriers to limit competition and Kyle assumes that a strategy involves gaining competitive advantages in terms of flexibility and ability to adapt;

**Terry** (in her week one DQ - initial response): "Under my opinion, it is vital to avoid new entrances, create barriers. Rivalry is limited by barriers to entry which will be influenced by the access to distribution and resources. As strategists we have to analyse if it is easy for new market's possibility of entrances and create barriers by any means (licensing or patents are just some examples)".

**Kyle** (in his week four IQ - initial response): "Due to the nature of the advertising industry which is a fast paced environment, where new technologies, trends, social and economic factors and consumer insights change constantly, can have a great impact on the business if they are not followed closely. So it is very important, in order to keep a competitive advantage, to be flexible and be able to adjust your strategy accordingly without getting out of track and without affecting your long term intentions in the company and vision about the company".

Kyle argues that having competition is 'healthy' in an industry; keeping companies alert to changes and new developments. In this sense, Kyle advocates having more competitors in an industry because it helps companies maintain a good strategy that is

based on flexibility and adaptability. With this analysis, Kyle's statement "...I totally agree with your analysis..." in his text to Terry does not really reflect an agreement. I am only able to make sense of this disagreement using Kyle's *week four* IQ - initial response. Episode Three, where Kyle states "I totally agree", occurs in *week one*.

Although the online tutor encouraged pluralism and differences, praised students' simple reflection on experience, and asked questions with no preconceived answers, criticality is observed less often in classroom dialogue. Based on this study's findings, the online tutor's approach created opportunities for reflective learning in classroom dialogue for his students but it did not deliberately promote reflexive doubt among students. According to Cunliffe (2002), the online tutor did not question students' accounts of an experience, exposing contradictions and possibilities. Online reflexive conversations do not necessarily involve facilitation on the online tutor's part. Neither is reflexivity acknowledged by the online tutor when it does occur. There is no deliberation in instigating reflexivity in the sense addressed by other scholars in their face-to-face classrooms (e.g. Grey et al., 1996; Watson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; Sinclair, 2007). Yet, this non-deliberate instigation of reflexivity echoes Hay and Hodgkinson's (2008) findings, which report that an MBA programme can allow a space for the questioning of self and practice, if only accidentally.

In this section, I have discussed inconsistency between online tutor dialogic practices and what students are instructed to do in their week one classroom dialogue. Now, I turn to inconsistencies with respect to the online MBA programme/module design.

## **B. Design Aspects**

Reynolds' (1999) cautionary observation that without addressing anomalies or inconsistencies, a teaching approach promoting criticality does not necessarily reflect a commitment to it is of importance to us here. In this section, I point to some observed anomalies in the overall aim of the online programmes and the OC module learning objectives (in week one).

On the management school website, the online MBA degree is promoted as:

“...designed to equip you for higher positions in management and to help you develop personally and professionally as a leader who thrives in complex and globally diverse environments...You will gain new skills and knowledge that you can immediately apply in your current role, so you can start making a difference from day one...”.

On completion of week one, the OC students are told that the learning outcomes involve their ability to:

- analyse industry attractiveness by employing the fundamentals of industry structure,
- explain the interface between industry structure and firm positioning and highlight how that interface influences organisational performance, and
- examine ways in which firms can operate profitably in unattractive industries.

The online MBA programme is promoted in what can possibly be described as a ‘technicist spirit’, reinforcing scientific understanding to management. Scientific understanding involves promoting management education as equipping management students with some skills and knowledge to improve performance (Grey and Mitev, 1995); to operate efficiently and effectively (French and Grey, 1996) (i.e. “You will gain new skills and knowledge that you can immediately apply in your current role”, “making a difference from day one....”). According to Alvesson and Willmott (1996), a technicist understanding seeks to reinforce the belief that management problems can be diagnosed and solved using tools and instruments that can be taught and applied later in practice. Thus, the way the overall aim of the online MBA programme is presented conveys to MBA candidates and students that knowledge is objective. This includes knowledge in the form of techniques, principles, and models (Cunliffe, 2004).

What the online MBA programme seems to promise candidates and MBA students on the completion of their studies can be perceived as promoting students’ instrumentalism (i.e. “equip you for higher positions in management”). Limiting management students’ motivation to the attainment of some kind of reward (e.g. credentials, a promotion, a salary raise, or a new job) is considerably criticized for reinforcing the image of an MBA programme as a commodity (Sturdy and Gabriel, 2000). As a consequence, students’ interests in an MBA programme can be limited to the qualification and

credentials and not in the learning experience they can construct with others (Antonacopoulou, 2010).

The week one learning outcomes, as outlined above, seem to convey a similar message to the OC students about the nature of learning in the virtual classroom. Learning is focused on developing students' analytical skills and use of theory as in "analyse", "examine", and "explain", rather than question, reflect, and describe for instance.

However, there are also efforts to recoup 'criticality' in the OC virtual classroom. Inviting students to ask probing questions (Raelin, 2007) and engage in questioning of assumptions (Reynolds, 1999) are among principles for enacting criticality in management classrooms. For instance, in the OC classroom dialogue, the OC students are instructed to critically reflect on their week one reading material;

"Your follow-on response should provide evidence that you have critically reflected on the material by questioning assumptions, revealing new personal insights, and probing and/or posing questions for further investigation"

Also, in week four, the OC students are given the following instruction to guide their responses to the IQ;

"To facilitate your practice of critical reflection and synthesis, in this week's discussion you will individually analyze the advantages and disadvantages of planned/analytical and emergent approaches to strategy. Like in the previous week, you are urged to bring your own particular organizational and socio-political and cultural context into the discussion. Your focus should be on the following questions..."

These observed inconsistencies in the programme/module design suggest that there is an understanding on the management school part of what must be done to help students engage in reflective, emancipatory learning. It does not, however, necessarily reflect a serious institutional commitment because of the inconsistencies in the online MBA programme/module design and the online tutor's dialogic practices that I addressed.

The use of participative, less hierarchical educational settings is encouraged in management education classrooms (Reynolds, 1999), and in networked learning pedagogy through the use of relational dialogue (Hodgson et al., 2012; McConnell et al., 2012).

However, some argue that the use of participative approaches may retain some technicist attitude towards learning/teaching in management classrooms (Grey and French, 1996; Raelin, 2009). The next section examines the use of case study in the OC classroom which constitutes another source of inconsistency, and contributes to the limited criticality in the OC classroom.

### **C. Use of Case Study**

A process-informed critical pedagogy within a conventional curriculum is criticized for falling short of achieving its potential (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999). It is argued that it offers management students little opportunity to develop imaginative and creative insights about work (Grey et al., 1996). However, Cunliffe (2002; 2004) suggests that a process-informed critical pedagogy can provoke reflection in management classrooms within a conventional curriculum. Drawing on Cunliffe (2002; 2004), I argue that a process-informed critical pedagogy can enact criticality in an online management classroom, where classroom conversations are text-based and devoid of face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, it requires a shift in mind sets and the pedagogical assumptions which underlie conventional teaching.

In their week one, the OC students are given the following instructions to answer the week one DQ;

“Review the Cola Wars case, as well as the article “Five Competitive Forces that Shape Strategy”.

- Consider the role of the following key components of the soft drinks industry value chain: concentrate producers, bottlers and retailers.
- For each of the key value chain components, assess the power of each of the five forces in the industry: that is, how powerful are the buyers, suppliers and substitutes? How formidable are the barriers to entry and how intense is the rivalry?”

The Cola Wars case study is used in the OC classroom to apply a theory/concept (i.e. Five Competitive Forces that Shape Strategy) to practice (i.e. Cola War case as a real world example). This conventional use of case study is criticized for promoting the idea

that translatability and generalizability of knowledge is possible (Grey, 2004), where a theory, concept, or technique is being backed up by a constant reference to real world examples (Grey and Mitev, 1995). The use of case study method in the OC classroom is limited to convincing management students about the relevance of a tool, technique or theory. Asking students to apply what they studied to some idealized case studies endorses the acceptance of decontextualised analytical techniques, which are then perceived as generally applicable to any context (e.g. industry, region, market, company, culture). This limits the scope for developing criticality and/or a questioning attitude in the virtual classroom.

Yet, the problem is not in the Cola Wars case study itself. The problem is in technicist learning assumptions that subvert its use. Others have proposed alternate uses of case studies in management classrooms which aim at developing criticality and provoking reflection amongst students. For instance, Cunliffe (2002) suggests that a case study can be looked at as ‘a story’, inviting management students to tell and share their own stories and experience with others in classroom dialogue. The various accounts and stories can then be used by an online tutor in the manner argued by Grey et al. (1996), in describing the role of educators as pointing to continuities and discontinuities between experiences and theory. In sharing their stories through classroom dialogue, Ramsey (2005) argues, students are offered various lenses through which to look at the story they are telling.

Watson’s (2001) negotiated narratives approach in on-campus teaching can be helpful in a virtual setting. Using idealized and abstract case studies as stories, an online tutor can encourage his/her students to look for the story behind the story. A combination of students’ various experiences and observations and using, where appropriate, academic concepts and theories to draw out any possible ‘story behind the story’ can provoke reflective, emancipatory learning in virtual classrooms. In this sense, a case study is not used to find some solutions to a problem.

It is this shift in the pedagogical assumptions underlying teaching a conventional curriculum in a virtual classroom that opens up the scope for developing criticality among online management students. Scholars claim that networked management learning that adopts a critical relational dialogue perspective can provide students with

opportunities to bring their cultural and social experiences and to develop critical thinking (Ferreday et al., 2006; McConnell et al., 2012). It is therefore of no surprise that few instances of reflexivity were observed in the OC classroom.

In this section, I have discussed my interpretation of the limited criticality in the OC classroom. I have argued that there are some inconsistencies in the online MBA classroom. I have discussed these inconsistencies in terms of the online tutor's dialogic practices, design aspects in the MBA program/module, and pedagogical assumptions underlying the use of teaching methods. I claimed that these inconsistencies suggest that there is an understanding of what needs to be done to help management students become more critical. Yet, it is not enough if online management learning is to respond to wider concerns about the status of learning in management education classrooms (e.g. Hayes and Abernathy, 1980; Roberts, 1996; Mintzberg, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005). There is a need for a consistent and an institutional commitment to promote reflective learning throughout the entirety of education offered in virtual classrooms, if online management students are to be helped with becoming more 'emancipative'.

#### **IV. Shifts in Students' Monologic Orientation and Opportunities for Reflective Learning in the Design of Online MBA Classrooms**

I have argued before that reflective learning needs to be reinforced consistently throughout the holistic education that a management education programme ought to provide (e.g. Hedberg, 2009; Antonacopoulou 2010) and that this should lead to the removal of inconsistencies. However, I did not present evidence that building reflective learning into different learning situations can offer learning opportunities to students. I use my observation of the shifts in a student's orientation from a less dialogic orientation in week one to more dialogic in week four to support my claim that designing an online MBA classroom to include different reflective learning situations offers students with monologic orientation opportunities to become more dialogic and reflective.

Bakhtin (1981:281) argues that a monologic orientation and passive understanding of others' discourses "contribute nothing new to the word under consideration". For Bakhtin (1981:281), passive understanding is "no understanding at all". In the OC

classroom, a totally monologic classroom conversation where all participants engage passively with others' discourses is rare. The only conversational moment that was perceived as totally monologic is the one presented in episode Six. Monologic orientation could also result from an authoritative reading to others' discourses. A passive respondent, Bakhtin (1981) argues, may grant authority to others' discourses and hence, agrees with the authoritative discourse without questioning.

