Spaces and Places: Negotiating learning in the context of new technology

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Declaration and Word Count

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

The need for a deeper understanding of students' experiences of e-learning, particularly amongst widening access students, forms the motivation for this work. The three key themes of higher education policy, technology-enhanced learning, and student personal space were used to develop a framework for analysing the match (or mismatch) between the potential learner's circumstances and how these circumstances impact on the ability of the learner to create their own unique learning environment.

To enable a more intimate insight into student classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences, interviews using the 'Biographic-Narrative-Interpretative Method (BNIM)' were undertaken (Wengraf, 2001). These narratives enable personal and individual accounts of behaviour, and place the work within the phenomenological tradition.

The findings reveal how students draw upon their life experiences outside of the university to 'colonise' their learning spaces, and to construct their view of 'self' as student. Further, their creation of this space impacts on those around them; control over one space seems to permit flexibility elsewhere. Students from deprived backgrounds face more complex challenges in trying to combine and prioritise the competing demands of education, work and family life.

The implications from this study are that, in the context of a new managerialist agenda, government and university policy should incorporate a vision of the learning spaces offered to students, and take account of diverse student voices. Inside and outside of the formal classroom, tutors need to change their perceptions as to what is valued as meaningful knowledge construction. Furthermore, differing student experiences need to be

acknowledged when designing appropriate and meaningful learning environments – including online environments.

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Chapter 1

Spaces and Places: Negotiating learning in the context of new technology

The problem

> "Imagine...that you go to a University where all of the buildings are empty - no desks, tables, or chairs, just big bulletin boards all over each room. Now imagine that you can go to school anytime you want. The campus is constantly filled with students, teachers, and administrators coming and going at all hours of the day and night. Each person, however, is physically invisible to all the others. The only way you can interact with each other is by posting your ideas, comments, and responses to other postings on the bulletin boards." (Hamilton and Zimmerman, 2002, p.259)

Hamilton and Zimmerman seek to provide the reader with an alternative view of the university, where all the activities are undertaken in a virtual place and in virtual space. Ideas like this are influential and attractive for various stakeholders in higher education (HE) in the UK. Successive governments are seeking to fulfil the need to develop skilled workers for economic success at the same time as encouraging policies of widening participation, yet refusing to adequately fund the burgeoning student population. Managers within the HE sector have to reconcile requirements for the implementation and audit of governmental policies and initiatives for learning, with ever greater numbers of students. Academics are increasingly encouraged to change their pedagogic approach to meet the needs of mass education and ever lower staff-student ratios. For these stakeholders, perceptions of the benefits of moving teaching and learning online can be attractive. But what about the students?

For the student, higher education can be a cold, harsh climate (Sinfield, Burns and Holley, 2004) where they are over-assessed, expected to acquire 'independent study skills' in a very short time, and have very few opportunities to access the scarce resource of academic time. The

undergraduates in this study are far from "the 'public schoolboys at Oxbridge' who make the unproblematic undergraduates" described by Evans (2004, p.15). The research for this thesis takes place in an inner city university where students have in excess of 170 mother tongues, work an average thirty hours a week in paid employment and come from 'non-traditional' backgrounds - thus they are typical 'widening participation' students. Pathologised by policy makers, the keepers of academy and influential others, these students speak of the 'struggles' they face in adjusting to the occult demands of higher education (Sinfield et al ibid, p.143). However, the focus of the research is not on the typicality of these students, but upon their individual experiences within a post-1992 institution with a strong commitment to widening participation.

This thesis will explore the consequences of moving aspects of teaching and learning online for specific students. The research focus differs from contemporary studies in the area where student cohorts and their activities are measured and tracked via the tools available in Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as commercially available packages like WebCT or their open-source counterparts such as Moodle. The study explores how individual students respond to the multi-faceted challenges they face in completing their studies. In particular it explores with individuals how providing online resources changes the places where they study, and also how the individual is able to re-conceptualise their individual learning space. Thus, I will argue that despite the negative connotations about widening participation students, these students are able to negotiate their own individual solutions to overcome their barriers to learning, and thus succeed in this 'cold harsh climate' (Sinfield, Burns & Holley 2004, p.143).

A framework for exploring the negotiated student experience

Given the background of governmental and institutional pushes towards e-learning (viz. NCIHE, 1997; HEFCE, 2005a) and the reality of work and study for a significant number of students, the actual experience of individual

students studying within their own 'space' is surprisingly underreported. The question of how to integrate students into the world of higher education (or academe) has challenged universities since the initial expansion in numbers in the 1960s. A typical response was to make residential status a prerequisite of university attendance. The university management saw residence as a suitable strategy for assimilating undergraduates, especially where the family background was not conducive to the habits and culture of study, and further thought that residence constituted "a part of the benefits of the University education whose value can scarcely be overstressed" (Evans 2004, p.14). This is very different today, because as market forces impact on all, those at the margins are unable, unwilling or even forbidden to study away from home. Attendance at their local university and remaining in the family home is the norm, rather than a move to a campus.

From within recent New Labour policy discourses, Ruddick (1996) identifies the ideal learner as based on masculine perceptions of the individual: male, white, middle class and able-bodied; unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, poverty or self doubt. Meanwhile, the non-traditional student is vilified by the popular press and the wider society and, worryingly, in the Houses of Parliament (Sinfield, Burns & Holley 2004, p.147), where claims are made that widening access polices equate to high dropout rates and a 'dumbing down' of courses, despite clear evidence to the contrary (Clare, 1999). Work by Bennett (2003) suggests the main reason for student dropout, especially in London, is financial difficulties. Individual self-esteem also played a crucial role in encouraging or discouraging withdrawal when a person experienced low grades or substantial financial problems; a very different picture from that portrayed by the politicians and media of 'dumbed down' students taking 'dumbed down classes'.

This thesis attempts to move away from classed, raced, gendered and aged responses to students identified by Burn and Finnegan (2002), Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) & Lillis (2001), to seeing our students as adult learners, who, with their complex lives and multiple demands on their time and energy, need

flexibility and individualization in their learning experiences (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read 2002). The university within which this research is situated is close to the bottom of the league tables in terms of governmental targets - staff-student ratios; average A-level grades (in the Business subject area only 12% of students enter with an 'A' level profile) and the completion of students within the traditional three-year study period (www.QAA.ac.uk, 2001. Accessed 02/12/02).

The whole study is set against a background of the "haves" and the "have-nots" in education, for, in today's higher education environment, many students are unable to be on campus physically due to their multitude of commitments, not least of which is earning money to support themselves and their families while they study. The problem I will be setting out to explore is located within the contexts outlined above. Is it possible to engage non-traditional students with their studies by doing more than 'stretching the mould', where staff include more and technology without rethinking or changing any of the traditional classroom teaching offerings? (Collis & Van der Wende, 2002). Instead, would it be an option to explore possibilities of learning beyond the large-scale lecture so beloved by higher education institutions?

When academics offer rich and engaging online materials, an opportunity is provided for students to engage with their learning in a different way, at a place and time of their own choosing. At the same time, when engaging in this process, educators have to value this alternative way of learning and relinquish some of their power and control of the classroom, and embrace more personalised and individualised modes of study negotiated with individual students. It is this process that is the focus for the studies in this thesis. Power relations are a recurring theme, at national, institutional and classroom levels, and aspects of the power debate are encompassed within the literature, methodological development and empirical work, through to the discussion and conclusion.

Conole et al (2004, p.1) suggest that learning technology is now an established field, addressing a diversity of research questions around the pedagogical, technical and organisational issues. Some authors have explored online learning (Jones, 2002; Pena-Shaff & Nicholls, 2004), blended learning (Brown & Wack, 2005, cf the 'no significant difference' debate), mobile learning (Sharples, 2005; Cook et al, 2006), informal learning and e-tivities (Salmon, 2002). However, much of the research currently undertaken has a governmental, management or teacher focus, and I will be suggesting that by silencing the student voice in these discourses, a key stakeholder voice is missing, and that this is problematic. This thesis will create a framework within which the influence of policies can be explored, and will set out an approach to analysing how students draw upon their own life experiences to negotiate their space for learning,

Background to the research

Coming to university teaching after a career in the logistics industry, with its 24-hour operation culture, was like stepping into a different world. My first post as a lecturer in Purchasing and Supply Chain Management introduced me to the reality of large group teaching, a diverse student body and an entirely different set of management concepts. As I gradually found my feet in the new environment, I began to slowly develop my own research agenda. Not unnaturally, my first research efforts were to do with subjects familiar to me, about women managers working in the transport industry, combined with writing short articles for transport publishers.

Gradually, however, I became aware that the environment was as strange to some of my students as it was to me, and that we both needed some ways to make sense of the teaching and learning expectations placed upon us. Teaching a class of nearly 150 in my first term proved to be a logistical nightmare - I was keen to provide the students with high quality handouts; they appeared most keen to have these. However, carrying sets of 150 notes 3 blocks up a busy road in the pouring rain was quite a challenge - as was

carrying them back again. My office hour was punctuated with students asking for this week's notes, next week's notes, could they have a copy of the coursework (again), 'my child is sick', 'my employer won't let me attend class next week', 'I have to work extra shifts', 'my partner is redundant'... All these comments made me think back to my own degree, where a rather privileged bunch of mainly young middle class white students had three years funded by full grants. It seemed a world away from the realities of study for my students in inner city London.

An interesting lunchtime workshop on using webCT, the university-supported Virtual Learning Environment, opened up a new way of communicating with my students. By the time the huge lecture was scheduled, I was exploring the idea of eroding time and space barriers between us, and had managed to put the basic course material on the web.

My logistics background empathised with the 'no physical stock' aspects of using web-based support, in that students could access material placed on webCT at a time and place that suited them. A significant difference in terms of my time was in the pattern of the office hour consultations with students - I was now helping students to focus on their coursework, and talking about the subject, not talking about how to get a handout about the subject. I began to wonder how else I could engage with my students, and an analysis of the course cohort made it possible to focus on the student experience. It was apparent that some students were poor attendees, and these students tended to prioritise attendance at lectures, not seminars. Attendance seemed to be a big issue; indeed, I arrived to invigilate my own exam and found three students I had no recollection of meeting at all. By now I was becoming aware of the possibilities opening up both for my students and myself by working in this emerging field. In 2000 the university invested in a technology tower, a new building that would house some 500-plus PCs with internet access. They wanted staff to develop materials to use within the new space, and provided some funding through an internal bidding process. I secured some money and the assistance of the in-house technology team to develop a multi-media

resource for my international purchasing students (see Holley & Haynes 2003, "The INCOTERMS Challenge: Using multi-media to engage learners"). I had begun to ask my questions about different kinds of students and their needs, and was considering whether moving some aspects of learning online would meet at least some of the issues these students were dealing with on a daily basis. Having made limited progress with the research, there remained some issues unanswered, and it is these unresolved areas that form the basis of the thesis.

A model of a negotiated learning framework

The 'changing environment' model (Figure 1.1) sets out the parameters for my research. The student is at the centre of the work, as I am exploring how students, with their very different life styles and pressures, negotiate their individual learning within the boundaries created by ICT, Learning and Space. These three concepts frame the work undertaken in this thesis, and so each will be briefly introduced below.

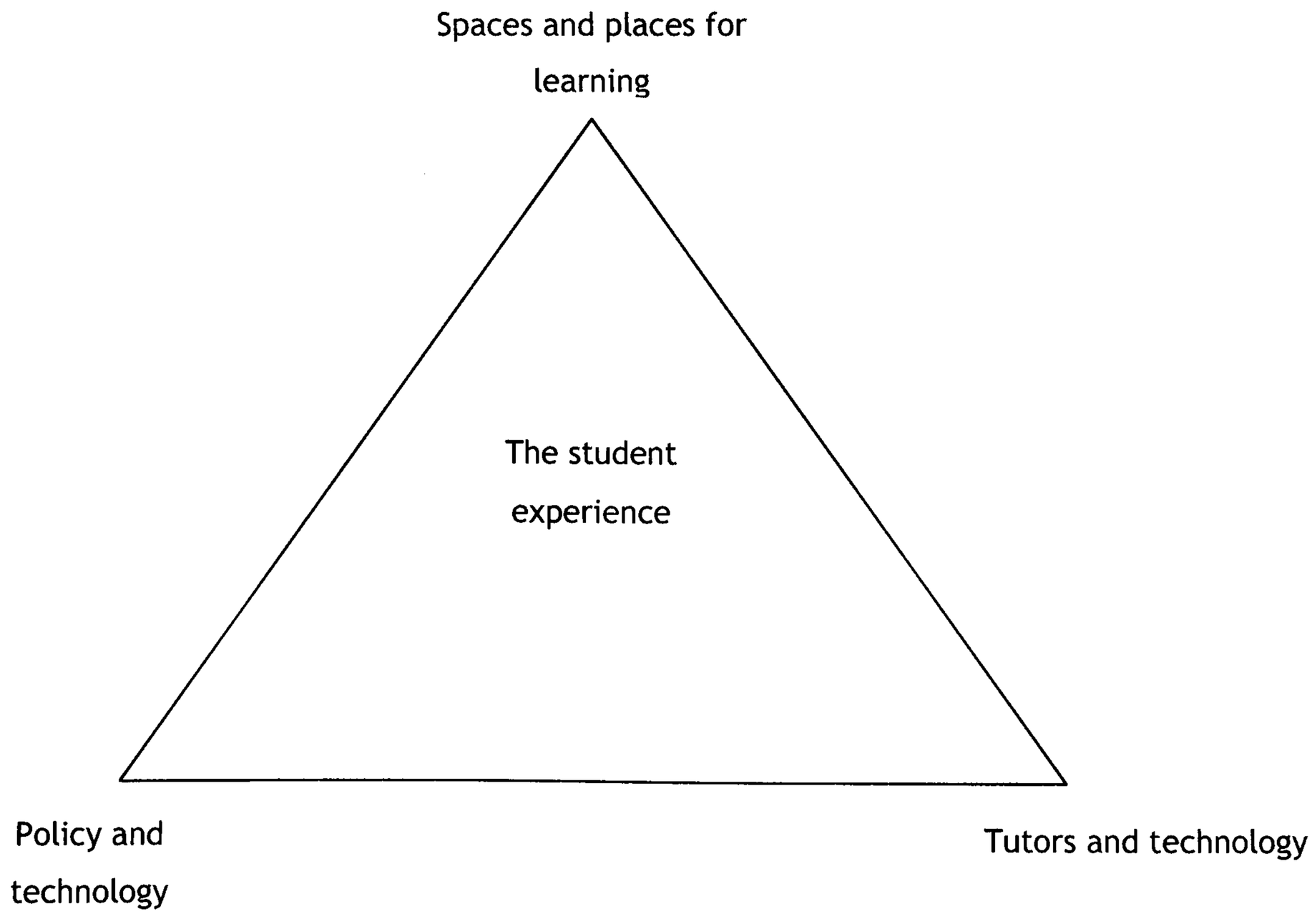

Figure 1.1: A changing environment for the student

Space and places for learning

Although there is considerable interest in the notion of context, very little research seems to be done on the simpler idea of 'space'. This is not a widely discussed topic in the educational literature, and much of what has been written tends to be in related fields suggesting ways in which space can be physically conceptualised. Thus for example, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) produced a glossy brochure that focuses on the design of spaces within educational institutions that "become a physical representation of the institution's vision and strategy for learning" (JISC 2006).