In an above section, I presented Terry's dialogic orientation in episode Seven as exemplifying an instance of intellectual critique. In this section I focus on Monica's (i.e. the other participant in episode Seven) monologic orientation as exemplifying an instance of authoritative reading to academic discourses. **Monica**, in answering Terry's critique, shows her allegiance to Porter's discourse of the most profitable industries.

**Monica:** "...Michal Porter (2008) in his article gave the graphic... Only for that reason I included that data to my response :)".

(text two in episode Seven)

Monica's monologic orientation and passive understanding are also observed in her conversation with Isaac in episode Two. In this conversational moment, **Monica's** perspective remains a mere opinion; with little effort to elaborate, extend, interrogate or add a framing context to others' discourses;

**Monica:** "...From my perspective, it is a very sensitive point, in that companies must give the right (not suitable for the moment, but the right) decision in aim to find the best balance between level of price and the profits gifted to customers...".

(text one in episode Three)

Monica's learning in episodes Seven and Three can be described as 'lower' or 'surface level' learning because it:

- shows no active and conscious engagement with experience; not relating to a meaningful personal application (Leung and Kember, 2003);
- focuses on comprehending material (Hay et al., 2004);
- is a mere repetition (Cope, 2003).



Even though some online students may appear un-reflective and show a passive understanding to others' discourses in one learning situation, promoting reflective learning in *different* learning situations opens up an opportunity to a change in a student's engagement and understanding.

In *week one*, Monica is observed having classroom conversations with more active learners whose orientation is more dialogic (e.g. Isaac in episode Two and Terry in episode Seven). I have called these conversations a proximate of monologic and dialogic orientations, where different participants show different orientation (monologic and dialogic) in the same conversation.

In *week four*, as outlined before, students are instructed to engage critically with their weekly readings and bring their own organizational, socio-political, and cultural context into the discussion. In my analysis, I have shown how **Monica** in her week four IQ-initial response shifts her orientation to more dialogic one, reflecting on an experience from her organization. Although Monica does not appear to be 'more critical', her understanding is certainly not passive as she reflects on a crisis period in her organization;

**Monica** (in her week four IQ response): "...There was the overlapping between the notions of operational effectiveness and strategic development. Porter (1996) argues that 'strategic agenda is the right place for defining a unique position, making clear trade-offs, and tightening fits' (Porter, 1996:78). Especially, during the crisis, the operational effectiveness of the company substitutes the notion of 'strategy'. Being better than rivals, stay alive when rivals have sunk off, all of those actions imply the operational effectiveness, not the strategic positioning. Unfortunately, the Company has made other serious faults. Before the crisis, the core goal of the Company was growth of activities. But, we did not foresee the trap of such actions. Growth does not mean profitability"

So, what opportunities does an online, asynchronous learning environment offer Monica to become a reflective learner in week four?

**Learning to be reflective:** Passive learners with less dialogic orientation are observed interacting with more active, reflective learners whose orientation is dialogic. This leads to classroom conversations that are monologic-dialogic proximate. These conversations can thus be looked at as 'learning spaces', where passive learners are offered an opportunity to learn *from* their engagement with other reflective students whose orientations are dialogic, and whose understandings are active. In this view, classroom

dialogue is not only thought of as a vehicle for the “creative interaction of contradictory and different voices” (Raelin, 2008:521), but also as an opportunity to learn to be reflective from other reflective and active co-learners in the virtual classroom.

Scholars propose that management students’ engagement in an online, text-based classroom dialogue can promote reflective learning (Salmon, 2000; Brower, 2003; Hay et al., 2004). In light of this study’s findings, I extend this proposition and argue that, in the interaction with more active and reflective learners, passive unreflective learners can learn to engage more actively (and reflectively) with others’ discourses and that a shift in their understanding and orientation can be observed over time.

**Different reflective learning situations:** In the OC classroom, reflective learning is encouraged in week one and in week four in different forms. As outlined before, it is encouraged in the week one classroom dialogue and in the week four IQ. These different reflective learning situations act like triggers of students’ reflections. For Monica, the week one classroom dialogue (i.e. trigger one) leads to less dialogic and passive understanding on her part, and the week four IQ (i.e. trigger two) leads to active understanding and reflective learning. It could be argued that a student becomes more confident and comfortable over module duration. Still, there must be a built-in opportunity to promote reflective learning for a confident online student to engage in a reflection on own experience.

In the next section, I shift the focus to active participants who are co-authors engaged in the construction of meanings with others in their classroom conversation.

## **V. Meaning Construction and Students-Tutor Relationships in the Virtual, Polyphonic Classroom**

A networked learning pedagogy emphasises “collaborative and cooperative learning, learning through dialogue and group work together with interaction with online material, and collaborative knowledge production” (McConnell et al., 2012:10). In this section, I illustrate the view of online learning as a dialogic construction of meaning or a collaborative knowledge production in which all participants act as co-authors.

A polyphonic setting is one where multiple voices are given the autonomy to converse (Bakhtin, 1981). Polyphony is a condition for a democratic setting, according to Bakhtin, but never enough on its own to claim that dialogism and active understanding co-exist (Vice, 1997). The observed OC classroom is polyphonic in the sense described by Ramsey (2008), where no one participant appears to be in full control of the dialogic learning process. In the OC classroom, an asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue allowed for the creative interaction of multiple voices (Raelin, 2008), and so provides an example of Bakhtin's dialogic construction of meaning (Hodgson and Watland, 2004).

In episode Three, **Kyle, Rafael** and the tutor, **Vince**, are conversing about the subject of healthy competition. Each participant shares his own sensemaking and perspective on what a 'healthy competition' entails;

**Kyle:** "...A healthy competition can work to a company's advantage by keeping them alert, investing in new machinery, technologies and R&D, new marketing strategies, and by also adapting new ideas. Moreover new entries, instead of shrinking the market share might open the market by introducing a new product within the same category. For example, a new flavor of Coca Cola or Pepsi, Vitamin Water, or Orange Juice with Calcium, etc. which have open the market and contributed in the in the industry's growth".

**Rafael:** "I would like to add that even for us as consumers is better to have more and better products to choose from, having more supply, down prices and quality improves".

**Vince:** "...Winning in a business sense is not necessarily a zero-sum game, where others lose. I would rather believe in Brandenbuser & Nalebuff's co-opetition. I also believe in healthy competition, preferably which minimizes the win lose outcomes...It is opposed to saving costs and improving value and the logic of co-opetition".

(texts one, two and three in episode Three)

In the above quotes, healthy competition is perceived as *a motive* triggering company's developmental efforts, investments in new applications, and boosting industry growth (in Kyle's), and as denoting *consumers' welfare* (in Rafael's) and *collaboration* with competitors to save costs and improve value (in Vince's). Rafael extends Kyle's sensemaking of a healthy competition to the consumers' realm and Vince adds new insight to the conversation (i.e. collaboration rather than competitiveness). These constructions and meanings are provoked from within participants' online conversation and exemplify Bakhtin's notion of the 'dialogic construction of meaning' in dialogic

online learning (Hodgson and Watland, 2004) and Shotter's (1993:19) idea of participants' situated knowing.

In my analysis, I presented my account of participants' different forms of dialogism. Kyle reflects on the Cola Wars case study and uses some examples. Rafael reflects on an experience from his own culture to add a new insight and Vince negotiates the meaning presented by Kyle, bringing in other academic discourses, and uses the Japanese collaborative networks as an example. Thus, the process of the co-construction of meaning is instigated from within participants' attempts to be dialogic.

Farmer (1998: xiv) argues that Bakhtin's notion of dialogic knowing refutes that knowledge can be derived from monologic conversations. In the OC classroom, to claim a newly co-constructed knowledge from within participants' relational engagements is to claim participants' active understanding and dialogic orientations in these engagements. The dialogic construction of meaning in episode Three illustrates claims that understanding and insights in the virtual classroom are developed as each student's voice builds on, contrasts or extends the understanding of others in the conversation (Dysthe, 2002), and that students act as co-producers of course content and learning (Brower, 2003) in their classroom dialogue. In episode Three, Vince acts as a learner himself, engaged in the process of the co-construction of meanings with his students. In her view of learning as co-authorship, Cunliffe (2002) argues that teachers should act as learners, taking active roles in the learning process. Shotter and Cunliffe (2003:17) speak of the notion of practical co-authorship in terms of an individual's ability to make sense to others in his/her talk;

“ practical authors speak in such a way that other participants can creatively respond in their own unique way but in ways that still make sense to all those involved.”

Kyle, Rafael, and Vince are *practical co-authors* in episode Three because each participant is able to make sense of the notion of healthy competition in his own unique way, yet relates at the same time to others in the conversation, who in turn respond in their own unique ways. On this perspective of co-authorship, students and their online tutor are co-producers of their learning in the virtual classroom.

Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) argue that good (reflexive) co-authors are those who can see something new in, or are moved by others' responses to them. Good co-authors do not only engage with others in the co-construction of meaning, but are also *good listeners* who in their responses become aware of different perspectives and possibilities (Cunliffe, 2004). In the OC classroom, we observe only two reflexive conversations in the sense outlined before. Thus, in this sense of what constitutes a good co-author, only Isaac (in episode Four) and Terry (in episodes Four and Five) are claimed to be good co-authors in the OC classroom. So, good co-authors in the OC classroom are those who become aware of different perspectives, bracketing traditional ways of seeing (e.g. Isaac in episode Four) and talking (i.e. Terry in episode Five).

In the next section, I discuss the limitations of an asynchronous, text-based learning environment in promoting dialogic learning, and where opportunities for reflective, emancipatory learning are lost in instances of disagreement.

## **VI. Lack of Response and the Learning Opportunities Lost in an Online, Asynchronous MBA Environment**

In this section, I present the reader with multiple interpretations to the observed lack of response in the week one discussion forum. It is surprising to observe that the lack of response and failure of dialogue discussed here is not questioned by either the OC students or their online tutor. The aim of this section is to present aspects in the asynchronous learning environment and the OC classroom that may have led to this lack of response, taking into consideration the nature of the setting, the learning situation and participants involved. In this section, I draw on Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism and relevant literature in online learning and management education. I use the same data on a few occasions but interpret the lack of response phenomenon differently, depending on the aspect being discussed. The sequence in which the aspects are presented does not correspond to any level of significance.

## A. Non-Living Words

In attendance to the relational nature of text, Bakhtin (1981: 282) uses the OAR process to describe the flow of conversations between participants and/or relational nature of text;

“...his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that the various points of views, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social “languages” come to interact with one another”.

An addresser puts his/her words together based on a perception of what might be interesting to others with whom he/she wishes to engage. For Bakhtin, it does not matter whether participants’ orientations are monologic or dialogic to describe the flow of a conversation. Regardless of participants’ orientations and understanding, “...every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates it ...” (1981:280). Thus, if this OAR process is successful, then an addresser receives a response from his /her named addressee and his/her words are claimed to possess a degree of *internal dialogism*. Vice (1997:70-71) explains Bakhtin’s view on words’ internal dialogism as related to a successful OAR process;

“... the word internal dialogism consists partly in its expectation of an answer, which means it takes up a certain orientation toward the addressee, as the speaker -the word- ‘strives to get a reading on his word’ ”.

In the OC classroom, not all attempts to orient, anticipate and receive a respond were successful. This leads to the lack of response on the discussion forum, where some addressers’ texts do not attract a response. In these instances where an addresser’s words lack a degree of internal dialogism, the OAR process can be claimed to be impaired or unsuccessful. To put it differently, in attracting no response, an addresser’s words fail to penetrate the ‘alien’ territory; the apperceptive background of his/her addressee(s). The addresser fails to relate to his/her addressee. For this, the addresser’s subject orientation does not resonate with his/her named addressee. Then the addresser’s words are claimed to be *non-living words*; words which are not answered; to which no one relates. In the OC classroom, there are six instances where an addresser’s words attract no response.

These are instances that were excluded from this study's two-stage analysis (see appendix B).

However, applying a dialogic approach to the investigation of the OC online classroom conversation reveals more of these instances embedded (or concealed) in ongoing conversational moments. In theory, Bakhtin's (1981) OAR process implies some sort of *deliberation*; directing the words to a targeted audience (e.g. readers of a novel) or to a particular, named addressee (as in 'Dear ...' in the OC classroom). What is observed in the OC classroom is that sometimes the named addressee may not respond, but other participants in the OC classroom do. In these instances a conversation is triggered because the addresser's subject orientation resonates with someone else in the OC classroom.

An example can be found in episode Three. In this episode, the conversation is initiated by Kyle who initially names Terry as his addressee. A response is made by Rafael who addresses both Kyle and Terry. Later, Vince joins the conversation and addresses both Kyle and Terry. Nevertheless, Terry responds to none. Kyle's discourse in triggering a response from others is said to possess a degree of internal dialogism.

As this lack of response took place often on the discussion forum, it is true then that breaking through the apperceptive background of an addressee is not always an easy task (Bakhtin, 1981). Since a lack of response was also observed in ongoing asynchronous classroom conversations, then words have meaning in *living conversations* (Bakhtin, 1981), but only *for those who engage with it*.

In similar vein, I observe the *unexpected* closure of participants' asynchronous classroom conversations. Most often asynchronous classroom conversations reach 'closure', just because participants involved disengage (i.e. stop posting text) at one point of time. In episode Two, Isaac and Monica converse about price-based competition and its impact on company profits and on customers' welfare. Monica, in text one, is concerned that price-based competition can result in eroding company profits. Isaac, in text three, explains that price-based competition means 'quality products for affordable

prices'. Then, the conversation between these two participants stops. Monica appears disengaged and they both do not respond to Vince's text (i.e. text two).

Another example is found in episode Three. Kyle, Rafael and Vince are conversing about the notion of healthy competition and what it implies or means to each participant. Three texts are exchanged in the process of meaning co-construction, the conversation stops, and the three participants appear disengaged. For instance, no attempts were made to summarize the different meanings co-constructed around the notion discussed or contrast one meaning against the others.

In this section, I have presented an interpretation of the observed lack of response on the discussion forum using Bakhtin's (1981) idea of internal dialogism. However, Bakhtin's dialogism does not tell us more, given the asynchronous nature of classroom conversations. To explore further, I discuss the role of students' relative anonymity in the absence of face-to-face, personal interactions in the OC classroom.

## **B. Students' Relative Anonymity and Emotions**

The use of an asynchronous, text-based classroom dialogue in an online learning environment is said to promote students' relative anonymity (Arbaugh, 2000; Sullivan, 2002) by not having to physically face others in an online classroom and/or be judged by others on the basis of their external look. Students' relative anonymity is usually looked at as a positive aspect in online learning environment, increasing online students' participation in discussions (Arbaugh, 2000) and making it easier to engage (Sullivan, 2002). However, I argue that this relative anonymity (which I call students' *relative invisibility*) can lead to lack of response instances.

Vince (1998) claims that there is no learning experience without anxiety. Emotions interfere to hinder as well as to promote learning (Brown, 2000), particularly where learners' differences are evident (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001). Participative approaches can be problematic for some students; create anxiety related to feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment and fear of being judged by others (Vince, 1998; 2010).



In a learning situation where a challenge to previously held assumptions, ideas, or values is conceived, a student may experience feelings of discomfort and uncertainty (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Gilmore and Anderson, 2011). In a synchronous setting, Vince (1998) argues that the feedback a student receives from another can easily feel unwanted. He/she may not be willing to be challenged, or ready to attempt to question his/her existing knowledge. A student's anxiety can result in denials and avoidance strategies, creating the condition for his/her willing ignorance (Vince, 1998). In an asynchronous, text-based learning environment in which students are relatively invisible, this could lead to silence and withdrawal.

In one instance, I interpreted one student's no response as a possible form of withdrawal; an inability to contain a learning situation that involved questioning of ideas and/or own experience and so maintaining a willing ignorance. **Judith**, who addresses Kyle, comments on the relationship between the number of suppliers and the extent of their power on the price level;

**Judith:** "...I wanted to react on a point you make about power of suppliers in the CSD industry. I know it is a very minor point, but I disagree with you when you state that since concentrate producers require few inputs, they can rely on a wide range of different suppliers if needed. In my opinion, the power of suppliers is very low because the inputs needed are very basic and abundant, not because they are very few. However, knowing that you have much more experience in that field, I would like to have your opinion".

(general observations section)

Kyle, in his uploaded biography and engagements with others in week one, reflects on his experience in working with "leading" advertising and media agencies in the U.S and Europe, and serving big clients like Pepsi Company. His experience and professional background is emphasized to the extent that Kyle is perceived by one of his colleagues as 'the expert' in the field.

In the above quote, Judith challenges Kyle's perspective on suppliers' power, arguing that the fewer the number of suppliers in the Cola soft drink industry, the more the power they can exert in setting a price level. However, Judith continues, if what the suppliers offer to producers is basic and abundant then their power is minimal. Kyle does not answer Judith's question. Why is Kyle silent? With Kyle's background and the

way he is perceived by his peers (including Judith herself), his silence suggests a form of withdrawal and avoidance. Perhaps he feels embarrassed (his perspective may be erroneous) or not ready to attempt to question his knowledge (to have his 'expert' perspective and work experience scrutinised).

In episode Seven, Monica and Terry are having a conversation about Porter's discourse of the most profitable industry. While Monica grants Porter's discourse authority, Terry opens it up to questioning. Towards the end of her text three, **Terry** asks a question;

**Terry:** "...Can you also let me know what page did Porter mention that information? I would like to have a re-read on that. I have done a search but could not find".

(text three in episode Seven)

However, Monica does not respond. Earlier in this conversation, Terry draws extensively on her marketing experience and others' discourses in support of her critical view. Could Terry's critical view and her attempt to question a well-known scholar have put Monica at unease? Could it have failed to resonate with her beliefs of what learning is about? Or does Monica feel challenged by Terry's critique and not know how to answer her?

In these two instances, there is no observed intervention by the tutor. Although it is argued that management educators need to attend to the impact of emotions on their students (Vince, 2006), the medium's lack of visual cues in terms of facial expression and body language can place online tutors at a disadvantage (Brower, 2003). Both examples represent instances in which participants disagree with each others' views. In the above section, I have described reflexive conversational moments in the OC classroom as born in instances of disagreement and disputation. It is in participants' silence in instances of disagreements that opportunities to become more critical are lost.

### **C. Time Management, Participation Assessment and Excessive Posting**

In this section, I interpret a student's lack of response in light of issues of time management, participation assessment, and excessive posting. The struggle to manage time wisely and the urge to meet the minimum required level of participation to attain grades can lead to students' instrumentalism. If this is the case, students would engage in

online classroom dialogue up to a point where the minimum number of posts (as per the online module structure) is met. This results in students' lack of response to any other posts, particularly towards the end of the week (i.e. Wednesdays). This interpretation echoes Currie and Knights' (2003) findings that students appear to go along with what they are asked to do, but for instrumental reason.

Kyle's lack of response to Judith's text can be interpreted in a different sense than the one outlined in the above section, given that Judith posted her text on a Wednesday, the last week day in the online classrooms. Kyle could feel less reluctant to engage in a new conversation after meeting the minimum requirement for engagement (i.e. three to five participation posts).

Debates around assessing online classroom dialogue are unsettled (Anderson, 2008). While Gregor and Cuskelly (1994) argue that online classroom dialogue need to be *deliberately* designed into the structure of virtual classrooms, Campbell (2002) argues that forcing participation in an online classroom dialogue can shadow students' instrumentalism. As outlined before, the problem of students' instrumentalism - where students appear motivated to attain some sort of rewards; grades (Currie and Knights, 2003), status symbol (Sturdy and Gabriel, 2000; Vaara and Faÿ, 2011) - is exacerbated by scholars in the wider field of management education.

The issue of time management, especially where online management students combine their studies with a day job, is commonly reported in online management learning research (Jones and McCann, 2005; Allan, 2007). According to the uploaded biographies, students in the OC classroom are practitioners, holding down a day job. In the end of module feedback, a student mentions his/her struggle to strike a balance between his responsibility and role as a student and other roles alongside, and another reflects on being 'nervous' about meeting assignments' deadline;

“I found 6000 word for the final Module Project, too long for such a small period of time having to deal also with many other personal and professional responsibilities”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

“Actually, DQ2 in weeks 2 and 4 makes me nervous. Every time there is little time period between DQ1 and DQ2, thus, there is nearly no time to prepare for the second DQ. It happens to me during the 1st and 2nd module. It may be my personal problem, but it happened to me twice”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

A lack of response could also result from students’ sense of being overwhelmed (Kimball, 1995; Brower, 2003; Redpath, 2012) and confusion (Salmon, 2000) in their attempts to follow up threaded discussions. In the OC classroom, the total number of observed text-based messages in week one is one hundred and thirty-four and the total number of observed conversations is forty-four. One student describes this issue as a negative aspect in his/her end of module feedback;

“The number of individual contributions was not controlled and I was pretty overwhelmed”

(Anonymous, OC module report, January Term, 2012)

The issue of being overwhelmed is usually reported in relation to excessive postings on discussion forums (Brower, 2003; Johnson, 2006). Online students often refer to excessive communications as a ‘noise factor’ (Jones and McCann, 2005). The next section will offer a fourth interpretation, this time taking in consideration instances where the addresser is Vince, the online classroom tutor.

#### **D. Online Tutor as an Authority Figure**

Bakhtin (1981) offers another way of looking at words which are not answered, if the author is perceived as an authority figure. Authoritative words are located at a distance from its audience. For them, authoritative discourse appears demarcated. It remains untouched and unquestioned (Bakhtin, 1981). It is respected as if it is the words of fathers (Bakhtin, 1981). In an educational setting, a teacher could be looked at as an authority figure by his/her students (Dentith, 1995:57). A teacher’s discourse can be agreed with, perceived as a scientific truth, and never or rarely questioned. In the OC classroom, a lack of response from Monica and Isaac to Vince’s text in Episode Two can be interpreted as a form of students’ allegiance to an authoritative discourse. In doing so, their silence can be a form of authoritative reading to their tutor’s discourse.

Challenging and disagreeing with Vince's text and views were not a common practice in the OC classroom. The following two students, in their conversations, express their disagreement with Vince's perspective in a rather apologetic manner.