In terms of student learning space, authors who have considered this issue approached the topic from their own research specialisms, thus there is limited scope for setting my research topic within an existing academically defined field. Broad themes include technology as a context, communities of enquiry, mobile and ubiquitous learning and sociological conceptions of social space. However, there is no commonality in terms of a singular conceptual framework, meaning that within the thesis, the crucial role of space and the student experience must be explored further. After reviewing the different positions, I will suggest a new perspective on space that will form part of the framework for the empirical work that follows.

Policy and technology

In traditional campus-based universities it is recognised that one factor for student success is that students are physically present, and that therefore one way of encouraging student involvement is to attract them to spend more time on campus (Holley et al, 2004, p.38). Indeed, authors such as Evans (2004, p.15) suggest that residence at the academy is not value free, and the roots of this thinking go back to the traditional Oxbridge model of education,

where "new arrivals from other destinations are going to need compensatory socialisation to render them acceptable to the world of universities". This view of higher education has been challenged by policies of widening participation in education, and the higher education sector has in the past three decades seen a move from education for the elite minority to massification of undergraduate degree provision. Successive governments have been reluctant to address the issue of who should be paying for the education of the country's young people. Nonetheless, with current targets of 50% of 18-30-year-olds within higher education by 2010 it can be seen that it is not just the traditional 18-year-old with an A-level profile that is expected to benefit from a degree level education.

Governmental policy in the area, from Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) onward and more recently the e-learning strategy (HEFCE, 2005a), suggests the solution to massification and diversity is to move resources online. However, I will be arguing that this is not a panacea to the real issues of expanding student numbers and a dwindling resource allocation. The well-documented literature of the new managerial agenda forms the background to set the power parameters operating within higher education institutions. The pressures from management to offer standard online resources may, indeed, be seen to be providing the students 'as customer' some added value for their investment. But if universities are to view the student in a different light, arguably there is a need to recognise that these adult learners have individual learning needs, which are different to those of the typical eighteen-year-old student embarking on a three year degree program.

There is a dearth of research into the individual student experience, and in particular into how the student responds from the informal arena of their learning environment. I will seek to address this gap within the thesis.

Tutors and Technology

Management, under the auspices of a heavy audit culture in terms of finance and pedagogy, are pushing academics towards utilising online resources. Students are also coming to expect materials to be made available online. Thus, tutors reluctant to participate in these kinds of student engagement have pressure from students upwards as well as management downward. Many universities have introduced Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as Lotus notes, webCT and Blackboard as part of the answer to rising student expectations and a diminishing unit of resource. Moving aspects of teaching and learning online fits with institutional aims of developing 'independent learners', where, as Burns, Holley & Sinfield (2006) suggest, a reductionist view of a learner as needy, deficit and atomised is posited. Tutors vary in their approaches to pedagogic design in the classroom, and it is no different with designing the online context. These new environments are not always designed with the student in mind, and the student response can be confined to reacting to ready-prepared online materials offered as part of a blended learning environment, or as Smith & Oliver (2002) suggest, to selecting which of a limited range of learning modules to consume.

Collis & Van der Wende (2002) suggest the term "stretching the mould" to encapsulate the dominant use of ICT in higher education. Three main areas emerged from their study of the ICT experience of teaching institutions across Europe, the USA and Australia. The first area encompasses the pace of change that the authors categorise as slow rather than radical and based on a business approach. The second main theme is that ICT in teaching and learning has become part of the blend of learning, but the "core medium" of instruction, most valued by institutions, remains the lecture. The third area, and perhaps most pertinent to this discussion of learning in time and space, is that instructors are gradually doing more, but with no reward. Thus instructors are "stretching the mould" by incorporating more IT into their daily practices; they are not radically changing the ways in which they teach.

True power and participation for e-learners can be achieved by careful design of ICTs, suggest Cook and Light (2006). In this context, we still need to understand what is required to design digital media that can assist the motivations of 'real people' in a way that empowers them (Cook et al, 2006). This clearly demonstrates the need to develop both new tools and new conceptions of pedagogic space.

It is often assumed, however, that the latest technological developments will change this situation. The theorists of mobile learning such as Sharples argue that the traditional model of the classroom with the locus of control remaining firmly with the teacher changes for mobile learning, as the control and management of learning can be distributed, thus disrupting the carefully managed environment of the classroom. This has profound implications, namely a "cybernetic process of learning through the continual exploration of the world and negotiation of meaning, mediated by technology" (Sharples et al, 2005, p.7). However, resistance from both staff and students are well documented in Akerlind et al (1999), Laurillard (2002) and Holley (2002).

To summarise, with pedagogic choice becoming a matter of strategy, rather than tactics, the choice of teaching techniques is becoming what Noble (2001, p.3) calls the increasing commodification of education: an educational experience that has been disintegrated and distilled into "discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things or packages of things". ICT has moved from being associated with peripheral innovations and developments to affecting all aspects of learning and teaching. Disempowering strategies such as those outlined in 'Harnessing Technology' represent for Conole, White & Oliver (2006, p.12) "knee-jerk policy which does not take account of evidence emerging from research" but which still have a huge impact on students.

Noble argues that whilst e-learning is akin to training, which is purely for the benefit of others and where any assertion of the self would become a subversive activity, 'education' involves the integration of knowledge with the self - where knowledge is defined by and helps to define the self. He stresses that whilst typically the push for e-learning is predicated upon a

belief in cost cutting, staff reduction and so forth, education relies on the quality of interpersonal relationships offered - and that to date educational research has at least demonstrated that good education requires a labour-intensive, personal relationship between students and quality academics.

The student experience

The three areas outlined above frame the students' experiences of learning in higher education. This thesis will seek to explore one key aspect of the student experience within this wider policy debate: how students are creating new and innovative ways to negotiate their own learning experiences. A phenomenological approach to the research will be undertaken, and this follows the approach of Coffey and Atkinson (1996b) who suggest that stories can be used to "give voice" to otherwise silenced groups and individuals. (This may, perhaps, be better understood as a means of representing voices that previously remained unheard.) What is significant in the work is that students very seldom negotiate with staff to find their own spaces - indeed, the negotiation is much more subtle and involves a combination of factors including their individual expectations of:

- Expectation of Educational Experience mapped against Home Space
- Expectation of Educational Experience mapped against Control of Technology
- Expectations of Educational Experience mapped against Space

By conceptualising these key areas, new insights are provided into student learning, and this requires both conceptual development (for example, in relations to the idea of 'space') and new methodologies.

Research aims

There are three inter-related research aims that will contribute towards developing our understanding of the student experiences of a blended learning approach outside the classroom.

Research Aim One:

To provide a framework for conceptualising student learning spaces.

Research Aim Two:

To find an appropriate methodology that will enable a more intimate, revealing glimpse into student classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences.

Research Aim Three:

To explore how students are creating new and innovative ways to negotiate their own learning experiences.

The structure of this thesis

This thesis is structured as a series of phases. The first phase involved reviewing the literature in order to relate students' experience to the wider context of higher education. This provided the framework within which the thesis is located. The second phase involved developing a methodology with which to study this topic. Importantly, the first attempt at this proved to be inadequate in terms of eliciting students' responses. This led me to take a more biographical approach. The third phase was where the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method was used, and involved two case studies. The fourth and final phase was the development of a framework for analysis, together with the conclusions of the thesis.

Chapter Two is thus the first of three literature chapters, and it takes the form of a critique of government policy initiatives that have led to the position of higher education becoming part of the 'New Labour' economic drive for efficient and effective central systems and services. I argue that in

this drive for efficiency, a 'new managerial' set of principles operates, and this, in effect, silences the voice of a key stakeholder group, namely the students. The impact of these policy changes on the tutors is addressed in the following Chapter Three, where the consequences of the introduction of technology to the classroom are examined. Chapter Four conceptualises the way in which changes have enabled students to create their own spaces, mainly outside the classroom, where they are comfortable to learn. Chapter Five then explores how we can understand student engagement/disengagement within the auspices of changes driven through by the use of new technologies in the classroom. This chapter also offers the first conceptual framework for analysis.

The conceptual framework suggested in Chapter Five, despite being a robust analytical tool, proved to be too simplistic to adequately address the research aims. However, the pilot study acted as a catalyst for the final methodological approach adopted. Chapter Six explains how the work was refocused and located within the phenomenological tradition, and explains why the biographic narrative research method (BNIM) came to be the selected method for the empirical work.

The empirical work of the thesis consists of two studies, each located within the BNIM methodological framework for analysis. Two different student groups were selected. The first study (Chapter Seven) focuses on the experiences of individual students studying a specialist final year module, and three narratives are singled out for interpretation: Charles, a part time day-release student who negotiates study on a virtual basis, Kwame, a student from Ghana who joins the class late and suffers a series of setbacks which he blames himself for, and finally Juanita who confidently takes the module in her stride using blended learning and communication tools with which she replicates her social networks online. Each has something to offer our understanding of the blended learning experience and how these very different individuals operate outside the classroom. The second study (Chapter Eight) draws upon the experiences of Marco, an Italian student

determined to make the most of living, working and studying in London; Joanna, a single parent who returns to university to try to improve her earning potential, and struggles to juggle family life and study; and finally the moving account from Nyela, a refugee from Somalia, about her efforts to create a life for herself in a new and alien environment. These three participants are interviewed within their first eight weeks of university life, before they are socialised into university norms and values, and this approach is clearly reflected in the honesty and openness of their narratives.

Chapter Nine discusses the cross-case issues arising from the empirical work, and relates these back to the key themes of learning, technology and space identified in the literature review. The work is further developed by the application of the key concepts into a proposed framework for analysis, comprising a series of tables. A template for reuse follows the specific analysis, which provides a resource for others wanting to reuse the framework as a basis for analysing their own classes.

The contribution of this thesis is discussed with reference to the three original research aims in Chapter Ten, the final chapter. The limitations of the thesis are covered, as are the implications of the work. Ideas for future study are suggested, and some concluding comments offered. Simply providing e-learning - no matter how well intentioned - is insufficient to address the problems that the students in the studies are experiencing. Further studies are needed that can reveal more about how individuals experience and cope with their engagement in formal education. At governmental and institutional level, as well as in the classroom, hearing the student voice clearly is a starting point for future work.

This chapter has outlined the scope and aims of thesis, and in the next chapter I will discuss the policy context that influences priorities in higher education today.

Chapter 2

Policy and Technology

Introduction

The policy context that influences priorities in higher education (HE) is an important theme in this thesis, and I will argue that successive government policies have had a significant impact on the learning environment within the classroom. In turn, government policies also influence the types of students entering the classroom, having most impact at those institutions with a commitment to recruiting a diverse student body.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate succinctly where policy has impacted most in terms of the staff and student experience. Therefore, rather than listing successive policies to give a descriptive list of historical 'facts', I have adapted McMillan Culp, Honey and Mandinach's framework (2005) (which they developed to assess two decades of educational technology interventions in the USA) to address the UK policy interventions.

The chapter starts with a contextual section explaining the impact of 'new managerialism' on the public sector, and its consequences in particular for those working in HE. McMillan Culp et al (2005) suggest that policy documents repeatedly describe matches between specific capabilities of various technologies and persistent challenges to the delivery, management and support of effective teaching and learning experiences. Their framework for analysis developed three key themes around which it is possible to assess the political impacts of technology. The themes are:

- Technology as a central force in economic competitiveness
- Technology as a change agent

- Technology as a tool for addressing challenges in Teaching and Learning.

A discussion of the significant implications of selected policy interventions concludes this chapter.

New Managerialism

> "During the 1980s the dominant ideology, especially in Reagan's USA and Thatcher's UK, became free market economics, also referred to as laissez-faire or neo-liberalism. The main thrust was towards 'rolling back the frontiers of the state'. State intervention was to be reduced, nationalised industries were to be sold off to the private sector, private industry was to be given a free reign with the economy. As private industry and its capitalist owners became richer, the rest of us would also benefit, as wealth gained at the top 'trickled down' through the system to the rest of us." (http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/media/eu.html. Accessed 11/12/05)

The issue for successive Goverments has been how to manage change in the public sector. In the 1979 general election, Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party were swept into power on an election slogan of 'rolling back the frontiers of state'. This was to be a turning point in terms of the nation's politics (Talbot 2007). The lessening of state intervention was the means by which the Conservative government would transform the economy, and the policies forged were arguably successful in addressing Britain's problems of inflation and deteriorating international competitiveness. By the late 1980s, it seemed that a programme of deregulation, privatisation and tax cuts had indeed transformed the economy. The reduction of public spending complemented Thatcher's attachment to free markets, greater choice and rampant individualism (Hutton, 1995). These policies were to change the top-down, monolithic organisations of the Keynesian welfare state and alter the nature of public sector management. In parallel, there was a trend toward the decentralisation of health, education and housing. Simultaneously, certain important areas, such as regional policy making and the role of the Metropolitan Boroughs, were centralised. Pollitt et al. (1998) suggest that it is

perfectly possible to decentralise or devolve authority over certain issues while simultaneously centralising authority over other issues. This led to the paradox that, whilst extensive decentralisation took place, it appears that from the 1980s and 1990s the UK State became one of the most centralised states in Europe (Pollitt op.cit.).