**Judith:** "I have to say that I only partly agree with you. I hope you don't mind"

(general observation section)

**Terry:** "I feel a little embarrassed to disagree with my instructor"

(general observation section)

The use of participative approaches to learning creates a less hierarchical, non-lecture based learning environment (Reynolds, 1999) and promotes the notion of co-authorship in management classrooms (Cunliffe, 2002). However, in sharing their expertise and assessing students' performance (Cunliffe, 2002) and classroom participation (Mingers, 2000), management educators cannot completely escape their image as authority figures in classrooms. It is often argued that the passive educational context students endure their entire lives can influence the way in which they perceive themselves as inferior to their teachers. As a result, they tend to listen and address the expert teacher's voice, while perceiving other voices in classroom as ignorant (Gutiérrez, 2002). In the OC classroom, students are observed participating in conversations with their peers and Vince<sup>19</sup>. Yet, some participants (e.g. Scott and Monica) engage more often with Vince than others (See appendix C). This suggests that the image of an online tutor as an authority figure should not be underestimated, even though an online MBA classroom is designed to promote the interaction of multiple voices in a polyphonic, less-hierarchical and non-lecture based learning environment.

## **E. International Students' Use of Language and Experience**

This section argues that although studies in the context of international, postgraduate management students identify language, students' experience and background as obstacles leading to students' silence, there is not enough evidence to support this claim in relation to the observed lack of response in the OC classroom. However, because of the nature of the OC students (i.e. international students, with more than half whose first

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<sup>19</sup> see sociogram p. 116.

language is not the English), it is felt that it is necessary to show the reader that issues such as language, students' experience and background have been examined in the context of the available evidence.

Some studies report difficulties in applying participative approaches in the context of international management students (Gutiérrez, 2002; Griffiths et al., 2005). Educators relate obstacles in the use of participative approaches to the use of unfamiliar language and different teaching/learning style (Griffiths et al., 2005), and as students struggle to relate theory to practice (Gutiérrez, 2002). Raelin (2009) describes classroom silence as an indicator of students' disengagement and having nothing to contribute. In the OC classroom, participants' use-of-language appears generally simple and understandable by their peers. There was no evidence in students' end of module feedback pointing to issues in comprehending their assignments, module reading material, and/or tutor's texts and feedback. Neither were there requests to illustrate on any aspect in the OC module on the week one discussion forum. There is not enough evidence to claim that (international) online students' lack of response is related to the use of unfamiliar language and/or lack of experience.

In this section, I interpreted lack of response and failure of dialogue observed on the discussion forum in terms of discourse's internal dialogism, students' relative anonymity, issues of time management, assessed participation and excessive postings, and perceived image of the online tutor. This, then, illustrates the limitation of an asynchronous, text-based learning environment in promoting dialogic learning, and where opportunities for reflective, emancipatory learning can be lost. The next section presents my reflection on this study's methodology.

## **VII. Methodological Reflections**

In this section, I reflect on my use of a dialogic approach in an attempt to understand how instances of reflection can be identified and conceptualized from within online, asynchronous learning conversations. I reflect on the tools and framework used in this study's analysis and presentation. In the first section, I reflect on the process of constructing my study design and then I move on to reflect on this study's analysis.

## A. Constructing my Dialogic Approach

In the Literature Review, I outlined that there is no available framework that offers insights on what to look for in investigating reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity as experienced by students in their asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations. The work of both Shotter (1996) and Cunliffe (2002a) offer useful insights on devising a research approach that is concerned with learning as dialogic, responsive process. Building on their work and ideas, I needed to identify my research and data collection methods, and analysis tools that would enable carrying out this investigation in the spirit of Shotter's "Witness-Thinking" approach. The first decision was to construct the theoretical framework that would guide the interrogation of data, rather than following the supposedly normal sequence in designing research as set out in textbooks. Van Maanen et al. (2007) claim that this ideal version of the interplay between theory and data which is commonly published in textbooks can be misleading and may not account for the real process unfolding over time.

Once I constructed my theoretical framework to guide my analysis, I moved to decide on research and data collection methods, and tools of analysis. The way this study design is set reproduces to an extent Kincheloe's (2001) *bricolage-like* approach. Kincheloe (2001:325) describes the concept of bricolage as the process of crafting a research strategy from hitherto unrelated methods and ideas; "we bring our understanding of the research context together with our previous experience with research methods". Bakhtin's dialogism influenced my choice of a combination of classroom observation to collect my primary data in the form of classroom conversations and document analysis to collect secondary data which helped in becoming familiar with participants' backgrounds, experience, and perspectives. Becoming familiar with my participants' social context is central to the analysis of students' reflection and reflexivity in the sense outlined before, using Bakhtin's ideas of framing context and rhetoric discourse. Bakhtin's ideas also influenced my decision to use visual tools as part of this study analysis. The framework itself is devised to guide data interrogation but it cannot be used to describe the observed polyphonic setting. The use of visual tools in the analysis, then,

becomes essential to offer the reader a sense of Bakhtin's polyphony in the observed online, text-based learning environment.

In the Methodology chapter, the theoretical framework is presented as if the concepts and the ideas I used from Bakhtin's dialogism were outlined first, and that their connection to data and concepts of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity was clear (to me) from the onset. Although it is presented in this straightforward way, the theoretical framework and data analysis were in continuous interplay, including a back-and-forth element. Van Maanen et al. (2007:1149) speak of this process as aimed at discovery; "...works backward to invent a plausible world/theory that would make the surprise (in data) meaningful" (my bracket). This back-and-forth process, which Van Maanen et al. (2007) call abductive reasoning, describes my going back to Bakhtin's dialogism and literature on reflection in management education when my first attempt to analyze classroom conversations reveals some unmet expectations or surprises. I recall early attempts to carry out this study's analysis as being shallow, and criticized for being based mainly on my own intuition and conjecture. Proceeding with data analysis, more surprises in data led me to go back again and again, re-reading theory and literature. Over time, the need to go backward was less felt and a sense that a reasonable fit between my understanding of theory and literature, and data was attained. Only then did I start to connect the pieces of the proposed framework together with my understanding of literature and data in hand.

Although the process of going back to theory and literature then back to data was time consuming, it also meant that I maintained close contact with the conversations, participants and their backgrounds. I kept notes on ideas, perspectives, and questions that were brought to mind in this process, which helped in the data analysis.

In constructing this framework and analyzing data, I was concerned with describing the observed asynchronous setting in a way that would make sense to the reader. However, this did not dismiss the difficulty of presenting interpretations and/or the opportunity lost when I could not ask a participant, for example, what did you mean by this or that? Or how did you feel in this situation? Gold (1958: 222), in his comment on the role of a complete observer, describes this situation; "Yet, there are many times when he wishes



he could ask representatives of the observed world to qualify what they have said, or to answer other questions his observations of them have brought to mind”. I am aware of the limitations of using this approach but I also see a contribution in the theoretical framework and approach devised to explore students’ reflection in their online, text-based classroom conversations, inviting other researchers to interrogate this framework in different contexts.

Applying a dialogic approach in the spirit of Shotter’s (1996) “Witness-Thinking” allowed for the investigation of the potential and limitations of online, asynchronous learning environments to induce reflective, dialogic learning, the exemplification of instances of reflection in online management classrooms, the exploration of the dialogic construction of meaning and co-authorship and the development of an understanding of how critical management education can be enacted in an online management classroom.

## **B. Use of Visual Tools**

In my investigation, I used two different visual tools; a visual metaphor and a sociogram. In the Methodology, I justified my use of visual tools in the context of this investigation and the proposed framework. Visual tools offer a way to communicate to the reader interpretations of Bakhtin’s polyphony in the observed setting. In its use, I was able to support the idea that my claim of monologic relationships in which the teacher appears to be the subject of the learning process (Gutiérrez, 2002; Ramsey, 2008) did not dominate in the observed setting, because students interacted with their peers as well as their tutor. This sets the scene for, and justifies bringing more of Bakhtin’s ideas into the relational analysis of classroom conversations, and the move to the second stage of analysis.

The way a sociogram is used to fit in with this investigation proved helpful in preparation for the second stage of analysis. To draw a two mode network, all classroom conversations need to be identified and organized. A sociogram can assist a researcher in taking the first steps to becoming familiar with the observed setting and develop a sense of the broader picture of participants’ interactions and conversations. For instance, I was able to develop a broad picture in terms of the total number of conversations, who

participated in which conversations, which conversations were relatively lengthy, with whom participants preferred to engage, which text attracted many or few responses, how many instances could be described as failure of dialogue, etc.

I was conscious of the influence a sociogram could have on my expectations and interpretations. It was helpful to have some checking points, where I took time to reflect on the process, asking myself what I was looking for, what my objectives were, and how my use of tools could help me get there.

### **C. Relational Analysis of Conversations Based on Bakhtin's Dialogism**

In this section I reflect on the use of Bakhtin's framework to carry out a relational analysis, both when it offered insights in identifying and conceptualizing instances of reflection, and when its use was limited and did not offer a way to interrogate deeper.

I began my analysis by dividing the forty-four classroom conversations into three main categories;

- (a) totally dialogic conversations where all participants are active (i.e. who show an active understanding of their weekly readings or others' discourses and make an effort to move beyond other's discourses including: adding new insight, extending a perspective into another context, and/or challenging others' discourses),
- (b) totally monologic conversations where all participants appear to be passive learners (i.e. little effort to elaborate on perspective or an idea, nothing new is added, repetition of theoretical/other's discourse), and
- (c) conversations where at least one participant appear active (i.e. monologic-dialogic proximate).

I used my understanding of Bakhtin's concepts of 'framing context' and 'rhetoric discourse' to explore instances where a simple reflection on experience and reflexivity are instigated in the OC classroom. In instances that I perceived as reflection, I attended to the nature of the 'framing context' the students use in their reflections. This helps in

identifying what sort of experience and situations of interest students bring to the classroom.

Instances of reflexivity were potentially different from the way they are described in the CME literature. They appeared, as outlined before, less like an instance of questioning the self, and more like unsettlement which involved becoming aware of the peculiarity of own context and its influence on own perspective, the limitation of own knowledge, and the taken-for-granted use of language. In my first trials to analyze conversations, I was unable to see any instance of reflexivity because they were not deliberately provoked by the online tutor, nor were they examined in students' answers to essays that required them to be critical. These were instances that were provoked naturally and un-deliberately in a classroom conversation. It was Bakhtin's framework that drew my attention to the different nature of reflexivity in an asynchronous, text-based learning environment. I had these Bakhtinian clues of 'oppositions' and 'elements of social heteroglossia' to guide me. These were instances where participants 'disagreed', but their disagreement could be traced back to some sort of 'social diversity' in terms of experience, knowledge, and use of language.

The framework I devised was helpful in describing asynchronous, text-based conversations and where participants appear engaged with one another, whether passively or actively. However, it did not offer insights into other instances and where a participant appeared to be disengaged unexpectedly or chose not to respond to his/her addresser. The framework did not help in interrogating those particular features of asynchronous, text-based learning environment in more depth. To interpret these instances, I had to draw on literature in an attempt to make sense of it. There were times when I questioned the extent to which my interpretation may have changed if I had been able to directly contact this study's participants. The proposed framework also did not allow for the investigation of students' different use of language.