A critical approach to new managerialism can be found in the work of Exworthy & Halford (1999), who review literature about professionals and new managerialism in the public sector. For these writers, capitalism is conceptualised as a dynamic process, and a knock-on effect of the inherently boom-bust nature of capitalist economies is identified as the fiscal crisis in the welfare state. As workers' earnings slump, the demand for state services increases, yet at the same time the state is less able to meet demands because taxation income is falling. Such processes are not party-specific; New Labour policies reflect those of the outgoing Conservative administration, for example, in that raising the tax burden is seen as unacceptable. Exworthy and Halford argue that the state still has to fulfil its contradictory role of support for and legitimisation of capitalism, but that new ways have to be found to achieve these desires. It is here that an emergent form of managerialism, with all its implications for the content and organisation of professional work, becomes important. The authors examine conflict, compromise and collaboration, and conclude that relationships between professionals and managers are constituted unevenly between and within different organisations (Cited in Kirkpatrick et al, 2005, p.6).

In order to achieve the outcomes desired by the government, such as a free economy and 'value for money', the introduction of managerialism within the public sector became a central strategy. This represented a way of moving away from traditional bureaucratic paternalism, and this move to overall control by managers was seen as both necessary and desirable by a government determined to drive through change (Pollitt, 1990). This reflected other changes in the public sector initiated by the government, such as concern about the economic costs of welfare, a dependency culture, and the

power of bureaucrats and professionals. Newman & Clarke (1994) suggest that it was the last of these that caused the government's main concern. 'Arrogant' professionals were arraigned alongside 'inflexible' bureaucrats and 'interfering' (local) politicians, all of whom had prevented efficient, effective and economic public services. The government policy advisors demanded a combination of markets and management as the only way to disentangle and defuse these "interlocking modes of power" (Newman & Clarke op. cit.).

New managerialism applied to higher education

The use of central funding to promote a competitive and expansionist market in further and higher education radically altered the culture of management in many institutions. This so-called agenda of 'modernisation' for higher education could be seen in turn as being part of a wider debate around performance and quality. Performance indicators provided management with both a technology and a 'rational' justification for exerting increased bureaucratic control (Kirkpatrick & Lucio, 1995). In particular, it has led to the increased use of performance management as a tool for setting and monitoring goals. This approach is often simplified to the phrase, "what gets measured gets done", and whilst this is a simplification it does capture the dynamic, objective and transparent philosophy of the paradigm. For example, policy makers have argued that universities had, in effect, become playgrounds for self-indulgent and inward-looking cliques, rather than engine rooms for a post-industrial economy. Consequently, there was a greater formalisation of tasks and routines, the specialisation of roles and increasing hierarchy, more standardisation and simplification of tasks, and clearer and more objective target-setting (Hoggett 1991, cited in Davies and Kirkpatrick 1995).

However, new managerialism remains problematic: it is frequently attacked through the corollary of the simplification, which is that what does not get measured gets neglected (Blalock, 1999). This is particularly important given the complex nature of education, and the argument that many measures are

superficial and over-simplistic. The choice of measures to be employed is often made by management (or at the least, passed on from funding councils via management). This has left some lecturers feeling that the most important elements of their work must now be neglected in order to demonstrate that less important (but more visible) measures have been met.

The strategic management of pedagogy

Further governmental policies that were intended to enhance the quality of higher education have added to the process of centralisation described above. In particular, pedagogy, once purely the concern of the academics directly involved in course delivery, has now become an issue for strategy. Moreover, the choice of pedagogic approach has become a matter of strategy rather than tactics (Holley & Oliver 2000). In order to recruit non-traditional students (a priority, given the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)'s access funding and the importance of new student markets), there is an emphasis on approaches with vocational relevance such as situated learning and problem-based learning.

HEFCE has linked elements of university funding to the creation and implementation of teaching and learning strategies. The consequence of this is that, in many institutions, pedagogy has been placed in the hands of strategic management for the first time. An example is the way in which funding is used to prioritise institutional targets. The Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) initiative, for example, has two main aims: to reward excellent teaching practice, and to further invest in that practice so that CETL's funding delivers substantial benefits to students, teachers and institutions (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/. Accessed 8/03/05.) This illustrates the new managerialist approach from the centralisation and decentralisation aspects of policy development within the same timeframe. In line with the other trends towards centralisation described above, the establishment of these strategies seems likely to promote conformity in order to establish common standards across the sector.

With pedagogic choice becoming a matter of strategy, rather than tactics, the choice of teaching techniques is leading to what Noble (2001, p.3) argues is the increasing commodification of education: educational experience that has been disintegrated and distilled into "discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things or packages of things". The first step in this process is the assemblance of the course into packages: learning outcomes, syllabi, lessons, and exams. These commodities are subsequently removed from their producers, the teachers, so they are given an independent existence apart from the creator. This constitutes the alienation of ownership as control of the course material is surrendered. The final step is the assembled course sale, in the market place, for a profit. Thus teachers become producers, students become consumers and their relationship takes on not "education, but a shadow of education, an assemblance of pieces without a whole" (Noble, 2001. p.4).

To summarise, this section has covered a broad range of contexts within which policy formation has been evolved. The twin ideas of centralised control and local implementation, with the setting of numerous 'performance targets' can be seen in public sector policies in general, and educational polices in particular. Both Conservative and New Labour government policies have been drafted drawing on the ideals of a free market economy. The next section moves on to explore artefacts that illustrate the policy context for education and ICT.

Technology as a central force in economic competitiveness

> "The powerhouses of the new global economy are innovation and ideas, skills and knowledge. These are now the tools for success and prosperity as much as natural resources and physical labour power were in the past century. Higher education is at the centre of these developments. Across the world, its shape, structure and purposes are undergoing transformation because of globalisation. At the same time, it provides research and innovation, scholarship and teaching which equip individuals and businesses to respond to global change. World class higher education ensures that countries

can grow and sustain high-skill businesses, and attract and retain the most highly-skilled people. It endows people with creative and moral capacities, thinking skills and depth knowledge that underpin our economic competitiveness and our wider quality of life. It is therefore at the heart of the productive capacity of the new economy and the prosperity of our democracy."
David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, Speech at Greenwich University, 15th February 2000 (http://cms1.gre.ac.uk. Accessed 8/12/2005)

The UK approach to 'encouraging' alternatives to traditional classroom teaching can best be located within an international context. The increasing political intervention into higher education is justified from governmental perspectives as meeting the needs of a "knowledge economy" (Hodge, 2002) enabling the UK to compete within the international trading environment. Writers such as White & Davis (2002) set the context of technology as breaking down international barriers to education. Computer-mediated learning environments make possible whole new ways of learning. They create global learning communities of student and professor practitioners. Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read (2002:18) foresee a future where the distinctions between classroom based and internet based education continue to erode, and teaching methods become much more tailored to the needs of the subject and students.

The first key policy intervention relating to technology higher education was over forty years ago, when in 1965 the Minister of Technology asked the Council for Scientific Policy and the University Grants Committee to set up a working party to undertake a full scale review of the computer requirements of universities and research councils. The working party was chaired by Professor Flowers of Manchester University and it produced A Report of a Joint Working Group on Computers for Research (The Flowers Report). Its brief was broad:

> "To examine the financial background to the Computer Board for Universities and Research Councils (CBURB) work; hardware provision identified or completed in particular educational institutions; hardware procurement (Board's policies); use of

American computers; large machine requirements; multiple access facilities; regional centres; buildings for university computers; running costs; summary of the Board's expenditure; estimates for future requirements; efficiency of computer usage; software requirements; charging for computer time; computer requirements for teaching; the Computer Consultative Council; Research Council requirements (temporarily on hold due to prioritisation of university needs); general aspects of the Board's work.

The Report recommended that every university should have a computer laboratory and that some should have the role of a Regional Computer Centre. The designated Regional Centres were London, Manchester and Edinburgh which were to provide computing services for local university users, surrounding research council establishments and other universities. Hence, even at this early stage, the policy of centralised expenditure devolved to the regions can be seen. There is an obvious link in the report and its remit between education, computing and the wider implications of a well-educated workforce for the nation's future prosperity."

When presented to Parliament in 1966, it was concluded that, "the position is still unsatisfactory ... the Flowers committee are concerned that, in spite of substantial progress, the total computing power available to the universities has not risen as quickly as was envisaged" (p.27).

The implications of this report had wide-ranging consequences, as the ideas of global competitiveness, the significance of the USA and its economic progress, and the principle of procurement as applied to educational policy can be traced from here. The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) is remarkably similar in its underpinning principles, and Dearing set the rationale for an economic model for the HE sector (see below).

Technology as a change agent

This section looks at key areas of policy, and starts with a brief overview of types of technologies as mapped against policy initiatives. The move towards resource-based learning as a means of dealing with a mass higher education system is traced, along with initiatives in the recent HEFCE White Paper on e-learning, where ICT is being integrated into all aspects of education. A

discussion of the ill-fated E-Universities UK policy initiatives concludes this section.

Smith (2005) categorises technologies and policy development into four distinct phases. The first, 1965-1979, was characterised by centralised mainframe systems, with time-shared resources and expert operators. The second time frame of 1980-1989 marks a shift toward stand-alone computers, the emergence of distributed resources and experimentation by early adopters, with the use of email growing towards the end of the decade. The third phase is defined as 1990-2000, and sees the emergence of the internet as a key driver of networking technologies and collaboration. This phase is significant in terms of development, as these technologies lowered the technical entry barrier for academic staff. Phase four (2001 to present day) is categorised by politicisation and systemisation, and learner-centrism. With technological development came awareness from academic staff that with the flexibility and accessibility offered by new technology, more creative ways could be used to reach students. For the purposes of this thesis, I am confining my coverage of policy aspects to the third and fourth stages defined by Smith, as this is when the main impact of information technologies began to find their way into the classroom.

Conole, Smith & White (2007) suggest the most important policy report of the third phase was the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997). The Dearing report sets the main macro-policy context within which this study is situated, as it was the culmination of a systematic review of higher education, and made a series of recommendations which have influenced the focus and direction of many ICT projects. It is within the context of a changing and diverse student body and a shift from an elitist to a mass education system that the government set up a working party to report on how it would be possible to fund the expansion of higher education and curriculum development in terms of cost efficiency, one of the key underpinning drivers for change influencing the new managerialist agenda. Its main aim was:

> "To make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years, recognising that higher education embraces teaching, learning, scholarship and research." (www.ncl.ac.uk. Accessed 22/10/02)

Brown and Gibbs (1996), writing shortly before the report working party was set up, outlined a number of arguments for employing resource-based learning:

> Libraries cannot cope
> Students are not buying their own books
> Students are more diverse
> Large lectures do not work well
> Courses have become more complex
> Tutorial support cannot be afforded
> Supervision cannot be afforded
> Students need better information-gathering skills

These premises were taken on board in the framing of the report, which was economically based, not pedagogically based. The report included an appendix examining new approaches to teaching, and the associated cost structure of teaching methods. This document is significant as it explores a rationale for enhancing the student experience by the use of resource-based learning by higher education institutions. The modelling of three types of learning is explained as "the type of modelling the HE sector will have to undertake if expansion is to be achieved within reasonable cost" (www.ncl.ac.uk. Accessed 22/10/02).

The appendix has some underpinning assumptions that had led the authors to pursue the economic case for resource-based learning. First, government policy has been based on the higher education sector being subsidised from the public purse, and at the time of the Dearing report, there had been no policy indicators hinting that this would cease to be the case. Furthermore, government policy at the time and since has indicated a desire for widening participation and accessibility for 18-30-year-olds. The figure of 50%

participation in higher education by the year 2010 is frequently cited by politicians: "The challenge is to widen participation for under 30-year-olds, to have access rates of 50% to HE by 2010. ..... Research shows that eight out of ten new jobs created in the next decade will need the skills and knowledge from HE - but not necessarily the 'academic degree'" (Hodge 2002).

One of the appendix authors is well known in her field for her work on developing learning technologies (Laurillard), and some technological assumptions in the appendix can be seen as reflecting this. One example is the assumption that learning technologies can offer a single alternative to the student body. The Dearing Report fails to break down 'the student body' in terms of the changes that have taken place in access to higher education, and to acknowledge that learners are no longer a homogenous group of privileged middle class 18-year-olds. Lectures are assumed to be large group lectures, and as such, "work particularly badly" (Brown & Gibbs 1996). Groups are set within the framework of the unit cost per student - as student numbers increase, the cost per student falls, so the total cost stays within the public spending constraints (Appendix 2). The economic model of unit costs takes pedagogy and what Eisner (1985) terms 'educational judgement' away from the expert tutor, the subject specialist, and places it firmly in hands of the management. Another assumption made by Dearing is that the economic model includes both student time and staff development time, and that this time is valued. The authors all seem of the view that the "radical" changes they propose will be positive.

A key strategic outcome of Dearing has been that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) now requires all higher education institutions to have a clear and demonstrable learning and teaching strategy as a condition of funding, along with institutional information strategies. McNaught and Kennedy (2000) suggest that these strategies together are an attempt to embed ICT into the institution, set into a series of nationwide policy initiatives, which reflect the 'UK PLC' thinking of consecutive Labour governments. Smith (2005, p.104) suggests that these policy developments

mark a fundamental shift away from the individual innovator towards a "systematic and politically driven model of online education".

Staples (1995), offers a strong critique of resource-based learning (RBL). His argument starts with the massification of HE in Australia, which, he argues, does not mean that students are any "better" than they used to be. Rather, he says, universities are now performing a mass custodial task, warehousing young people for the job market. Institutions are becoming "less places where any teaching, or exchange or development of knowledge can take place, and more shops for degrees, open to haggling... RBL which dispenses with physical documents, using instead digital technology, may seem the solution, both pedagogically as a more effective way of teaching the new student, and economically, as way of cutting costs" (Staples 1995, p.2). Resource-based learning is posed as an alternative solution for dealing with increased student numbers, as the example of E-Universities UK illustrates.

E-Universities UK as an example of governmental intervention

"That is why I can announce that HEFCE will bring forward proposals for a new collaborative venture between universities and private sector partners, under the working title of the "e-Universities". The e-Universities initiative will concentrate UK effort and resources from a number of partners in a single virtual provider, which will be able to compete with the scale of the resources available to the leading individual US players such as MIT, Phoenix or the University of Maryland. It will be clearly positioned overseas as the flag-carrier for the best of UK higher education in web-based delivery.

Our intention is to identify, on a competitive basis, a consortium of leading HE institutions in the UK to develop the e-Universities venture. The consortium will also include at least two leading companies as partners, drawn from the Internet-servicing, software/hardware development, publishing, and corporate learning sectors. More institutions will participate as they demonstrate their ability to make a high quality contribution.

This is an innovative project with the intention of creating a brand new university venture with a difference, to meet the competitive global challenge thrown at UK higher education."

> David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, Speech at Greenwich University, 15th February 2000 (Blunkett, 2000)

United Kingdom E-University (UKeU) was designed to market online degrees from British universities while providing a technological platform to make them happen. Smith (2005, p.104-5) comments that: "Politicisation and systemisation of e-learning appears endemic, as policy and funding pursues large scale development to harness potential in this area." Blunkett's speech had "some daunting overtones - 'big business' big aspirations' 'well rehearsed' - in relation to the national and global benefits of e-learning" (Smith, 2005, p.104-5). A disjuncture between policy and practice is identified, where learner-centric developments are called for, and not yet available through existing commercial tools. The e-Universities scheme made proposals, apparently accepted as non-controversial by ministers, for a business model developed by consultants Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC). The consultants were asked by HEFCE to produce a business model for an e-University, and commented," Our higher education system faces a great opportunity, but a great challenge. We are confident of its success" (PWC, 2000, p.2)

The starting premise of the business model was that technology would replace expensive tutor support.

> "The more that new technology is used to build tutorial support into the design of learning material, the less would be the need for additional tutorial support. Indeed this is almost a trade-off, as both types of support are expensive to provide." (PWC, 2000, para 73)

The PWC e-universities document includes several appendices, explaining the operational features of the new institution. Appendix 3, p.2 explains options for learner support. It suggests services available could include specific forms of interaction including online communication, telephone support and even face-to-face tutorial support in specific situations. As the learner progresses through the courseware, there is the opportunity to ask questions by selecting

the associated 'chat' channel in the toolbar. In response, a chat window opens and the learner is greeted and invited to describe the assistance sought, in text form. The person who answers the questions is part of a call centre and is specifically trained to answer questions about the courseware.

The business model suggests customising for individual students not only through a call centre, but also by customising the web to their interactions. "Other products are now appearing that make use of artificial intelligence algorithms to track and personalise general web interactions, so that users can rely on tools which automatically search for items of interest to them. Little has yet been done to explore the use of similar techniques in learning and teaching applications, but doubtless these products will soon appear in the market" (Appendix 3, p.95). Thus none of the customisation suggests a constructivist or problem solving approach that would act as an enabling strategy for students to make sense of their searching, but relies on commercial products geared up to mass use.

The market approach was further developed where academic staff were replaced by specialist providers external to Universities, whose services would be contracted in under a contract model similar to those currently in use for services such as cleaning and catering.

> "For the e-U, on-line tutoring services may be provided in a number of ways depending upon how the market develops. Just as there are specialist assessment service providers, so we can expect to find specialist services established to tutor specific subject areas - as is already happening in the US. An HEI may decide to be a service provider of this type and offer specially trained on-line tutors to answer questions from learners in specified subject areas. Such services could be offered on a commercial basis and would operate to an agreed level of service" (PWC, 2000, p.96).

The actual e-Universities project collapsed in 2004, surrounded by recriminations from all those involved, with only 900 students registered. Conole, Carusi, De Laat, Wilcox, and Darby (2006), in a report 'Learning from the UKeU experience', commented that one of the most important findings of

their research is the mismatch between those with a business-oriented vision for UKeU and those more interested in the academic aspects and the potential educational innovation. Headlines at the time showed a lack of understanding by the government. The higher education minister at the time, Kim Howells, blamed the lack of marketing for the failure of the UK's e-university, not the lack of understanding, especially of the student learning experience, by those in charge of the project (http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/. Accessed 10/11/04). Thus, by citing examples from this recent policy initiative, it can be seen that the government remains keen to view ICT policies as a force for change, which, as Burns et al (2006) suggest, justify their use of the economic model, and hence a force for 'good' for the UK economy.

Technology as a tool for addressing challenges in Teaching and Learning

This section explores the impact of such policies on the student body and examines the impact of widening participation as a context for this discussion.

Widening participation

The widening participation agenda in the UK has had a significant impact on many HE institutions. A driver of this policy has been the government's concern with the capacity of the country to compete in a globalised market where technological advances and the information revolution were increasing the demand for a skilled workforce (Blunkett, 2000). At the post-1992 institutions, the context of widening participation is acting as a force for change in HE - both in terms of traditional and online teaching. Historically, much of the focus on work-based education and skills development within education was done via the Polytechnic sector which, under the governorship of the Councils for National Academic Awards (the CNAA), awarded more 'vocational' degrees and Higher National Diplomas to students who, in the main, were non-traditional (by today's definition) students. The Polytechnic students often did not have the necessary academic qualifications to enter the universities of the day; some were mature and without formal

qualifications (above minimum school-leaving age), some were from ethnic minority backgrounds, and quite a few from the lower socio-economic groups. So it could be said that the Polytechnics were already 'widening participation'. However there was a perceived image that the Polytechnic qualifications (CNAA awarded) were of a lower quality that those degrees awarded by the traditional university sector. This perception often meant that students who graduated from the Polytechnics were discriminated against in the graduate job market. It was more difficult for Polytechnic graduates to enter 'blue chip' graduate training schemes in either the private or public sector and it was also more difficult for the Polytechnic graduate to get onto postgraduate degrees at traditional universities.

In an attempt to remedy this situation the government of the day decided to remove the 'binary' approach to higher education and in 1992 all polytechnics and a few higher education colleges were granted charters to become universities with their own degree-awarding ability. At the same time all universities were encouraged to grow significantly to encourage widening access, with the majority of this increase occurring in the new university sector. The pre-1992 universities, however, did not grow anywhere near as rapidly as the post-1992 universities and, if anything, their exclusivity grew (Evans 2004).

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s the numbers of students entering higher education grew rapidly (during this time the proportion of school leavers entering higher education doubled). However, the numbers of non-traditional students did not really change (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000, p.1). The increasing numbers of students entering higher education were coming from the traditional middle socio-economic backgrounds as evidenced by Forsyth & Furlong, who argue that, despite a decade of educational policy change, 80% of HE students in the mid-1990s still came from the most affluent geographic areas. This situation was highlighted in the Dearing Report of 1997, which laid the foundation for the current widening participation policy as well as announcing the government target for entry into higher education by 2010 to

be 50% of all 18-30 year olds. Widening participation is about increasing the numbers of 18-30 year olds entering higher education but also increasing the numbers (and percentage) of non-traditional students moving into higher education. The HEFCE publication M8/97 (June 1997) defined non-traditional students as having at least one of the following characteristics:

- From an ethnic minority group;
- Had a long-term disability;
- Possessed non-standard qualifications on entry to higher education;
- Were aged over 25 years on entry to university;
- Were from lower socio-economic groups of origin.

Students

These changing circumstances have impacted upon student life. Haselgrove (1994, p.171) outlines the UK move from an elite to a mass system of participation. The impact of these changes for the student "will depend on what resources they bring to negotiating and controlling their experience of the system." Older universities have grown less (than post-1992 Universities) and seem to have tried to change their student profile less, although they have been more successful in the overseas market. Other higher education institutions have diversified their profile more to older people, women, ethnic minority home students and those studying part time. This section explores some of the tensions experienced by some students from these diverse backgrounds, as the work in this thesis is set in the context of a post-1992 University.

The overall move to an older average age has implications for students. The first is that increasing poverty among full time students is driving them to engage in paid work alongside their academic commitments (Haselgrove, 1994). Some students in post-1992 universities reported working in excess of twenty hours a week in paid work (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003, p.23). Because of poverty or because they are mature students tied by domestic commitments more students live at home, even if enrolled as full time

students. This has had a consequence the growing accreditation of work-based learning, and also can be seen in the curriculum offering itself being driven to justify relevance and competence outcomes in a way previously alien to the university ivory towers. Community activism can impact across the whole educational offering. One example of this is a learning community plan across a whole community, such as the plan in Liverpool (Haselgrove, 1994); another is the Highlands and Islands University based across several small regional colleges with on- and off-line blended learning located in the North of Scotland (University of Highlands & Islands Prospectus, 2005). These locally based initiatives work by developing 'ground up' shared strategies for success involving all the stakeholder groups.

Academic status can entail another kind of difficulty for mature students - one that is political. At its most extreme, this involves the experience of personal disrespect, even of personal humiliation. A middle-aged person, long accustomed to a responsible social role, can find herself suddenly reduced to the "status of an ignorant nobody" (Haselgrove, 1994, p.142). Although power relationships are seldom acknowledged in the discussion of academic work, they cannot but be present in the negotiations between staff and students. Mature learners can find themselves unimportant in the view of the tutor, who is rewarded for research, not teaching. This kind of treatment is likely to be particularly disempowering for mature students, because, for all their strengths, "older students are also vulnerable, having been outside the academic world for most of one's adult life tends to produce a lack of intellectual confidence" (Haselgrove, 1994, p.143).

Technology acting as a tool for addressing challenges in learning and teaching is, of course, dependent upon how different stakeholders view 'the challenge'. Government clearly sees a challenge that needs to be addressed through legislation. Legislation is primarily needed when voluntary policies, codes and practices do not address changes seen as desirable by politicians. Thus, for education and ICT, the construction of the 'new' role of students and staff is central to an analysis. Smith & Oliver (2002, p.243) argue that the

Dearing Report's discourse of passivity of students means that the role of the student is limited, "apart from making an informed choice about which course to take.....{after which}... students are then developed by HE." This policy view on the role of the student sets up a rationale that Smith & Oliver (2002, p.243) describe as making institutions more responsible for 'what they do to students", as arguably "enrolled students have no possibility to influence their situation."

Disempowering strategies such as these can have a big impact on students who come into university with low self-efficacy, and can add to struggles identified by writers such as Page (2003) and Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) faced by widening participation students in 'this new cold climate' (Sinfield, Burns & Holley 2004, p.143). Conole, White & Oliver (2007) suggest that the ICT debate can no longer be addressed in isolation, from the perspective of a few early adopters, and has become a management consideration across institutional and national strategies. It is clear that ICT has moved from being associated with peripheral innovations and developments to affecting all aspects of learning and teaching. Thus, echoing the moves to manage pedagogy, technology use can be seen to be moving within the strategic remit of management.

Conclusions

Conclusions

> "There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old system, and merely lukewarm defenders in those who should gain by the new one." (Niccolo Machiavelli, 1513)

This chapter has developed the context within which Information Technology has been introduced to higher education. This has been undertaken in order to address the first research question, to evaluate the governmental/ institutional context within which online learning takes place. Values

underpinning governmental initiatives have been discussed in relation to new managerialism and its impact on pedagogy, both strategically and in the classroom. The governmental definition of a 'widening participation' student has been established, and how students and staff are portrayed in policy documents has been explored.

The government has drawn upon an economic model to influence the policy agenda, and institutions have to be seen to comply with an audit culture to access funding. The widening participation agenda is increasingly recognised within government departments. Instead of increasing resourcing, capacity is to be created through increased efficiency, primarily understood in the terms of the adoption of technology for teaching. Funding for ICT has been targeted through various initiatives, such the e-learning strategy (HEFCE 2005) and more recently the bidding process to establish Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, where collaborative links have been rewarded. The result has been a change in the expectations from both tutors and students. These changes have impacted most on the widening participation student, where the current policies of transferring funding for university study from the state to individuals and their families, "risks reinforcing and exacerbating inequalities", especially given the lack of attention paid to the demands of term time paid work (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p.23).

The McMillan Culp (2005) framework has helped to contextualise successive Government policies. Its analytical framework sets the themes of technology and Governmental economic policy (the so called 'UK PLC' soundbite often used by Blunkett in his speeches as Education Minister; e.g. Blunket, 2000), technology as a change agent and technology for addressing challenges in teaching and learning. What it does not explain adequately is the audit culture following these policy initiatives. This comes as Universities endeavour to implement the widening participation agenda with a falling resource stream. The 'new managerialism' literature, especially the work of Kirkpartick and Lucio (1995) and Hoggett (1991), offers some insights into the impact of these policies in Higher Education, where performance management

tools judge academics. The subsequent paradigm of 'what gets measured gets done' makes it very difficult to 'see' the University classroom from the eyes of the student, as typical measures of success/failure in the classroom are questionnaires to students, sometimes centrally administrated, with simplistic 'tick box' answers. Thus a homogenised version of the student experience is offered, and it takes the work of writers such as Page (2003), Leathwood & O'Connell (2003) and Sinfield et al (2004) to illustrate how these policies have disempowered students and reveal how they impact most on the students from non-traditional backgrounds. However, whilst the policy critique offered by these authors is useful, they still lack the in depth analysis needed of individual student experiences.

Thus whilst the empirical work of the thesis needs to acknowledge the policy context, the methodology selected should include a method of enquiry that will articulate the experiences of the individual, not homogenise the experiences of the 'mass' of students in the classroom.