Presenting this study's analysis was a complete and utter challenge. In my attempt to develop a robust and rigorous analysis approach, I depicted the relational analysis of the seven episodes in four ordered steps (e.g. argument → episode → description → analysis), making it easier for the reader to follow. The relational analysis carried out in this study

shares with discourse analysis, as method, a social constructionist epistemology. I broadly reviewed some of the scholars' work in discourse analysis (e.g. Dick, 2004) to gain some insights about the presentation style of the analysis. For instance, it is common in discourse analysis to breakdown a participant's discourse into a series of lines which are sequentially numbered, and use special notations to indicate pauses, laughs etc. in spoken discourses. Because of the asynchronous nature of the conversations and this study's focus on meaning construction, I felt that there was a lesser need for all of these details. I chose to present participants' texts as they appeared on the discussion forum and allocate a single number to the whole post to show the flow of an online conversation. I also underlined parts of the text to emphasise participant's position, subject orientation, use of examples from experience, or any relevant feature that was brought into the analysis of a particular episode.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

This section summarizes this study's findings by drawing on the objectives set out in Chapter One. In carrying out this investigation, I had four objectives. I will postpone the discussion of the fourth objective to the Conclusion chapter. The first three objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the potential and/or limitations of online, asynchronous learning environments to induce reflective learning among management students.
- To exemplify instances of reflective learning from within online classroom dialogue.
- To explore the notion of the dialogic construction of meaning in an online classroom dialogue.

To achieve the *first objective*, I examined the nature of students' understanding (active vs. passive) in their online, asynchronous classroom conversations. This study's findings suggest that online, asynchronous learning environments can induce as well as hinder reflective learning among management students. Online management students can appear to be active learners; constructing their learning in their reflective conversations

with others in the virtual classroom. Online management students can also appear to be passive learners; adding no new insights or meanings to their conversations with others, making little effort to go beyond their textbook and/or peers' discourses, or ascribing to the authority of a well-known scholar's discourse. Reflection on an experience is provoked more frequently in online classroom dialogue than intellectual critique and reflexivity. Reflexive conversations are provoked naturally and un-deliberately in the virtual classroom conversations. I also pointed out the limitations of an asynchronous, text-based learning environment in promoting dialogic learning, where failure of dialogue and lack of response in instances of disagreement meant that opportunities for reflective, emancipatory learning were lost.

To achieve *the second objective*, I exemplified instances of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity as experienced by online management students in their asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations. Most of the observed classroom conversations are best described as monologic-dialogic proximate, where at least one participant appears to be an active learner. In their reflective conversations, management students added their experiences from their organizations, culture, and other situations of interest as a framing context to others' discourses. Reflexive conversations appeared more like instances that involved an unsettling of own perspectives. It involved becoming aware of the peculiarity of a learner's own context and its influence on his/her perspective, the limitation of own knowledge, and the taken-for-granted use of language. Intellectual critique involved a critique of both rhetoric (i.e. the logical soundness of an argument) and authority (i.e. the legitimacy of a perspective).

To achieve *the third objective*, I exemplified the process of meaning co-construction using one of the observed classroom conversations in which the tutor and his students appear to be active learners. Each participant made an effort to move beyond others' discourses and texts, adding a new insight and/or extending the other's perspective. I have argued that the tutor and his students in their constructions mirror the notion of learning as co-authorship.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how this study's methodology and findings allowed for the achievement of the first three objectives. In this final chapter of my thesis, I elaborate on my contribution to knowledge and identify areas for future research. To this end, I answer the questions which I raised in Chapter One and focus on this study's fourth objective. In this chapter I also offer a reflection on my learning journey during this Ph.D. research project. In Chapter One I posed the following three questions:

- A. What is the nature of reflective learning - which is comprised of reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity - provoked in online, asynchronous classroom conversations?
- B. How might reflective learning be constructed in an online, asynchronous learning environment?
- C. How can we understand, interpret, and conceptualize reflective learning in online, asynchronous classroom conversations?

In the next sections, I answer these questions in the following order: C, A, then B. It is true that the concern with examining the nature of reflection is the main trigger of this investigation but in practice, and because there was no mention of a rigorous theoretical framework in the literature, the theoretical framework had to be devised first to allow answers to questions A and B.

### II. Interpreting Reflective Learning using Bakhtin's Dialogism

In my proposal of a theoretical framework to interpret and conceptualize reflective learning, I argue that Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of *polyphony* and *active understanding* are mirrored in many of the scholars' arguments about how management students should learn in face-to-face classrooms (e.g. Holman et al., 1997; Cunliffe 2002; Raelin, 2008; Ramsey, 2008; Cunliffe, 2009; Dehler, 2009; Hedberg, 2009). I claim that these two themes, polyphony and active understanding, can be helpful in constructing a rigorous

framework that would help us identify instances of reflection from within practice. I claim that reflective learning that is comprised of instances of simple reflection on experience, intellectual critique, and reflexivity exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of active understanding, where a student shows an effort to move beyond what has already been said by others in their discourses (textbook, theory, or peers' discourses). Reflective learning involves negotiating, assimilating or re-accentuating discourses and texts. In this sense, reflective learning is never passive; it is not a repetition or mere comprehension of others' discourses. The call for the use of participative, less hierarchal approaches in management classrooms emphasises learning that is dialogic and responsive among students and between them and their teacher, who act as partners or co-authors in a classroom dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002). Bakhtin (1981) advocates a multi-voiced, polyphonic setting to allow for the dialogic and active interaction of multiple consciousnesses. This suggests an interconnection between Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, which allows for the co-construction of meanings amongst individuals, and learning that is perceived as dialogic and responsive amongst co-authors in management classrooms.

The idea that learning is inherently a dialogic process emerging from within classroom dialogue (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002a) and that we may need to explore it from within its natural setting (Shotter, 2006) is not new. However, the contribution of this study is in proposing a framework to carry out an investigation that takes this ontological stance in an asynchronous setting, where a classroom dialogue is text-based. Although a number of scholars have explored the relevance of Bakhtin's ideas in online learning settings (e.g. Koschmann, 1999; Dysthe, 2002; Mitra and Watt, 2002; Ferreday et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008; Hodgson, 2009), the use of Bakhtin's ideas of *authoritative discourse*, *framing context* and *rhetoric discourse* to explicitly examine the potential of online learning environment to promote criticality in virtual management classrooms has not been explored before (see Table 3.1 p.81). This study has illustrated how the use of Bakhtin's ideas can help us understand, interpret, and conceptualize reflective learning in online, asynchronous classroom conversations.

In the Discussion, I outlined other instances where the proposed framework did not allow for a more in-depth interrogation of those instances (i.e. lack of response and students' disengagement in classroom dialogue). I have also pointed to the difficulty in presenting interpretations and/or opportunities lost in assuming the role of a complete observer. Although this implies a limitation in the use of Bakhtin's dialogism using a complete observation mode of investigation, the theoretical contribution of the devised framework invites other researchers to interrogate it in different contexts (e.g. online learning sets, students' written reflective papers in face-to-face classrooms, other online modules and programmes as online DBA programmes) and using different "Witness-Thinking" modes of investigation which may include the use of a participant observation and interviews, or focus groups.

### **III. Identifying the Development of Criticality in an Online MBA Classroom**

The emancipatory intent of CME is to create spaces for management students to be more critical; taking steps towards achieving a personal change (Mezirow, 1998; Cunliffe, 2002). Cunliffe (2002) argues that the possibility of change is improved if critical educators encourage reflexive engagements in their classrooms. Research in CME has drawn largely on students' perspectives to gain insights about their learning experience after it has ended (e.g. Griffiths et al., 2005; Currie and Knights, 2003; Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008). With the exception of few empirical illustrations of the nature of students' reflection in face-to-face, on-campus teaching (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006; Hedberg, 2009), there is much more theoretical talk about what constitutes reflection, critical reflection, critique, and reflexivity in the literature. There is also very little 'talk' about criticality in online management classrooms, often in the realm of networked learning pedagogy (e.g. Ferreday et al., 2006; Hodgson et al., 2012; McConnell et al., 2012), and in the sense described by critical educators in face-to face, on-campus teaching. The study explored instances of reflection from within students' online, text-based classroom dialogue. Drawing on strands of work from several authors, I have shown how online classroom dialogue provides opportunities for reflection, intellectual critique and reflexivity. I have used exemplars from students' online conversations to discuss the extent to which the nature



of reflective learning in asynchronous learning environments echoes scholars' proposals and views on what constitutes 'becoming critical' in face-to-face classrooms.

The study findings show that reflexivity is not for everyone (Carson and Fisher, 2006). In a classroom of fourteen online management students, only two students experience instances of reflexivity in their online classroom conversations. Reflective, emancipatory learning is not always deliberately instigated, especially not in the sense proposed by other scholars (e.g. Grey et al., 1996; Watson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; 2004; Sinclair, 2007; Hedberg, 2009; Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2005) where educators play a key role in moving students into a reflexive mode in face-to-face classrooms. In the virtual classroom, reflexivity is usually provoked naturally in online classroom conversations where an addresser's subject orientation (i.e. an issue or a topic of interest) may or may not trigger an addressee's reflexive engagement.

Reflexivity in the virtual classroom does not involve probing more deeply to question one's own assumptions and beliefs (e.g. Raelin, 2007), or going beneath the surface to challenge the taken-for-granted of what appears to be real (e.g. Dehler, 2009). Neither does it involve a change *in behaviour* (e.g. Hay et al., 2004; Carson and Fisher, 2006). The scope and research approach of the study did not allow for further investigation of whether students' own assumptions are questioned or whether behavior is changed outside the classroom. Evidence shows that reflexive conversations in this virtual classroom are more like instances of unsettlement (Pollner, 1991; Cunliffe, 2004) in which students are moved in the sense described by Shotter's (1993) discourse of the 'moving moments', which allow individuals to re-position themselves in relation to their situation, to re-see it in a new perspective. In the virtual classroom, 'moving moments' or 'arresting moments' involve some form of bracketing conventional wisdom (Willmott, 1994). This includes bracketing traditional ways of *seeing* and *talking*. There is Isaac who questions his claim of knowledge as he becomes aware of the influence of one's context (i.e. Nigerian's context in this case) on own views and perspectives. There is also Terry who realizes how her taken-for-granted use of language influences her interpretation of the tutor's discourse.

Reflexive instances are described by Cunliffe (2002) as instances where a student opens up to new perspectives and possibilities and speaks in more embodied ways. In this virtual classroom, students open up to new ways of seeing and talking in the sense outlined above, which constitutes a change for them. Students in these instances may talk about their emotions (e.g. Terry's feelings of shame and selfishness) and/or their current assumptions and state of knowledge (e.g. Terry and Isaac's re-assessment of own knowledge in relation to their contexts and professions).

The evidence presented in this study shows that reflexive instances in online classroom conversations are born in instances of *disagreement* and *disputation* in which participants justify their perspectives and views by reflecting on some 'elements of social heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981). These reflexive instances include a criticism and a justification (Billig, 1996). In this sense, students are claimed to be engaged in a rhetoric discourse which is not aimed at achieving victory (Bakhtin, 1981; Billig, 1996). A student experiencing an instance of reflexivity appears to be 'struck'; is able to go on after an 'unsettlement', and this may or may not involve an utterance of surprise. So reaching an understanding in reflexive instances can be described using Wittgenstein's (1953, no. 154) words "Now I know how to go on...".

Engagement in intellectual critique in the virtual classroom echoes Mingers' (2000) classification of four types of critiques, and Cunliffe's (2002) observation that students can become critical by focusing on realities and systems that exist independently from their own personal involvement. According to Mingers (2000), students should be challenging arguments, taken-for-granted assumptions, the legitimacy of certain perspectives, and the validity of knowledge in others' discourse and/or text. In this virtual classroom, instance of intellectual critique involved *only* challenging others' arguments and the legitimacy of certain perspectives. There was no observed personal change as a student examines the claims in others' discourses (Mezirow, 1998).

#### **IV. A Proposal to Enact Criticality in Online, Asynchronous Learning Environments**

Conventional approaches to management education are criticized for being theoretical, ignoring the view that managers rely on other sources of knowledge including their own

experience and sensemaking to help them act within their circumstances (Cunliffe, 2002; Mintzberg, 2004). This reduces management education to analysis (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2004). Critics argue that helping management students to develop functional and technical skills (Hayes and Abernathy, 1980; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Armstrong, 2005; Raelin, 2007; Scott, 2010) does not lead to reflective practitioners who have a better understanding of the complexity of their practices. CME recognizes that there are other forms of knowledge that are relevant to practitioners in action (Cunliffe, 2002) and so, promotes students' engagement with their experience, practices and taken-for-granted assumptions, to reach new understandings and appreciations.

Evidence shows that promoting engagement with an experience, practice and taken-for-granted assumptions can also take place in online classrooms. In this virtual classroom, students engage with a simple reflection on the experiences they bring from their organizations and cultures. Students' reflections also include engagement with a situation of interest which is brought about by their case study and their peers' classroom conversations. Although the value of online learning platforms in promoting reflective learning has been recognized before (e.g. Meyer, 2003; Brower, 2003, Johnson, 2006; and Wang and Woo, 2007), it was not backed up by empirical work. Scholars who advocate networked learning as an educational philosophy in virtual classrooms that is based on 'negotiation, collaboration and cooperation' (e.g. McConnell et al., 2012; Hodgson et al., 2012) include a reference to the potential of a critical pedagogy in virtual classrooms. Hodgson et al. (2012) and McConnell et al. (2012) assert that networked learning philosophy has its roots in critical pedagogy and promotes online learning environments as platforms to develop criticality and emancipation. For instance, Ferreday et al. (2006) examine the ways in which the nature and the kind of online classroom dialogue contribute to constructing identities within an MA programme. In this study, the potential of the online learning environment to promote a critical pedagogy is explored in relation to perspectives on CME and dialogic reflective learning.

The study also offers insights about lurkers' learning. Dysthe (2002) asserts that lurkers learn from their engagement with peers' texts and conversations in some internal

dialogue with the self. Lurkers can also learn through an active engagement with their peers' texts and conversations, using them as a context for their reflective learning in their conversations in the virtual classroom. Online classrooms can offer opportunities for reflective, emancipatory engagements in which students are moved to re-see a situation in a new perspective. This defies claims that online classrooms can only promote learning that is passive and cognitive (Barker, 2010) and that online learning is "the ultimate in commoditization" (Weigel, 2002:30).

Online learning environments can promote learning that is dialogic, reflective and emancipatory. Online classroom conversations have the propensity to open up spaces for the co-construction of meanings, challenging conceptions of reality, and exploring new possibilities. This is not to suggest that online conversations that lack dialogism where online management students appear to be passive learners are nonexistent, but the scope of these totally monologic, unreflective conversations is limited. The majority of online conversations involve at least one active participant in what I called a monologic-dialogic proximate. There are also drawbacks that relate to the asynchronicity and/or the design of online learning settings which can lead to students' lack of response and so hinder the realization of learning that is dialogic and responsive in the virtual classroom. These obstacles/drawbacks include the absence of visual cues and body language, students' relative anonymity, excessive posting, time management issues, student's instrumentalism and perceptions of the online tutor as an authority figure. However, these obstacles should not rule out the critical potential of online, asynchronous learning environments.

Online learning can create a setting in which students ask questions and contribute to a discussion several times without having to compete for a 'window for speaking' or 'air time' with others (Brower, 2003; Meyer, 2003) unlike large lecture theatres which can accommodate hundreds of students, and present limited opportunities for students to ask questions and engage in classroom dialogue. Online MBA students are also practitioners who live and work in different parts of the world whilst carrying out their online studies. This opens up opportunities for reflective engagements with one's own experience and practices which are brought about from different contexts and cultures. For instance,

students in this study hold down jobs across different industries and fields including banking, advertising and marketing, construction, IT services, oil and gas, electrical engineering, regional development and higher education industries, and come from all across the globe (Nigeria, UK, Mexico, Liberia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands and Egypt). The diversity of experiences, practices, and cultures is rich soil for provoking reflective, emancipatory learning in online classrooms because it can result in disagreements and disputation which can be traced back to some social differences. Next, I propose how we can capitalize on this diversity to *deliberately* enact criticality in online management classrooms.

In the Discussion, I argued that reflective learning needs to be consistently built into the holistic education that an online MBA programme provides to management students. The potential of online, asynchronous learning environments to deliberately promote criticality in virtual classrooms depends on the existence of an institutional commitment to reflective, emancipatory learning. This commitment needs to be reflected *consistently* in the programme/module learning outcomes and objectives, the use of teaching methods or approaches to facilitate online students' learning, and online tutors' practices. All of these aspects of the online programme should convey the same message about what constitutes learning in an online MBA classroom: learning is about broadening perspectives, bracketing conventional wisdom, and being able to re-see in a new perspective. Carson and Fisher (2006) assert that promoting reflection in an educational environment that asks students to confirm, and adhere to the status quo could be risky and students may feel reluctant to pursue. Without consistent institutional commitment, we can expect to see criticality taking place only occasionally and accidentally in virtual classrooms. Institutional commitment also means carrying out more research that would help us better understand criticality in online classrooms and developing programmes for online faculty development.

Simple reflection on an experience is seen as a stepping-stone to promote reflective, emancipatory learning (Grey et al., 1996; Reynolds, 1999; Cunliffe, 2002; Cotter and Cullen, 2012). So, how can this simple reflection on experience be turned into reflective,

emancipatory learning that produces a change on an individual level in an asynchronous learning environment that is devoid of face-to-face interactions?

One of the outcomes of this study is that business schools need to attend to the roles of online tutors and their facilitation of online classroom dialogue. Although the OC tutor is observed encouraging pluralism (Currie and Knights, 2003), not pushing a classroom dialogue to a consensus or a resolution (Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005), reinforcing the value of students' practice-knowledge (Raelin, 2007), and encouraging disagreement, this appears to have had a little impact on instigating criticality in the virtual classroom. In online learning literature, there is no mention of an overtly critical/dialogical approach to online facilitation and indeed, this study was instigated with this lack of research in mind (e.g. Leidner and Javenpaa, 1995; Nijhuis and Collis, 2000; Ricketts et al., 2000; Anderson et al., 2001; Coppola et al., 2002; Easton, 2003). What online tutors need to attend to are their dialogic practices; their influence on what comes next in their online conversations with their students (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2008). In their facilitation of online classroom dialogue, online tutors should try to re-position themselves and their students' as online co-authors; sharing responsibility for the learning process (e.g. Cunliffe, 2002). If this is the case, drawing on Cunliffe's (2002) and Ramsey's (2008) research in face-to-face settings, it becomes paramount to online tutors' roles to identify dialogic opportunities where they can provoke reflexivity in online classroom dialogue. Drawing on Cunliffe's (2002) ideas, facilitating online classroom dialogue can involve assisting students in making connections between theory and practice (i.e. reflective conversations), questioning theory, concepts or ideologies from a distance (i.e. intellectual critique), or unsettling own assumptions, broadening perspectives, and opening up a possibility to change (i.e. reflexive conversations). I propose therefore that the facilitation of asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations should include:

- questioning students' accounts of an experience; exposing contradictions and possibilities (Cunliffe, 2002), and pointing to continuities and discontinuities between experiences and theory (Grey et al., 1996),
- promoting complicated understanding; increasing the variety of ways an event or situation can be understood (Bartunek et al., 1983; Dehler et al., 2001; Currie

and Knights, 2003). This can be done by inviting students to interpret a situation, an event, a theory or a concept by drawing on their practices and social realities. For instance, what Porter's model of five competitive forces means for your practice? Does it help your organization in setting out its strategy? How does it help? What might be missing from theory? What does strategizing mean for your organization?

- attending to instances of disagreement among students and helping students to connect their different understanding and perspectives to their own social contexts and the taken-for-granted. Online tutors need to be much more aware of the verbal clues in students' texts. They can improve their ability to read these 'clues' by becoming familiar with their students' experiences and backgrounds through their uploaded biographies, reflective papers and, perhaps doing more research into students' backgrounds - if needed. The tutor can use this background information to help read students' views, stances and arguments.

This draws our attention back to the question: What kind of skills do critical online tutors need to possess? Gray (2007) asserts that provoking criticality in face-to-face management classrooms is not an easy job and that it may require skills that teachers may not possess. For instance, to help students take steps towards achieving some personal change, Dey and Steyaert (2007) argue that educators need to cultivate 'entrepreneurial imagination' which involves promoting students' imagination and creative potential in order to accommodate new ideas and concepts. There seems to be no agreed upon set of 'skills' that critical educators need to have to facilitate critical learning in their classrooms. This perhaps points to a potential area for future research. We need to understand how online tutors envisage their roles in virtual classrooms, and in facilitating classroom dialogue in particular; what are their strategies, practices, and perspectives on facilitating learning in online classrooms? This could guide business schools' efforts to develop teaching skills and strategies for online management tutors who are committed to promoting reflective, emancipatory learning in their virtual classrooms.

Another outcome of this study is to point out the strengths of a critical pedagogy that involves a critically-informed process within a conventional curriculum in virtual classrooms. By a conventional curriculum, I mean a curriculum which does not necessarily involve critical accounts of organisation and management theory. A number of scholars of on-campus teaching advocate developing criticality in the light of Reynolds' (1999: 1999a) proposal of a critical teaching pedagogy, which was originally proposed by Giroux (1981) (e.g. Mingers, 2000; Dehler et al., 2001; Sinclair, 2007; Dehler, 2009). Although an argument could be made about the use of a critically-informed curriculum in virtual classrooms, the underlying emancipatory aim of this approach appears to be more concerned with the realization of a more just society, based on fairness and democracy. In the Literature Review, I have argued that Alvesson and Willmott's (1996) notion of micro-emancipation, which involves developing a questioning attitude towards micro-practices or everyday practices on an individual level, can help management students take steps to achieve some (attainable) changes in own perspective, attitude, or practice. If this is the case, it is less likely that we need critical content that deals with topics as power, inequality and ideology to provoke reflexivity in virtual classrooms. What I am proposing is to encourage online students to use their practices and experiences as a source for questioning others' practices, perspectives and theory. Classroom dialogue and other teaching methods (e.g. use of case study and essay questions) can be used as vehicles to promote this kind of questioning attitude towards theory and practice rather than reinforcing the acceptance of decontextualised, analytical techniques, concepts, or models.