The student experience of the range of policies that have been enacted and the issues arising for designing the empirical work will be addressed in chapter five. The next chapter focuses on the changing roles for tutors within the context of the classroom.

Chapter 3

Tutors and technology: changing roles for tutors?

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the issues of politics and power as applied to the educational context were discussed. General pressures and issues for HE and its management were highlighted at macro level. This chapter does not give an extensive review of the literature of learning theory, but seeks instead to highlight key issues within which tutors in UK higher education classrooms operate. However, a very limited introduction to learning theory is provided in order to locate the work in this thesis within the social constructivist view of education.

Thus the chapter focuses on the ways in which the introduction of technology has been significant in changing the roles of tutors. Similar questions are being raised in the USA, where Ramaley & Zia (2005, p.15) identified these gaps in terms of new roles for the tutor:

- What is the (new) role of the instructor within the learner-centered environment? How is the professional role of the teacher/professor changing? How must pre- and in-service teacher preparation programs change? What are the implications for faculty development?
- Informal learning settings are also being changed, raising the question, where is the locus (or loci) of learning?
- How does the educational system respond to changing behavioral patterns and technical skills of students who are increasingly more comfortable with IT than teachers? What is the impact on the actual development of new materials, resources, products, and processes? What are the new continuing professional development needs for teachers and faculty?

In order to understand the underlying concepts underpinning relationships between staff and students, a discussion of the terms 'e-learning' and 'blended learning' sets the context. This is followed by the 'no significant difference' debate, where claims made by those exploring the differences between online learning and the traditional face-to-face offering are assessed. A brief section outlining educational theory follows, providing a background to the approach taken for an analysis of the changing roles of the tutor - whether operating at a distance or as part of a blend.

This background provides the setting to explore the new roles advocated for the student and tutor. These will be interpreted in terms of issues of power and resistance, time, space and student diversity. It is within this changing setting for students and tutors that the main body of the thesis is set. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some neglected areas that are addressed as the thesis develops.

E-learning

The current debate about e-learning has its own controversies. Oliver & Conole (2002) categorise online learning as an emerging research area. It would be useful to start with a working definition to set the context of this work, and this is no simple task. A useful starting point is an extract from E-Learning, a peer-refereed international online-only journal directed towards the study and research of e-learning in its diverse aspects. This journal seeks to cover e-learning within its remit: pedagogical, curricular, sociological, economic, philosophical and political (http://www.wwwords.co.uk/elea/ Accessed 02/12/02). The editorial board's policy statement suggests a complex reality, one where underlying assumptions make for very different educational utopias based on technology. These range from the technicist account where new technologies provide for a learner-centred, market-driven model of education based on tele-learning in cyberspace, through to a much more social vision of e-learning improving access to those with disabilities or

living in remote areas, and shaping the future of lifelong learning. However, with e-learning the "focus is currently on e-content issues, while the process and setting of learning are too often neglected, despite findings from various learning theories" (Derntl & Motschnig, 2005, p.113).

A more useful definition can be drawn through the discussions of the notion of a 'learning ecology' where it is suggested that the essential feature of e-learning extends beyond its access to information and builds upon its communicative and interactive features (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p.3). Thus, the goal of quality e-learning, arguably, is to blend diversity and cohesiveness into an offering that is simultaneously dynamic and intellectually challenging. E-learning is the "networked, on-line learning that takes place in a formal context and uses a range of multimedia technologies" (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p.2). To achieve learning experiences of this type, however, is not a simple matter. Laurillard (2002, p.6) comments that the most brilliantly designed educational materials can fail completely if they are not used with same care. She asserts, "learning technologies have progressed well on the back of enthusiasts, but cannot achieve their potential this way." Reuse on a larger scale is not yet supported, and as Derntl & Motschnig (2005, p.112) comment, "Redesigning a course exploiting the benefits of novel learning technologies is essential but requires much thought, time, experience, and both didactical and technical skills to implement the design."

Blended learning

Institutional use of blended learning can be categorised into three types of use: the provision of online supplementary resources, transformational course level practices underpinned by radical course designs and a holistic view of technology use to support blended learning (Sharpe et al, 2006, p.24-26). Within these broad parameters, the literature surveyed suggests a blend of delivery mode, technology and chronology, and this pattern very much fits into the historical development of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) within institutions. In these circumstances, "the learner is subordinate to the

learning, which is still institutional and learner centred" (Sharpe et al, 2006, p.22-23). It is not until the dimensions of focus and direction are added to the blend that the learners' aims become at least as important as the institutional aims.

Oliver & Trigwell (2005), following a review of the literature, suggest the following as a basis for the term 'blended learning':

1. the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches
2. the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment
3. the combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of learning technology use

In terms of impact on the tutor, Stubbs and Martin (2003, p.8) concluded at the end of their study of 238 first year undergraduate students, "we do not believe that the best role for IT is to replace face-to-face contact; it was much better at enhancing the increasingly pressured but nonetheless pleasurable opportunities we have for face-to-face contact with our students." Other researchers (for example McShane, 2005, and Schrittesser, 2004, cited in Sharpe et al, 2006) recommend a blend of pedagogical approaches, and Sharpe et al (2006, p.21) comment that although there is currently little evidence of these approaches, "it is along these axes that we see the potential of blended learning to emerge as transformational practice."

There is some anecdotal evidence that students are expecting more from their tutors in terms of blended e-learning, given they now have to pay fees for tuition. Institutions are not providing the large-scale innovations that transform educational experiences as yet. The current 'state of play' is that most institutions are providing access to a VLE, and this resource is a stable platform that can be used for a variety of contexts, according to institutional

policy and the individual lecturers' interest in providing a range of online pedagogic experiences. There is emerging evidence that students are making use of their own technology as well as that provided by institutions and they are, "doing this in ways that are not planned, difficult to predict and may not be immediately to their teachers and researchers." (Sharpe, 2006, p.4).

The 'no significant difference' debate

Despite a rapidly emerging body of literature about the benefits of e-learning and blended learning, what evidence is there that a blended learning approach makes a difference to the student experience? Are tutors convinced by the government rhetoric of e-learning being 'as good as' traditional education (that is, a classroom based experience), as argued by some authors? Russell (1999) published "The No Significant Difference Phenomenon", which reviews 355 research reports, summaries and papers from 1928 onward, reviewing the impact of technology on the learning process. Student learning outcomes, grades, interactions, frequency of interaction between students and staff as well as other measures are all reviewed. However, the work is confined to the experience of distance learners, whereas this thesis is focussing on the learning experiences of students experiencing a 'blend' of learning, in that they experience both face-to-face and online access as a complement to, not a replacement for, class contact.

The 'no significant difference' between the experiences of online learners and those attending class raised a subsequent plethora of papers supporting and refuting his findings. The issues raised do, however, provide a context for the issues of learners in different places and spaces. Phipps and Merisotis (1999) point out shortcomings in the work, namely lack of control of extraneous variables; lack of randomness in selection of subjects; validity of instruments; and the under-weighing of the importance of staff and student perceptions. Their findings call for further research exploring differences within groups of online learners, and exploring why dropout rates are significantly higher in distance education programmes. Brown and Wack

(1999) critique the Phipps and Merisotis paper, commenting that it is very difficult for any research outcome to predict the experiences of an individual learner if all learners learn differently. Brown and Wack (1999, p.6) conclude it is not "the pitting of face-to-face conventional instruction against technology-enhanced and distance strategies" that is the issue, but the "educational researcher's most pressing and persistent challenge is not that we don't have the insight into ways to assess and enhance the art of teaching, but that educational research has for all but a few failed to inform teaching practice."

The debate around 'no significant difference' is developed further by the work of Twigg (2001), who suggests that to realise the potential of learning technologies, academics must be willing to move toward a learner-centred pedagogical model, and further, faculty must focus on what can be done with IT that 'cannot be done without it.' Laurillard (2002, p.214) calls for her 'Conversational Framework' to be applied within the university setting, "if we are to make best use of new technologies". This is where the university moves towards becoming a 'learning organisation', which is 'one that attempts to conduct an internal learning conversation that allows it to learn from experience, and adapt to its environment" (Laurillard, 2002, p.215). Laurillard acknowledges the difficulties of this for an organisation, indeed, even for the Open University, an institution in a specialist position of offering distance learning. Resistance to innovation is a theme covered by the work of Akerlind & Trevitt (1997, p.97) who suggest the idea that "resistance regularly occurs and needs to be tackled in a systematic way is relatively unacknowledged".

Resistance to online teaching can come from both staff and students. The apprehension of faculty who anticipate losing status and power is a key theme of Talbot's work (2002, p.8). The move from educational settings where staff are at the centre of teaching and learning models can cause anxiety. There is well-documented evidence about the role of tutors changing with the introduction of web-based technology, especially within the context of

sharing course access and design. When a user is a member of multiple groups who have different access privileges to the same resource, "they are credited with the highest level from their privileges" (Allison, McKechan, Ruddle & Michaelson, 2001, p.44). This may now include staff such as learning technologists and other IT specialists. A survey of attitudes of staff to technology sets a critical context to the debate about the use of ICT (Smith & Oliver, 2002). Tentative findings showed that staff respondents were broadly in favour of using technology in the context of their subject teaching; however, these were staff who saw themselves as 'above average' in using ICT. The respondents view other academic colleagues as hostile or unwilling to use learning technologies, not as colleagues that have a different set of equally valid priorities. A simpler explanation may be that those that traditionally hold power are reluctant to share it, and thus the new technologies and their enthusiasts are viewed as a threat to the status quo. And students, too, can resist, a factor that can come as a surprise to early enthusiasts implementing technological innovations.

Having explored some of the issues surrounding implications of governmental policy on e-learning for the tutor, we can see that implementation of this policy is not simple, and that many academics remain unconvinced of the benefits of the move to e-learning. So what models are available to enable an analysis of any such move?

The impact of massification policies on the tutor

Bennett (2002) outlines the background to change from 1989, when "the British Government began to systematically reduce the unit of resource available to higher education". A decade later, the money spent per student was barely 60% of its 1989 level. The results were an increase in class size; young people from a wide range of educational backgrounds began to enter universities and mixed ability teaching became increasingly common. Coping with this new teaching situation required fresh thinking, both regarding the modes of delivery and approach to the management of large classes.

The institutional context, with associated challenges previously discussed has implications for tutors and their students. Increased participation and a steadily falling unit of resource have resulted in lecturers adopting new pedagogical approaches in order to maintain the quality of their courses. Dual demands for compliance from lecturers to employ IT-led teaching methods and to apply student-centred independent learning have been identified by Bennett (2002). One management response to this challenge, particularly in 'new' universities, has been the drive to move learning to the web. In turn, new challenges have arisen in terms of learning expectations of both learners and lecturers. Online learning material has impacted on learners and lecturers in a number of ways, often driven by a senior management agenda (Holley & Oliver, 2000). This move to student-centred learning and the change in the role of the tutor has been described by Jones (2001) as "a cloak for a new managerialist agenda that places additional burdens on the student and masks the increasing audit culture in higher education." Jones views the expansion of HE as a result of political pressure providing students with particular skills that are presumed to be required for a networked society and an information economy.

Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) set out an extended role for non-academic members of staff, and there are no recommendations to suggest that pedagogy should remain firmly within the remit of the tutor. These changes can be traced through from the Jarratt report in 1985. The role of subject librarians is contested, and suggestions made to erode the barriers between librarians, who have traditionally provided guidance on information sources to specific users, and computing service staff that provide tools and communication access to networked information. The Jarratt report calls for a new model of management, with a more integrated and strategic approach to services provided in universities. Interestingly, the e-Universities UK policy, discussed previously, also sets out a division of labour in terms of students and their tutors, with proposals such as:

> "As the learner progresses through the courseware, there is the opportunity to ask questions by selecting the associated 'chat' channel in the toolbar. In response, a chat window opens and the learner is greeted and invited to describe the assistance sought, in text form. The person who answers the questions is part of a call centre and is specifically trained to answer questions about the courseware."
> (PWC, 2000, para 93)

The Dearing appendix does offer a radical shift in the way in which University teaching is carried out - and acknowledges a different way in which staff time can be utilised. The appendix sees a positive role for interactive media that is "fully developed, tested and maintained", and suggests much of this development will be commercial, to ensure a high quality offering of RBL material. However, it could be argued that while government holds the allocation of funding and has not yet indicated that higher education should be run on a business basis, academics will have to compete for scarce resources to develop their materials. The report indicates that commercial developers will be needed - and these commercial companies are likely to want either to charge commercial rates, or to see some return in kind for developing materials. With hard-pressed managers looking for financial savings, it seems more likely that the pedagogical control over content will be sacrificed. The student and his/her learning wishes do not seem to enter the thinking at governmental or institutional level. Staples comments,

> "If lecturers were freed up from preparing and delivering lectures and this time was not otherwise occupied, they would have more opportunity to give students personal attention. However, it seems the workloads of academics will always be expanded to more than fill the time available, and I have seen no evidence proving that distance learning students receive more personal attention than on-campus students attending lectures and tutorials, or that lecturers with distance-only students have more free time." Staples (1995, p.3)

Thus it can clearly be seen that a broader remit than engaging tutors and students is envisaged, with a clear focus on links with business and a new managerialist approach to evaluation. The debate is taken forward in the call for ICT within workforce reform where, "ICT has the capacity to automate

processes and save time" (ibid, p27), an issue clearly rejected by Laurillard (2002, p.196) who comments that a question like "what is the most cost effective medium? can only expect an unhelpful answer - it all depends." In terms of implementation of e-learning policy, Crossouard (2004, p.13) argues: "that without due attention to local and situated practice, and to the key role played by instructional design within these local contexts and therefore to the key role of the teaching profession at all levels, these potential benefits will remain illusory."