This approach uses theory and research as provocations (e.g. Ramsey, 2008) for reflective, emancipatory learning in the virtual classroom. It therefore mirrors two of Reynolds' (1999:173) principles which underlie a critical approach to teaching. First, it entails questioning the assumptions and taken-for-granted embodied in both theory and professional practice, and second, it acknowledges the authority of experience in developing ideas and appreciates the social nature of experience (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001).



I conclude that this study, among others (e.g. Dysthe, 2002; Ferreday et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2008), opens up the scope for assessing online learning in management classrooms as the “dialogical construction of meaning” (Hodgson and Watland, 2004:100). It is not the asynchronicity of the setting that is inherently problematic in stimulating reflective, emancipatory learning. This echoes Redpath’s (2012) and Hodgson and her colleagues’ (2012) arguments that it is not the mode of delivery (asynchronous vs. synchronous) that determines teaching approaches or the nature of learning in a given online setting. The study shows the critical potential of online, asynchronous learning environments in engendering reflective, emancipatory learning, where management students are moved to re-see a situation in a new perspective. Although reflexivity is not always deliberately instigated in online classroom dialogue, the fact that it is provoked in this virtual classroom points out the strengths of an online teaching approach that is *not* underpinned by a critically-informed curriculum. The study provides us with insights into online management learning beyond the passive portrayals of learners, showing that virtual classrooms may very well provide a context for dialogical, reflective learning, and so, respond to the wider critiques of the status of learning and nature of management students in management classrooms (e.g. Hayes and Abernathy, 1980; Mintzberg, 2004; Armstrong, 2005; Raelin, 2007; 2009; Scott, 2010).

## **V. Implications of Study’s Findings**

The theoretical contribution of the devised framework invites other researchers in the fields of management education and online management learning in particular to interrogate it in different contexts (e.g. online learning sets, blended learning settings, students’ assessed work in face-to-face classrooms, other online modules as HRM or Organization studies modules and other programmes as online DBA programmes). Moreover, the use of different “Witness-Thinking” modes of investigation can be helpful (e.g. participant observation, interviews, and focus groups or even a mix of these) and as opposed to the complete observation method that is carried out in this study. Another promising area for future research in online management learning field is one that is oriented towards the development of our understanding of how online tutors envisage their roles in virtual classrooms, and in facilitating classroom dialogue in

particular; what are their strategies, practices, and perspectives on facilitating learning in online classrooms? A broad objective of this research opportunity is to offer business schools some guidance in their efforts to develop online management tutors' teaching skills and strategies to promote reflective, emancipatory learning in their virtual classrooms. A core finding of this study is the propensity of asynchronous, text-based classroom conversations to be dialogic, reflective and emancipatory (as well as lacking this dialogism). This then has two implications to online MBA programmes. First, it directs educators' attention to the strength of a critical pedagogy that is not necessarily underpinned by a critically-informed curriculum in the design of online MBA classrooms. And second, it emphasises the importance and the influence of tutors' facilitation role in relation to the promotion of reflective, emancipatory learning in virtual management classrooms. Online tutors need to recognize the influence of their dialogic practices on the kind of learning that is promoted in their own conversations with their students in online MBA classrooms. In light of this, CME can be consistently enacted in online management classrooms via a process-focused critical pedagogy.

## **VI. My Reflective/Reflexive Conversations; *Knowing my way about***

In this section, I reflect on my embedded sense of what constituted 'learning' during this four-year period of completing this Ph.D. research project. I reflect on my feelings of anxiety and my ability to go on. I share my reflection on learning about self and my development as a researcher.

Early in my journey, I struggled to handle the anxiety I felt in embarking on a Ph.D. Part of this anxiety stemmed from being a novice in the field of management education research. I felt unease and discomfort deciding my research plan, questions, and objectives. Over a two-year period, these feelings nurtured my continuous urge to re-organize and re-plan my research; sitting down to write a draft after another. I am a person with good organization and project planning skills. These skills have been always my comfort zone and salvation. If I am faced with a challenge in any sphere of life, I would organize and plan how to confront it. What I never considered before was the possibility that my understanding and assumptions (of this challenge or that issue) would need to be problematized. I was never reflexive about what I did and/or thought.

Looking at my early drafts now, they mirror the same understanding and assumptions. I sought understanding in a ‘plain view’; in a ‘scientific’ conception (Wittgenstein, 1953). I confused Cunliffe’s discourses for my own discourse. I constructed my own trap when I granted others’ discourses authority (Bakhtin, 1981). Or perhaps I was ‘bewitched’ (Wittgenstein, 1953) with the theoretical contemplates of concepts. Wittgenstein (1953, no. 302) describes what happens in these instances when one is tempted to explain rather than to describe; “(it) stands in the way of us seeing the use of (a) word as it is (in practice)” (my bracket). We, early career researchers, have a strong inclination to explain what we see using the authoritative words of others. We discredit our ability to construct our own understanding and text. But when theory (or your plain understanding of it) does not give you a way to move on, you feel stopped.

For me, being able to go on entailed a change in my approach and expectations of learning. I saw other possibilities of understanding and doing research. I learnt that an understanding of academic discourses, concepts, and theories comes to fruition only in practice not merely in reading them. My understanding was constructed in the actual doing of this research project. Although it is true that your research is your ‘own’ construction that results from your ‘own’ sensemaking, a good researcher will always be able to relate to others and others’ discourses. I also became aware of how the way I talk (and feel) about my research changed. I am anxious but excited; worried but optimistic. Every learning experience is entwined with feelings of anxiety (Vince, 1998) and doing a Ph.D. is a no exception. It is not until the anxiety felt becomes a motive to learn, experiment and see new possibilities that you truly learn about the experience of learning itself.

Despite the amount of time and effort I invested, and the number of times I attempted to put this Ph.D. project together over a period of four years, I have enjoyed every success and failure. Almost six months of this period was spent reading (and re-reading) the observed conversations, drafting (and redrafting) the analytical treatment, and deciding which episodes to present in my analysis. At one point in time, I felt that there were too many stories to be told. Choosing which stories to tell and how to present them to the reader required training. The training involved getting feedback on written drafts, and in

engaging with those around me through informal chats, workshop/conference presentations and research groups. Over time, I constructed a way to present the story I wanted to tell and a (social) language with which to communicate it.

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## Appendices

### Appendix (A): Student online support

The purpose of the details provided in this appendix is to communicate the nature of support and guidance awarded to new students joining the online programmes. The content is quoted from the Centre for Student Success website link accessible at: <http://success.ohecampus.com/>. On the Centre for Student Success website link, an online student can find support in different forms or links which allow a student to navigate through the website, giving access to different types of information:

- [New Students](#) has everything you need to know to get your studies off to a good start.
- [Programme Information](#) contains details about each of our programmes; we suggest that you select the page for your programme and bookmark it/make it a favourite so that it becomes your homepage for the Centre for Student Success, giving you easy access to information specific to your programme, as well as all the other information on the website.
- The [Student Handbook](#) contains detailed information about the various policies and regulations regarding your studies.
- [Support](#) allows you to get an immediate answer to many frequently asked questions, or to contact our specially trained support staff if you need their assistance to resolve your query. You can choose from Bursar Support (which deals with all financial queries) Student Support (for answers to general questions about your studies), or Technical Support
- [Resources](#) contains information that will help you become a better student.

On the [New Students](#) link, for instance, students are advised about what is expected from them between their admission and the start of their first online module (i.e. intake module) and also what kind of support is available to them before and during their first module. Information available covers such topics as:

- **Admission**

Once you have been accepted on to your programme and completed the formalities required, you will be admitted to the University as a student. Once you have successfully completed the application process and been admitted to the University, you will be able to access Laureate LENS using the log-in details you will find on the Welcome page of your application form. Laureate LENS is the software you use to access the online classroom, your study email address and the Student Community, and also to deal with the administrative aspects of your studies.

- **Five weeks before your scheduled start date**

Five weeks before you are due to start studying you will be asked to complete the *Student Readiness Orientation*. This a non-credit bearing module that teaches you how to use the online classroom in Laureate LENS, and provides a summary of important information you will need as a student. We will also confirm the textbook/s for the first module of your programme so you can get them well in advance of the start of your studies. Please do not buy your textbooks until they are confirmed; textbooks for a module can change, either due to the publisher releasing a new edition, or because of the normal process of regular module updates and reviews. If you order your textbooks before then, you may order the wrong textbooks and be unable to start your programme as scheduled.

If there are less than five weeks between your admission and your start date you need to order your textbooks and take the *Student Readiness Orientation* as soon as possible. As soon as you have completed your *Student Readiness Orientation* and confirmed you have your textbook/s, your start date will be confirmed and you will be enrolled into the first module of your programme. If you do not complete the *Student Readiness Orientation* or receive your textbook/s by the required date, you will need to reschedule your start date.

- **Ten days before your scheduled start date**

Around ten days before the start of your programme you will be invited to join a private Facebook group specially for students starting on the same date as you. This will allow you to connect with other new students and to receive timely updates from our team of

Student Advisors. Joining this group is not compulsory, and you will also receive the information you need via email, but we recommend that you take part so you can get up-to-speed and connected before your first day in class.

- **On your start date**

On the first day of your studies you will enter the online classroom and 'meet' your faculty member and fellow students. Throughout the Centre for Student Success you will see the term 'faculty member' used; who this is depends upon what stage of your studies you are at. When you are studying a module, this will either be an Instructor (Masters programmes) or a Doctoral Tutor (Doctoral programmes).

Over the first few weeks you will be introduced to online study and receive important information regarding academic writing and citation and referencing. These foundation elements overlap and complement the academic content of your first module. During the initial weeks of your programme our Student Advisors will monitor your progress and reach out to you if it looks like you need assistance. Although support will never be more than a phone call or email away, this enhanced level of support will ensure you get off to the best possible start.

- **Module one of your programme**

From your start date you will be studying continuously until you finish module one of your programme. This means ten weeks of uninterrupted study for students on the Masters programmes and eleven weeks of uninterrupted study for students on the Doctoral programmes. Unless it is unavoidable, we advise students not to travel during this period so they can build up a good study routine without any additional pressure. If you do have to travel you will need to make sure you have the time and Internet access you need to stay up-to-date with your studies..

- **Four Essential Steps before You Start**

Admission means you have been accepted on to your programme by the University, and have a place reserved for you on the start date you requested. However, we need to make sure you are actually ready to start on that day before we can confirm your start date. We want you to succeed in your studies, and know that completing a few essential steps before your first day in class will greatly increase your preparedness and improve the outcome of your first module.

**There are four simple steps that will ensure you are ready to start studying as scheduled:**

**1. You must have the required textbook/s.**

If you are due to start in less than five weeks, you should order your textbook/s now. You need to have the textbook/s for module one of your programme before your first day in class so you can complete the assignments and take part in class discussions. See [Order your textbook/s](#) for details.

**2. You must log-in to Laureate LENS™.**

Laureate LENS is easy-to-use and intuitive software you access through your Internet browser. You use it to access your online classroom, the study email address that we provide for you, and the Student Community. You also use it to deal with the administrative aspects of your studies, like registering for modules and paying your fees. Once you complete the application process and are admitted to the University, the log-in details for Laureate LENS will be available on the Welcome page of your online application form. See [Log-in to Laureate LENS](#) for details.

**3. Check your study email address.**



You are provided with a study email address; this will look like, `firstname.lastname@ohecampus.com`. ALL email regarding your studies will be sent to this address. We do this so that we can be sure that you have access to your email whenever you have Internet access. We cannot control when you can access a work email address, or the reliability of email provided by a third party. However, you can have any email received by your study email address forwarded to another email address or set it to download to Microsoft Outlook or another email programme. See [Check your study email address](#) for details.

#### **4. You must take the Student Readiness Orientation.**

Five weeks before your start date (or within a few days of admission if this is less than five weeks before you start) you will be asked to take the *Student Readiness Orientation*. This introduces you to the online classroom and covers some key topics.

**Appendix (B): Conversational Moments Observed in Week One Discussion Forum  
and Participants Pseudo Names Tables**

**1- Conversational Moments**

Post Number	Conversational Moments		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V1- Isacc</b>			
1.		V15-V1	C1
2.		V1-V15	
3.		V15-V1	
4.		V1-V15	
5.		V2- V1	C2
6.		V15 -V2,V1	
7.		V1- V2	
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V3- Terry</b>			
8.		V15- V3	C3
9.		V3-V15	
10.		V15-V3	
11.		V3-V15	
12.		V15-V3	
13.	C5	V14-V3	C4
14.		V4-V3,V14, class	
15.		V15-V14,V3	
16.		V1- V3	C6
17.		V3-V1	
18.		V1-V3	
19.		V3-V1	
20.	C7	V1-V3	C8
21.		V3-V1	
22.		V1-V3	
23.		V5-V1	
24.		V15-V5	
25.		V6-V1, V3	C9
26.		V1-V6	
27.		V3-V6	
28.		V7-V3	
29.		V8-V3	C10
30.		V3-V8	
31.		V2-V3, V8	
32.	C12	V1-V3	C11

33.		V3-V1		
34.		V1-V3		
35.		V10-V1		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V2- Monica</b>				
36.		V15-V2	C13	
37.		V2-V15		C15
38.		V15-V2		
39.	C14	V9- Assume V2,V15		
40.		V2-V9		
41.		V9- Assume V2		
42.		V15-V9		
43.		V9-Assume V15		
44.		V4-Assume V2, V15 'hello class'		
45.		V15-V4		
46.	C17	V3-V15,V2	C16	C18
47.		V7-V3 and all		
48.		V2- V7		
49.		V3-V2		
50.		V2-V3		
51.		V3-V2		
52.		V15-V3, V2		
53.		V1-V3		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V11- Judith</b>				
54.		V15-V11	C19	
55.		V11-V15		
56.		V15-V11		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V6- Bill</b>				
57.		V11- V6	C20	
58.		V6-V11		
59.		V1-V6	C21	
60.		V6-V1		
61.		V6-V1 'correcting'		
62.		V1-V6		
63.		V15-V6	C22	
64.		V9-V15		
65.		V6-V9		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V8- Mathew</b>				
66.		V13-V8		
67.		V15- V8		
68.		V10-V8		
<b>In response to DQ- initial response by V14- Kyle</b>				
69.		V3- V14		
70.		V12-V 14	C23	
71.	C24	V14-V12		

72.		V12-V14		
73.		V14-V12		
74.		V1-V14		
75.		V14-V1		
76.		V1-V14		
77.		V11-V14		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V7- Nick</b>				
78.		V1- V7	C25	
79.		V7-V1		
80.		V1-V7		
81.		V15-V7	C26	
82.		V7-V15		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V13- Charles</b>				
83.		V8 -V13	C27	
84.		V13-V8		
85.		V11- V13	C28	
86.		V13-V11-a	V13 words in a "I will have <u>to think</u> about your other points and get back to you soon"	
87.		V13-V11 -b		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V9- Scott</b>				
88.		V1- V9	C29	
89.		V9-V1		
90.		V1-V9		
91.		V6- V9, V1		
92.		V1-V6		
93.	C31	V8-V9 C30	C33	
94.		V9-V8		
95.		V1-V8	C32	
96.		V6- <b>Assumed</b> V1, V8'classmates'		
97.		V2-V8		
98.		V15- V9	C34	
99.		V9- V15		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V4- Rafael</b>				
100.		V8- V4	C35	
101.		V3- V8-V4		
102.	C36	V4-V8,V3, class		
103.		V3-V4	C37	
104.		V10-V4		
105.		V14- V 4	C38	
106.	C44	V4-V3, V14, class	it looks as if V4 is wrapping up two conversations with one post ; one he had with V3 ( @103)	

			earlier and other with V14 ( @105)	
107.		V12-V4	C39	
108.		V4- V12		
109.		V15- V4	C40	
110.		V4-V15		
111.		V8-V4,V3		
112.		V4-V8		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V12-John</b>				
113.		V14-V12	C41	
114.		V12-V14		
115.		V10-V12	C42	
116.		V12-V10		
<b>In response to DQ - initial response by V10-Tom</b>				
117.		V1-V10	C43	
118.		V10-V1		
119.		V2-V10		


Table (1) Conversational moments observed in week one discussion forum

**Table (1) key**

- What does the use of a shading colour mean? Nine colors are used in a particular sequence (i.e. yellow light green, blue, pink, grey, orange, purple, dark green/ teal, and turquoise) then repeated to indicate an existing conversation moment. The selection of colours and the particular order used is a matter of personal preference.
- What does V1 to V15 mean? V is an abbreviation for vector which is commonly used in SNA to indicate an actor in a network. For instance, V1 refers to participant one who is given the pseudo name Terry. See Table Two for all participants' pseudo names.
- What does 'Post Number' column indicate? How to read post number 1(V15-V1) and post number 46 (V3-V15, V2). It indicates a particular post made by one participant to another. For instance, post number 1 is made by V15 (addresser) and addressed to V1 (addressee) and post number 46 is made by V3 and addressed to V15 and V2.
- Why is the 'Conversational This subdivision is made for simplicity. It is easier to show different conversation moments where a particular

Moments' column is sub-divided into four sub-columns?

post by one participant to another is a part of more than one conversational moment. Thus, if a particular post is given three colours, as in posts number 20, 46, 93, and 106, it indicates that this particular post is perceived as part of three conversational moments but it does not necessarily mean that these conversational moments are running in parallel.

- What does the use of a turnaround arrow mean? 

The turnaround arrow is used to indicate that a particular post (i.e. arrow tail) is made in response to another particular parent post (i.e. arrow head). For instance, post number 15 is made in response to post number 13. Together posts number 13 and 15 form one conversational moment as indicated by the grey colour. Post number 23 is made in response to post number 20, and together with posts number 20, 23, and 24 form one conversational moment, indicated by the purple colour, and so on.
- What does the red coloured borders mean?

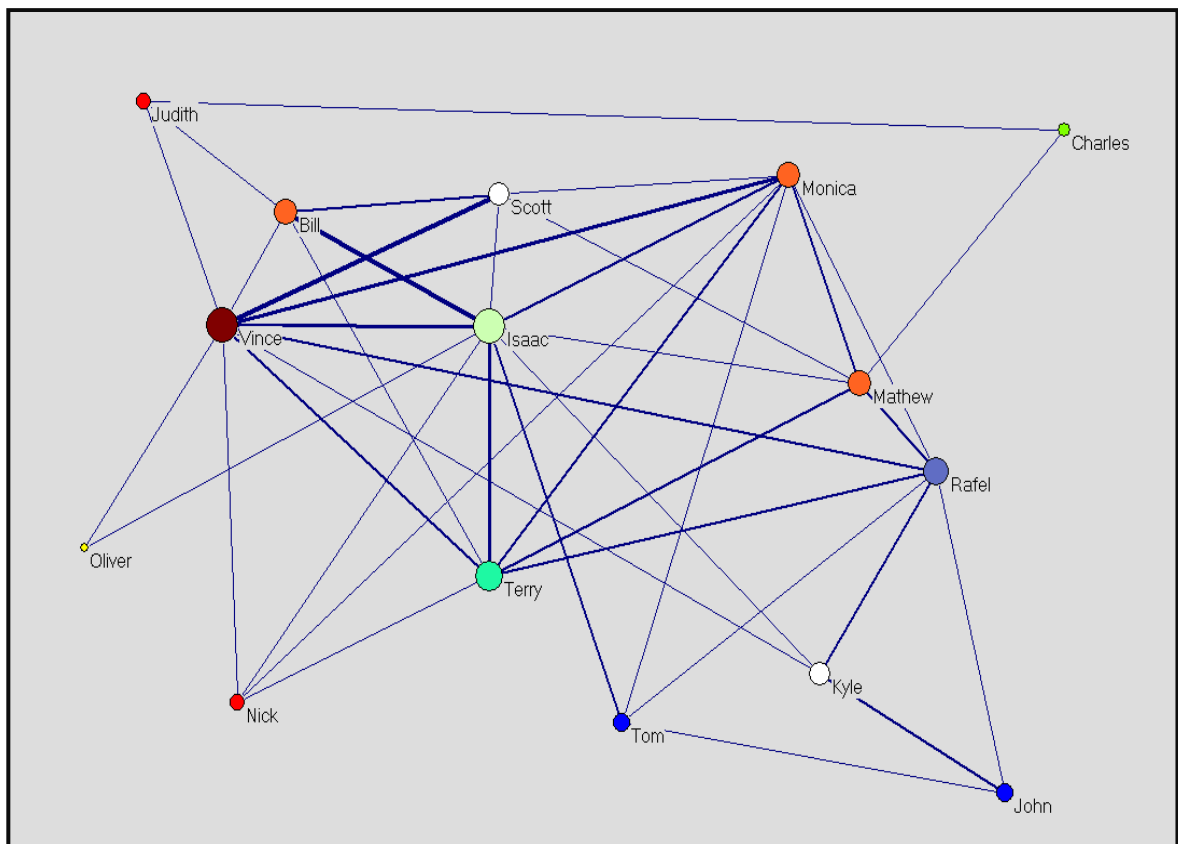
It indicates moments where a particular utterance/post by one participant is made in response to a particular DQ initial response but fails to attract a response from its addressee or other participants in classroom. However, these are only moments that are quite visible before content analysis.

## 2- Participants' Pseudo Names

Vector	Pseudo name
V1	Isaac
V2	Monica
V3	Terry
V4	Rafael
V5	Oliver
V6	Bill
V7	Nick
V8	Mathew
V9	Scott
V10	Tom
V11	Judith
V12	John
V13	Charles
V14	Kyle
V15	Vince the tutor

Table (2). Participants' pseudo names

### Appendix (C): A Sociogram of One Mode -Network



Figure(1). A sociogram to identify who participants like to engage with (one- mode network)

In this figure, we can visualize who participants like to talk with by observing the width of lines/affiliations connecting them. For instance, we can observe that Scott and Vince seem to be engaging with each other more often. Similarly, Isaac and Bill seem to engage in conversations more often





**Appendix (E): Summary of Participants' Interactivity in Week One**

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Number of conversations in week one</b>
<b>1</b>	Isaac	15
<b>2</b>	Vince the tutor	14
<b>3</b>	Terry	10
<b>4</b>	Rafael	9
<b>5</b>	Bill, Mathew, Monica	7- each
<b>6</b>	Kyle, Scott	6- each
<b>7</b>	John , Tom	4- each
<b>8</b>	Judith , Nick	3
<b>9</b>	Charles	2
<b>10</b>	Oliver	1

Table (3). Summary of participants' interactivity in week one