Despite concerns raised from both academics and students, the government continue to be propose interventions in the classroom:

> "My Department will now be using the consultation responses to drive forward our strategy for using technology to personalise education. We will use the opportunity that the budget settlement gave us to invest in the levers for change, and to make better use of our existing resources through the use of technology...
>
> The Government will take responsibility for ensuring a unified approach to standards and quality in the use of technology for learning and delivery... we need more imaginative approaches to funding, to invigorate the e-learning market, address the gaps and quality of e-learning content, and drive pedagogic innovation." (Clarke, 2004)

Learning theory

No single theory can account for all the nuances of the complex processes and differing aspects of learning. I suggest that for my subject area, there are varying bodies of academic debate about how learning should be conceived. At one end of the range there is the cognitivist view of learning where learning is an internal unobservable process. This is subscribed to by theorists such as Wertheimer, Kohler, Koffka and Lewin; these approaches can be termed 'applied behaviour analysis' (Hill, 1990, p.84). At the other end of the range is the constructivist position where learning is viewed as a socially situated activity of meaning making. Cognitivist approaches are significant in many computer-based instruction patterns, where the student is taken

through a simulated approach (for example, computer programmes for trainee pilots). However, for this particular research thesis, the constructivist approach is most appropriate, as McDonald (2002, p.12) suggests that "in the last 30 years, virtually every social science and field of humanities has moved away from rationalistic, linear ways of thinking toward an appreciation of multiple perspectives and reasoning in context". This move has had implications for the curriculum and assessment practices. McDonald claims that this focus on constructed learning by educators, both traditional and distance, has had as a consequence the emergence of discussion and various other forms of group learning as important teaching methods.

A social constructivist view of education

Constructivist theories of education highlight the social nature of knowledge, claiming that meaning is constructed as a result of social interaction (cf Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Laurillard, 2002). The educational perspective posed by Eisner and Dewey lends itself to a constructivist manifesto for higher education as suggested by Jonassen et al (1993). These authors assume "that learners construct knowledge by interpreting our perceptual experiences in terms of our prior knowledge, current mental structures and existing beliefs" (Jonassen et al, 1993, p.2). Constructivism is strongly linked to ICT, with the authors arguing that modern technology 'can and should' support advanced knowledge construction. A link is therefore developed between open learning systems, characterised by need-driven and learner-initiated interaction, and designed using many of the classroom principles advocated by Dewey (1859-1952) and Eisner (1985). Dewey and his writing on schools is as significant for the researcher today as for earlier educational researchers, as he challenged the factory system model of education popular in the USA up to the early 1960s. At the time of his work, school planners and efficiency experts viewed students as "relatively passive raw materials to be moulded by teachers, repetitious methods of learning, and subject matter divorced from social content" (Apple & Teitelbaum, 2001, p.180). Dewey thought it appropriate and relevant to "make each one of our

schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and throughout permeated with the spirit of art, history, and science" (1899, p.39). Situating learning was a theme covered in many of his writings, and which influenced a change in teaching and learning methods. For Dewey, it was important to unite subjects together, and situate these around the students' lived experience with knowledge.

Social constructivists view learning as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped by external forces (McMahon, 1997). Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities. The social constructivist approach has developed in what Laurillard (2005) identifies as a series of historical phases. Early advocates were theorists writing at the turn of the century, and include Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. These key educational theorists share a common ground, arguing that learning must be active on the part of learner, and that knowledge is a social construction. One of the most influential of the psychologists working in this area was the Russian, Vygotsky (1896-1934). His analysis of the social origins of mental processes has been significant in a variety of educational contexts. Vygotsky's theories appeal to contemporary researchers in the West, it is suggested, because these are based on his profound knowledge of his own and other sciences, and have an interdisciplinary synthesis (Ardichvili, 2001). In terms of learning and development, Vygotsky was working with children, and his hypothesis was based on the notion that the development of mental processes did not coincide neatly with the learning process; indeed, a child's development process 'lagged behind' the learning process (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, p.90). This gap Vygotsky termed as 'zone of proximal development', which defines functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing. Thus, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, p.87). The limits of the work are acknowledged by Vygotsky himself, who states, "In actuality, there are highly complex dynamic relations between developmental and learning processes

that cannot be encompassed by an unchanging hypothetical formulation... extensive and highly diverse concrete research based on the concept of the zone of proximal development is necessary to resolve the issue" (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978p.91).

Bruner (1960) draws upon the work of Vygotsky, and, instead of focussing on the development of the child, takes as his framework learning as an active process in the classroom. Here the instructor should try to encourage students to discover principles by themselves. The task of the instructor therefore is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding. Successful students should tell one another what they have learned about the world (Bruner, cited in Palmer, 2001, p.94). Thus, constructivism in learning means, instead of passive reception of information, the learner's active and continuous process of constructing and reconstructing his or her conception of phenomena (Tynjälä, 1998, p.175). Arguably, since learners interpret new information on the basis of their existing knowledge, constructivist pedagogy is based on the previous perceptions and beliefs of students. In the classroom, therefore, the emphasis is on understanding things rather than memorising and reproducing information, and on social interaction and collaboration.

A model for e-moderation

This section explores how the introduction of technology relates to changes in the role of the tutor. It draws on the ideas of one of the most frequently cited authors on e-learning, Gilly Salmon. It also suggests alternative views that lead to our understanding of a far more complex picture of e-learning than that suggested by Salmon.

Salmon (2001a) writes extensively on the role of online students, and the paper acknowledges some of the difficulties the online tutor is struggling with, for example the discomfort of many academics with the increasing commodification of education. This view is supported in Lisewski & Joyce

(2003) who argue for a new role for learning technologists, to work with, not for, academics, and thus develop their own academic legitimacy. Salmon acknowledges the lack of learning opportunities for online tutors, and recognises that many universities are willing to provide the technical framework, with little attempt to provide the students, and indeed the tutors, with the skills needed for this new medium. Her solution has been to devise a theoretical model of development to attempt to bridge the technology gap for online learners. Her model is set in the context of delivery via the medium - thus her training ideas are all based around various types of online activity.

This is certainly a useful starting point for examining the role of the online tutor, or e-moderator, as Salmon describes the online academic. Four key themes were identified from a critical exploration of Salmon's work. These are:

a) what assumptions can be made about the values held by staff and students when engaging in online learning?
b) what boundaries are appropriate in terms of staff/students' relationships online, and do these differ from classroom boundaries?
c) Is a process-driven analysis of the online environment suitable for all students?
d) Will moving learning online meet the claims that Salmon makes about online learning solving educational problems?

See Appendix 2 for the Salmon Five Stage Model.

Underpinning assumptions

The first area of discussion is focused on the underlying assumptions around values and how these can be incorporated into the five-stage model, seemingly without any concern. The terminology used in the table has cultural connotations. "Polite", "courteous", "positive attitude", "enliven", "value diversity", "communicate without visual clues", may have different meanings

to different students, and no attempt has been made to explore these. Since "individuals are socialised into the roles typical of their culture" (Worsley, 1992, p.52), and no attempt is made (or encouraged) to explore what the terminology might mean in a specific context. Thus, a weakness of the model is arguably its lack of commitment to a diverse student body. Knowledge sharing, when the e-moderator participates alongside the students, is placed within the grid under "online communication skills" (stage five). However, stage six, a more developed stage, states that the final level of online communication ability is to "be able to communicate comfortably without visual clues". The latter would arguably be more relevant at an earlier stage of e-moderator ability, as values are perhaps one of the most difficult aspects to change. However, Salmon's work can be problematic in the area of visual representations, as body language is as culturally derived as other aspects of an individual's make-up. Indeed, is this an appropriate role for the e-moderator? Worsley (ibid) comments "these value-orientations become part of their individual personality, too: of their way of thinking, the judgements they back, and even the ways they respond emotionally to situations and people".

Salmon proposes that the abilities for an e-moderator are:

a) the ability to learn online communication and e-moderating skills (rather than only learn the software);
b) the ability to promote appropriate use of own and students' time online;
c) the ability to provide support and counselling through email;
d) creativity and flexibility to design and adapt online resources and interaction for differing purposes and participants' needs;
e) the ability to value and use diversity in the service of learning;
f) flexibility in considering approaches to online assessment and evaluation;
g) an appreciation of the benefits of online working and hence the ability to act as resource guide and monitor;

h) a personal meta-cognitive and adaptable approach to learning and teaching;

i) the ability to reflect and input into overall course learning processes.

(Salmon, 2002)

The abilities outlined above could, arguably, apply to the work of an academic already when considered in the offline context. Time management, for example, in terms of both tutor and student is an acknowledged issue for many of those engaged in a mass education system. The massification of education debate, outlined in Bennett 2002, indicates that academics already have to manage their time to reconcile the demands of teaching, research and administration. Ability c), "Creativity and flexibility," is not a new concept - see the work of Eisner 1985, for example, about educational connoisseurship, a mode of evaluation and research that focussed on what actually transpires in the classroom. Eisner takes a creative and holistic view to the classroom experience, and encourages wide curriculum redesign to include the arts as an integral part of the child's experience in school. Point f) about flexibility in assessment and evaluation can be seen in the move away from traditional examinations to assessing group work and individuals in varied ways throughout whole higher education sector. Online assessment can see seen as part of this ongoing work, and thus is not particular to e-moderators.

Role of e-tutor: friend, foe, facilitator?

The Salmon model raises complexities for the role of the e-tutor. This section will discuss issues raised around three types of role for the tutor suggested by the model. These are the online tutor as 'friendly' presence, the adversary or 'foe' in terms of power and assessment and finally the 'facilitator' role.

In terms of tutors being an 'online friend', the approach put forward in the paper is clearly inappropriate for the tutor/student relationship, either on or offline: e-moderators will be expected to provide support and counselling through email (Salmon, 2000). Supporting students may be seen as an

expectation of the academic. However, counselling, "a relationship necessary, but sufficient for constructive changes to occur in clients" (Rogers, 1951), is not a role most academics are familiar with. The nature of relationship described above is based on empathy, and the counsellor is trained to support the client "sufficiently" to enable them to work through their problems, in effect to walk with them, but not to lead them. The emphasis is for the client to identify the constructive changes they wish to make in an unjudgemental environment. This takes time and space, and a genuine in-depth two-way relationship. Rogers later applied his therapeutic ideas to education, and criticized the uniformity of the teacher-as-expert student-as-passive learner model of instruction. His work has been criticised for its focus on individualistic relationships (Feinberg & Feinberg, 1979). Although this is an undoubted weakness, it is still a useful concept for thinking through student/staff relationships, as Rogers firmly puts the student in control of their own development. This concept is lacking in the Salmon model.

The ability (g) - an appreciation of the benefits of online working and hence the ability to act as resource guide and monitor - is problematic, whether discussed in reference to the online teaching or within a classroom. Acting as a 'resource guide and monitor' raises issues in the context of teaching adults. The online tutor is expected to "Challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding...Know when to control groups, when to let go" (Salmon, 2000). Adult learners arguably respond better to encouragement, rather than monitoring, and the terminology of monitoring raises issues of power and authority over students - thus the online 'friendly' tutor can be seen as the adversary or 'foe'. Concerns about learning within virtual and managed learning environments are raised by Land and Bayne (2002), for whom currently available learning theory does not adequately deal with the complexities of "agency, discursive practice, identity and subjectivity within virtual learning environments" (Land & Bayne, 2002, p.14). The authors suggest that new articulations of power and knowledge within cyberspace need to be acknowledged, and changes approached with caution.

An alternative role for the online tutor is suggested by Jones (2001, p.9), where, "the tutor is active in advising students about how to work together alongside providing the more traditional academic guidance." This explanation of the role acknowledges the limitations of online tutor as friend, and encapsulates the issues of power, thus addressing the 'foe' aspects of the role. Salmon hints at the facilitator role in the approach she advocates by ability h), described as "a personal meta-cognitive and adaptable approach to learning and teaching" where Salmon seems to suggest that as teaching and learning is moved online, training e-moderators will resolve all the educational problems around teaching and learning. It could be argued, however, that the with the ability approach, academics are considered to already possess the relevant skills, both technical 'hard' skills and 'soft skills' such as counselling and reflection. As long as these skills are present, Salmon claims that students will then automatically progress through the five-stage model. There is no debate around how any problems or issues could be identified, measured, judged or applied consistently. Authors such as Dweck & Leggett (1988) argue that students and their teachers are more likely to succeed when facing new challenges when they have belief in their abilities. The five-stage model does not explain where this leaves students who lack self-efficacy. How meaningful this process is to the student becomes problematic when the power relations around assessment come into play. The issue of tutor power as relates to student assessment is absent from the Salmon model, and aspects of tutor power and control are considered further the 'tutor-as-researcher' section in chapter five.

'One size fits all'

The 'one size fits all' approach is of concern, and may be illustrated by a discussion of ability a) "ability to learn online....rather than only learn the software." Implicit in this statement is a single model of online learning. Salmon advocates her five-stage model where online students (academics) move along between the stages smoothly, and come out the other end as

trained e-moderators. The process at stage four achieves independent learning by the student. Salmon and Giles (1997a) suggest, "we consider that at this stage of CMC (computer mediated communication) use, students' individual thinking is developing as well as interactive skills which contribute to individual and collective knowledge generation" (http://www.emoderators.com. Accessed 02/12/02).

So what does this quote say about the model? The "training" view would, in its extreme form, emphasize uniform and predictable responses to standard guidance and instruction reinforced by practice and repetition (Buckley & Caple 1995). Therefore students are simply treating the reflective process as 'part of the game' as indicated by Yorke (2003) and at this point the student is being rewarded for demonstrating the outcomes desired by their tutors. The outcomes are standard, and can be measured. There is a tension between the development of group working and the individual, and the model does not explain how to reconcile the needs of the group working through a task, and the individual taking control of their own learning. As Yorke (2003, p.75) claims: "certain learning outcomes are unlikely to materialize unless assessment methods of the right sort are in place: imagine promoting group work without having assessment of groups' achievements arranged across the programme in conjunction with instruction on progressively more advanced techniques for effectively working in groups and as groups". Group learning, whether online on in the classroom is a much more emergent form of learning, and about constructing ideas rather than standard responses.

Discussion

Ramsden (1991) develops an extensive analysis of the best teaching methods, and concludes that these must involve students in actively finding knowledge, interpreting results and testing hypotheses. He goes on to note the sharp contrast between these and the methods that traditionally place authoritative information before students and leave the rest to them. Ramsden does not think the solution lies with the medium. "No medium, however useful, can

solve fundamental educational problems". Nixon et al (2001) talk at some length about the issues around "putting the teaching relationship first", and the tensions around the academic identity in the UK currently. These ideas have no part in the Salmon paper.

The Salmon model is useful in that it offers a simplistic diagrammatic explanation of how to train e-moderators to facilitate online learning. There are examples of ways in which materials can be designed to engage student interest. An emphasis is placed on design of e-tivities that incorporate content, process and output. However, it leaves several areas of concern for those interested in the investigation of the role of the online tutor. A report by Kerka (1999) suggests that the emphasis on e-learning masquerades as self-directed learning, when in fact it merely serves to accommodate learners into prevailing social and political beliefs while conveying an illusion of control. It is limited in its addressing of the notion developed by Ramsden that best practice teaching is "a sort of conversation". This idea is theorised in rather more detail by Thorpe (2002a) who speaks not of training, but of developing online tutors to play a key role in developing the technology of conversation.

In broader terms, Lisewski & Joyce (2003:63) highlight "the dangers of adopting an overly-codified, 'off the shelf' one size fit all' approach to educational development", using the '5 stage e-moderating model' as an exemplar. Their discomfort arises from this single framework becoming a dominant discourse within an emergent field, and being presented as a 'single solution' that managers implementing e-learning strategies can easily implement. This would leave staff without any opportunity or encouragement to develop their own reflexive practice, steamrollered into accepting a model that, given a new managerial agenda, can situate learning across disciplines with little attention paid to the individual student.

The table of e-moderating skills is set in the context of training e-moderators via the Open University masters degree in online learning, and also from those engaging in the First class programme for e-moderators. Salmon claims

training is essential through the online medium learning as this is both cheaper and more effective than a face-to-face experience. Thus, arguably there is a contradiction here between 'training of' and 'developing' e-moderators as the two concepts can arguably have very different connotations, in particular in reconciling the interest of the individual and the organisation. The research is set within the context of the Open University, where students come with the pre-knowledge that face-to-face teaching will be limited, or indeed, perhaps non-existent. The implications of the work for the wider audience are limited and would be more relevant with an attempt to understand what is actually happening between e-moderator trainee and tutor, and the relationship between the e-trainees. As Salmon says in her keynote talk, "It's teaching Jim...but not as we know it!" (Salmon, 2001b). The wider implications of the Salmon e-learning training scheme could be the standardisation of teaching within an institutional remit, thus power issues arise in relation to the tutor. The Open University tutor may well have to sign up for the e-learning course prior to being allocated a group of students, but how appropriate is this as a wider framework for professional development?

Neglect of drowning students

The explanation offered by Salmon and Giles (1997b) leans toward the descriptive classification of learners, and does not offer any insight as to the complexities of teaching and learning online. The learners are classified into three categories: swimmers, wavers and drowners. Swimmers are trainees that "dived in early...responded happily to the training programme..." The wavers were depicted as trainees who needed "considerable help in getting started...most became competent swimmers." Learners classified as drowners were, unsurprisingly, trainees who found it extremely difficult to log into the system, "drowning in a sea of red flags (unread messages)". These drowners were either rescued by swimmers and became wavers, or vanished. The authors confine their analysis of the drowners as those who "continued to complain in other fora about the lack of time or lack of relevance to management education of working through the medium of CMC". This brief

account of those that did not continue with the course tells us little about their attitudes to CMC, and they are rather summarily dismissed as irrelevant to the authors' work. Salmon has neglected this issue, and there are some inconsistencies with the 'bigger picture' which can be partially resolved by taking account of the environment the model was developed in - that of the Open University where all students are distance learners. This gap offers an opportunity to explore students' motivation and commitment to online environments, perhaps in a different learning arena.

De Laat & Lally (2004) offer a different perspective and suggest a multi-dimensional approach, which provides a richer analysis of what is taking place. They argue that the nature of networked learning is complex, and that no single theoretical model is "sufficiently powerful, descriptively, rhetorically, inferentially or in its application to real contexts, to provide a framework for a research agenda". Their work draws upon a multi-method analysis of the learning and tutoring processes occurring within a comparable Masters programme in E-Learning. Their analysis differs from that of Salmon, in that participants may operate quite differently, with some students being strong facilitators, while others offer little support to their collaborators. The authors of this paper outline their concerns and assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of their approach, before moving on tentatively to suggest some outcomes. This approach gives a more learner-centred focus, with a genuine attempt to value diversity, which is lacking in the Salmon model.

To summarise the discussion above, there are different roles advocated for tutors and students. When technology is introduced, the role of both student and tutor is expected to change. This new role is complex, and has not been adequately described in CMC studies. Exactly what this role should be remains unclear, and will be explored through the empirical studies later in the thesis. Student engagement with their studies cannot be explained in simple terms, from the traditional classroom, nor, indeed, from the online classroom perspectives. There appears to be a gap in a mainstream model of e-learning, which leaves issues around "drowner students" unresolved.

Conclusions

In this chapter it has been shown that there are various definitions of e-learning and of blended learning, but none adequately capture the complexities of the institutional context, the tutor role, or the diversity of the student body. Although authors such as Bennett (2002), Sharpe et al (2006) and Laurillard (2002) acknowledge the relevance of institutional demands and constraints, they do not clearly outline how this impacts on the tutor role. Moreover, the literature on tutor role, although going some way toward unpacking the different modes of delivery, is currently too simplistic in approach, in considering the difficulties of engaging students in an online environment. Of particular relevance to this study, however, is the gap in knowledge with respect to student diversity. While the description of swimmers, wavers and drowners (Salmon and Giles, 1997) is helpful in attempting to recognise the differences between those who are successfully take part in online learning, and those who do not, little attention has been paid to the 'drowners', in terms of their personal backgrounds and challenges, the way that they learn, or how they 'disengage' from the process. In summary, this research suggests three issues:

a) Following the work of Sharpe (p50), there is a need to consider the use students are making of their own technology.

Institutions are making extensive use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and this gives easy access to researchers in terms of student learning activities are within a very structured and monitored context. This work offers insights to how student online activities can most usefully be structured, but conceals the invisible, non-reported usage of technologies outside the formal learning context, i.e. outside the monitored and visible system. It is here that the methodology I have chosen (Biographic Narrative Research Method) will offer a space for individual students to comment on

their usage and non usage of both technology that is visible, and technology that is currently invisible to the tutor - for example mobile phone calls or SMS text messages, use of social networking sites such as facebook and myspace, and other web 2 technologies.

(b) The work of Akerlind & Trevitt and Talbot (p53) suggests there may be resistance to change from the students.

There is a small body of research emerging about resistance to the use of technology by staff working within the higher education setting. In much in much contemporary research there is an assumption that students will appreciate and engage with technologies willingly. Indeed, broadly they do, apart from when the technology is seen to 'replace' what the students perceive as vital face-to-face classroom time (Holley, 2002). However, there is a dearth of research about students that struggle with the use of technology, or that are reluctant or unwilling to engage in a new and unfamiliar learning environment. Exploring the individual experience of learning outside the formal classroom environment has led researchers to call for new types of study to be undertaken - ones that explore peoples' patterns of use and seek to understand them (e.g. Potter, 2006). Thus the student experience is explored from the student agenda, not the researcher agenda. This approach would offer some useful insights from the student perspective.

(c) The 'drowner' students, identified in the work of Salmon & Giles (p65) have been relatively neglected in existing research.

That students drawn into Higher Education from widening participation backgrounds struggle to negotiate Higher Education is well documented in studies (cf Sinfield, Burns & Holley 2004; Leathwood & O'Connor 2003; Haggis 2004). The 'drowner' students have had little attention paid to needs and reasons for their disengagement from the courses. That these courses take part at the Open University is significant, as students tend to be mature, self funding and articulate. Thus there may not be any real need to change

practice as these students are in the minority. By way of contrast, the setting for the case studies in this thesis is within a University that prides itself on flexible access and actively seeks students from widening participation backgrounds. These students take on much personal risk (and indeed debt) to come to university, and identifying their struggles and issues will make a useful contribution to curriculum design and teaching practice, as there is a clear institutional focus on student retention, progression and achievement.

In terms of the first research aim, which is to provide a framework for conceptualising student learning spaces, this chapter has considered the social constructivist view of education as a framework. The current debate about whether online learning offers any 'significant difference' has been identified, and questions about how we evaluate these different educational models posed. The changing role of the tutor has been discussed in terms of studies typifying the postgraduate and undergraduate student experience, and the simplistic model of development of the 'e-moderator' suggested by Salmon has been shown to have some crucial deficiencies.

The next chapter suggests a conceptual framework for the student experience of creating their own spaces for learning, and this is followed by chapter six, which discusses these issues from the student perspective.

Chapter Four

Space and Place: a conceptual framework for the student experience of blended learning

Introduction

In this chapter I want to suggest a new conceptualisation of student space, and I plan to do this by exploring different kinds of learning spaces. A theoretical framework drawn from the work of Lefebvre (1974) sets the context before the chapter develops to assess the impact of more recent theoretical approaches to the study of this key theme for the thesis.

The literature is then divided into broad themes around space, the first of which focuses on Temple's (2007) work on new and exciting spaces for students (and staff) to work. This work offers much to those seeking inspiration for designing physical spaces. It does, however, lack the pedagogic framework of the ways in which learning can be designed to take place in these (and other) spaces. Thus the next theme to be explored is that of pedagogic space, and we find that the idea of tutors creating a pedagogic space for themselves and their students is not a new one - indeed, this is not a new context. Tutors have long endeavoured to find this freedom within a formal curriculum, for example, and Eisner's work from the early 1980s challenged the pedagogic practices of the dominant theorists of the time. His work called for creative spaces within which students and tutors could operate. Coming up-to-date, the themes of physical and pedagogic spaces have been drawn into a new debate: what happens when we (and our students) leave our physical presence and start to engage with our learning in cyberspace? The student as an 'embodied self', is viewed through the work of authors such as Land, Bayne and Kefka, who broadly consider the body in space as an extension of the physical being, and authors such as Dreyfus, who take an opposite stance. Views as to whether a revolution has occurred (or is imminent) for teaching and learning with the introduction of new technologies

are explored further and set within institutional parameters as the final 'space' theme. Finally there is an analysis of Sharples' work on the movements between formal and informal spaces, as a potential framework for conceptualising learning space. The chapter concludes with some ideas as to how our understanding of learning spaces can be conceptualised, and those areas that still need to be addressed.

Space as a commodity

Lefebvre applies a Marxian analysis to the notion of space, arguing that space is produced and reproduced through human intentions, and thus a market has been created in spaces themselves in a increasingly lucrative and important sphere (86). Thus, Lefebvre applies the renewal of Marx's concepts [which] is best effected by taking full account of space (343). Lefebrve is alluding to the later writings of Marx, where he moves away from the binary opposition of labour and capital to what Marx had to say about land and the physical environment. These later writings "reflect his [Marx] belief in a tripartite basis of capitalism: the earth, along with labour and capital" (Molotch 1993:887). It is from this precept that Lefebrve's work can be usefully applied to the concepts of space. The imprint of capitalism, Lebreve comments, has "now laid its imprint upon the total occupation of all pre-existing spaces and upon the production of new space (Lefebvre 1994:326). The physical environment is used to illustrate the privileges of some group over others in the work of Lefebrve. An example of this Molotch finds particularly useful is where Lefebrve illustrates with reference to the built environment. "Walls and roads obviously privilege certain kinds of activities and inhibit others, support the projects of one type of actor and deters the goals of others" (Molotch 1993:888). If we apply this analogy to the Internet, and more particularly to who has/ lacks access, it emphasises that access to technology is not value free.

Current research into the digital divide advocates that technologies are not value-neutral, and can only be understood when placed "within a wider

political context of an unequal and changing pattern of power relationships" (Loader, 1998:7). That the digital divide exists is acknowledged by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who refer to the divide as the gaps in access to information and communication technology, which, "to some extent is simply a deepening of existing forms of exclusion" (OECD 2002:11). This is seen to be of growing importance in a society that has been positioned as a "knowledge economy", and is something seen as having implications across the educational system (Peters & May, 2004). Thus, arguably, the divide should be of concern to government policymakers, as without policy interventions, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will intensify societal divisions, and thus increasingly marginalize those who are, "unemployed, poor, housebound, disabled, less educated, members of ethnic and cultural minorities - and in many countries, women" (OECD op.cit). This politicises access to technologies, making Lefebvre's analysis extremely useful concept for exploring power relationships in terms of access to blended learning environments, and hence how and when different groups of students are able to access online materials. The definition of learning space offered on page 94 thus seeks to clarify some of the issues between the learner's circumstances and the impact of these on their ability to create their own space.

Goodyear (2006:84) develops the theme of capital in his critique of the 'Martini' world ('anyplace, anytime, anywhere') discourses of e-learning. For Goodyear, the dominant interests of capital are shaping people's beliefs and expectations of how time and space are changing. He comments, "powerful interests, a category which sometimes includes Universities, have a louder voice than the student or the unrepresented educational consumer in shaping expectations" (Goodyear 2006:91). This can be seen in Universities in the United Kingdom and their move towards (mainly) supporting commercial Virtual Learning Environments such as Lotus Notes or Blackboard, purchased and controlled by managers, instead of the open-source packages such as Moodle and Boddingtons.A study by Vogel and Oliver (2006) explored the implications of learning design with both open source and commercial Virtual

Learning Environments (VLEs), and found most Universities in their sample had Moodle installations alongside their official VLE. They commented that,

> "What these circumstances do not reflect, but what is evident in the above comments about interim use, is that the ecological implications of introducing any VLE are significant even if its license costs nothing. The conditions for VLE lock-in occur as much as a result of investing time and effort as they do of money. Moreover, the selfseeding nature of Moodle, without direct intervention of senior management, raises questions about how support and development for its users is resourced - indeed whether the requirement for these is acknowledged by policy makers at all." (Vogel & Oliver 2006 p38)

The preference for management at the University within which this thesis is based is to 'officially' support a commercial VLE and implement a policy for compulsory staff development, whereas staff are able to use open-source software, but no technical support from the institution is available. Thus the main thrust of implementation is, by default, that of the commercial supplier. These nuances of selection of appropriate VLEs to support students and staff are significant in the way that learning design occurs. In the empirical work, one case study is supported by Blackboard, a commercial VLE, the other by an open-access website. The use students make of the differing resources are described more fully in the empirical chapters.

Despite the selection policies of selection of VLEs for an instituion, Goodyear calls for physical and digital spaces that are appropriate for students, with better interaction between the two spaces. He argues for a more complex analysis of the emerging new conundrums of time and space processes that "generate simplified stories of what is happening, or about to happen, and to whom" (Goodyear 2006:96).

Designed spaces

This discussion around designed spaces indicates some of the limitations in conceptualising student use of space. Current research assumes that changing the physical space in which learning and teaching takes place will cause both

tutors and students to change the way that learning and teaching happens. However, no evidence to support this is provided.

In his review on the literature about learning spaces, Temple (2007, p.5) comments, "Space issues in higher education have usually been considered either in the context of space planning, the aim of which is to provide appropriate amounts of spaces for defined uses, and to maximise its use once provided; or as part of campus planning and building design." The review spanned work ranging from teaching and learning and its use of space; related design issues; campus space and organisational change. From these broad themes conceptual perspectives of university space were elaborated upon, namely "the campus; the university in the city; a community space, individual buildings, spaces intended for teaching and learning (including libraries) and other spaces" (Temple 2007, p.29). The literature review assists in locating the student within the field, and indicates that although student study patterns have changed, much of the built environment has remained static, with perhaps the exception of libraries, which now have much more flexible space. But this seems to be more a division of internal space (for example more rooms for group work and 'pods' for use of PCs and the internet) and an institutional acknowledgement about changing teaching (and assessment) practice within the overall context of a buildings strategy. What students are actually doing within this space remains poorly understood, although researchers have suggested that this development reflects students studying what may be a non-traditional curricula by new methods (Barnett & Temple, 2006); students mixing academic and social activities (Lippincourt, 2006); and, as Hughes (2004, p.367) says, "learners who wish to use technology to structure their learning environment are seeking out the means by which they can do so". This thesis seeks to address the issues raised when learners are outside of the formal classroom and engaging with blended learning materials in a space of their own choosing, be this home, a library or other location. A study by Crook (2002) about students and their experiences of networked learning in their hall of residence offered little in the way of insights of non-traditional students attended their 'local' university. Vavoula (2005), in his

study of adult learning, found that 51% of reported learning episodes took place at home or in the learners' own office, that is, the learners' usual environment. In addition, a significant proportion reported access to learning in another environment, but still familiar, such as a workplace outside the office; a friend's house; a place of worship; or a doctor's surgery (Vavoula, cited in Sharples, 2005).

Researchers into schools have theorised what could happen in learning spaces rather more than in the contemporary HE literature. The government 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative (BSF programme 2005) "represents a new approach to capital investment. It is bringing together significant investment in buildings and in ICT (Information and Communications Technology) over the coming years to support the Government's educational reform agenda" (http://www.bsf.gov.uk/bsf/ Accessed 26/09/07). It is, first and foremost, "about education, not bricks and mortar" (Rudd, Gifford, Morrison & Facer, 2006, p.3). The education of the future, Rudd et al suggest, has at its heart a more personalised education system, which could involve a combination of when learners will learn, where they learn, what they learn, who they learn with and how they learn. Many learners are already creating personalised learning environments for themselves outside school using digital resources (Green, Facer & Rudd 2005, p.4). This research shows that for most young people, technology is part of their daily lives, and by the age of 21 the average person will have spent 15,000 hours in formal education, 20,000 in front of the television and 50,000 hours in front of a computer screen. For these young people, their digital learning landscape affords a high degree of personalisation which is "currently unacknowledged by their formal school experiences" (Green, Facer & Rudd ibid). Thus, what is needed is what Monahan (2000) calls the "built pedagogy" based on the premise that built environments enable and constrain certain modes of social action and interaction, and that educational structures embody curricula and values by design. One way of conceptualising such a built pedagogy is, for example, Jilik's keynote speech to the Futurelab conference (Jilik, 2006) where he recommended designing for '50% useless space' for which the learner is

empowered to create its meaning. Such spaces can, he argues, lead to new social practices and learning experiences.

The 'best practice' design literature (JISC, 2006) focuses on the provision of new and flexible space, where students will have a physical presence. "The prevailing pedagogic approach has swung towards active and collaborative learning, but room design and staff skill sets do not always reflect this" (JISC, 2006, p.10). The accompanying advice for senior managers planning to redesign learning spaces is: "There can be no one blueprint...the variety may even be considered an advantage - when rethinking your own learning and teaching provision and the spaces it will inhabit, exploring differing approaches can help to clarify your own requirements." (JISC, 2006, p.30). As Temple (2007, p.49) comments: "Rather little, however, is said about the precise nature of these new spaces demanded by new ideas on teaching and learning". Thus, although there are pockets of new and exciting built environments across the HE sector, "Impressive new buildings are, on their own, no guarantee that improved learning will be achieved; though they may be used in marketing terms, by helping to brand the institution" (Temple, 2007, p.7).

To summarise, the current literature around learning spaces focuses mainly on the built environment and managing this resource. The teaching and learning aspirations of the institution are often, for senior staff, embodied within the design of learning spaces, and 'new' spaces are a useful marketing tool. However, what the student actually does within these spaces is under-conceptualised. In the words of (Hughes, 2004, p.368), "In providing learner supports, we should focus on what the learners need, not on what we want to or are able to supply, but it is surprising how easily this emphasis can be lost in our wish to help."

Pedagogic spaces

This section starts to raise some of the difficulties in changing pedagogic practice, and raises questions about how 'free' a space can be when students are monitored, tracked and highly visible to their tutors.

A useful start to conceptualising student space is to identify where space is available within current pedagogic practice. A study by Oliver (2003) explored the relatively neglected area of curriculum design practices with academic staff. The research suggests that curriculum design tended to be themed as a series of expanding academic considerations starting sequentially from an absence of design, to content considerations, the planning stage, and finally the process of integrating the whole into the organisation. A separate theme to this process of curriculum design was also identified in the Oliver paper, namely the 'lived curriculum' that was elaborated as a need for a 'creative space' - areas that were not planned, in which teachers and students would feel able to try things out and negotiate what should be done. Significantly, it was "felt that this space should be enjoyable and...respectful to and encouraging of students" (Oliver, 2003, p.5). Thus a space has been identified within which students are able to move freely, and academics felt that there was a need to protect this spontaneous open space from the formal, planned curriculum.

A more conventional approach to the redesign of courses is taken by Thorpe (2002b, p.148), who suggests, "in revisiting the boundaries and distinctions characteristic of earlier practices, we remind ourselves of the challenges still to be overcome in the design of learning, whatever the promise of our more powerful ICT tools and media". In terms of design, time barriers do remain, as the time constraints of learners do shape their behaviour, and Thorpe comments on the paradox of the educational designer having to factor in the real-time availability of learners before the ability to achieve time freedoms online becomes a reality.

The work of Oliver & Thorpe echoes the early work of Eisner (1985), who recommended that academics create their own creative space, within which they can engage their students, away from the realms of a fixed classroom curriculum. Eisner (1985, 1979) offered a challenge to some of the more hallowed assumptions about educational planning and educational evaluation. He was interested in seeking alternatives to the conventional scientific and technocratic procedures that dominated the planning of school programmes in the USA, England and other Western countries. Eisner questioned the premises of psychologists working in the connectionist tradition, whose work influenced North American pedagogic practice. An example of the extent of the influence of the connectionist tradition can be seen in the work of Thorndike (1874-1949). Thorndike was a reinforcement theorist whose view of learning was, "that it involves the formation of stimulus-response bonds through the operation of reinforcement" (Hill, 1990, p.40). This became the dominant view in American learning theory. For Eisner (1985, p.87), "this yearning for prediction through control was, of course, reflected in the desire to make schools more efficient, and presumably more effective."

Eisner (1979) views teaching as an activity requiring artistry, and schooling itself as a cultural artefact. He saw education as a process whose features may differ from individual to individual, context to context. He also argued that theory provides some of the windows through which intelligence can look out into the world, and thus one of the functions theories might serve in educational evaluation is the cultivation of educational connoisseurship. His view of the classroom was structured around the twin concepts of Educational connoisseurship and Educational criticism. The first, connoisseurship, takes place in private, and plays an important role by refining the levels of apprehension of qualities that pervade classrooms. To be a connoisseur of the teaching process:

> "...is to be informed about their qualities, to be able to discriminate the subtleties ...by drawing on a gustatory, visual and kinaesthetic memory against which the particulars of the present may be placed for the purposes of comparison and contrast." (Eisner,1979, p.193).

Educational criticism aims at the re-education of perception. It takes place in the public domain, and involves description and interpretation. Thus, "one describes - an effort to characterise or render the pervasive and sheerly descriptive aspects of the phenomena one attends to....educational criticism is a type of portrayal of the qualities one observes without getting into what they signify....One interprets - represents an effort to understand the meaning and significance that various forms of action have for those in a social setting" (Eisner, 1979, p.195).

These concepts are useful in the empirical work of the thesis, where we will see the contrast between a lecturer's designed curriculum having to meet the requirements of professional bodies, quality assurance procedures and curriculum requirements imposed from an undergraduate module framework (the public arena). This contrasts with the creative spaces the students find within a blended learning curriculum that enables them to engage on a personal level with their learning (private space). These types of space are closest to what I am terming a 'student learning space' - with the key difference that I am viewing this space from a phenomenological viewpoint, emphasising the view of the student, not the academic. The concept of 'lived space' within the curriculum is useful in informing the empirical work of the thesis, as it starts to identify tensions between what happens formally within the curriculum, and what may happen outside the curriculum as students are asked to engage with a series of online learning tasks. What actually happens in these spaces that are left out of the curriculum? Is this a negative space for students, with issues of a hidden curriculum which Eisner (1985, p.98) refers to as "the null curriculum"? Or is this a much more liberating space away from what Land & Bayne (2002, p.7) call "extensive tracking tools"?

Embodied spaces

The aim of this section is to explore how learning may differ in cyberspace. The main authors cited in this section use the term 'cyberspace', which has

its origins in the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, and his 1984 novel Neuromancer (http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/books/neuromancer.asp). The section below raises some of complexities involved in gaining an understanding of this under-researched area of pedagogic practice, which remains subject of much debate amongst academics as to its exact definition. Cyberspace is, for the purposes of this section, focussing on communication in time and space where the 'physical' contact is not made. This has is a different emphasis compared to the wider context blended learning, which is covered in more detail on page 63mmmm of the thesis.

> "A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of very computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding." William Gibson 1984:51.

Gibson's ideas of cyberspace were publicised extensively by John Perry Barlow, a founder of The Electronic Frontier Foundation, an organisation in the USA which "will fund, conduct, and support legal efforts to demonstrate that the Secret Service has exercised prior restraint on publications, limited free speech, conducted improper seizure of equipment and data, used undue force, and generally conducted itself in a fashion which is arbitrary, oppressive, and unconstitutional." (www.eff.org)

Barlow's series of online publications include crime and puzzlement, and it is here that a useful metaphor for cyberspace can be drawn, to set the context for embodied space.

> "In this silent world, all conversation is typed. To enter it, one forsakes both body and place and becomes a thing of words alone. You can see what your neighbors are saying (or recently said), but not what either they or their physical surroundings look like. Town meetings are continuous and discussions rage on everything from sexual kinks to depreciation schedules.
> Whether by one telephonic tendril or millions, they are all connected to one another. Collectively, they form what their

> inhabitants call the Net. It extends across that immense region of electron states, microwaves, magnetic fields, light pulses and thought which sci-fi writer William Gibson named Cyberspace." (John Perry Barlow, 1990)

Cyberspace, in the context below, is focussing much more upon more communicational aspects of the blend of learning. What kinds of learning do the students in cyberspace undertake? Does the student in space represent a different kind of learner? Land (2005, p.150) comments, "Cyberspace remains difficult to define as a learning space. Is it a space, or what architects and designers call a non-space?" The embodied student and the embodied teacher, both of whom operate within relatively clearly defined physical boundaries, offer a contrast. But is this contrast enough to explain the current debate? On the one hand, authors such as Dreyfus (2001) argue that what we need to learn is embodied, and this cannot be learned in cyberspace, because the learner is disembodied here. On the other hand, authors such as Land (2005), Land & Bayne (2002) and Kazan (2007) all argue that cyberspace offers an extension of the embodied self. Whatever the issues, for tutors and students alike, cyberspace "complicates and disrupts preconceptions and habituated practices" (Land, 2005, p.150), and as such is a crucial area for this thesis.

The contrasts outlined above can be illustrated from the perspectives of two students:

> "I have learnt that online learning can be really inspiring and really frustrating. Discussions can be really involving and interesting as you read and relate to others' comments, make your own contributions etc. Then you hit a low (could be a technical problem, can't add the attachment or more major, computer not working, or could be a personal issue - feel daunted by expertise of other participant or just don't relate to what they are saying) which throws you back. I did not expect to experience highs and lows in this way." (Online Tutoring course participant in Sharpe et al, 2006, p.6.)

> "Unlike face to face communication you get no instant feedback. You don't know how people responded to your comments; they just

> go out into silence. This feels isolating and unnerving. It is not warm and supportive." (Wegerif, 1998, cited in Land, 2005).

Studies have indicated how important it is to understand how students engage with physical space (cf Temple, 2007; Sharples et al, 2005). Theorists such as Kerka (2002, p.1) suggest that Western culture has been dominated by a separation of cognitive knowledge from embodied knowledge and the distrust of body knowing. This separation has implications for the underpinning assumptions that operate in the classroom, hence, one implication of this work is the 'body project' which Kerka (op.cit) states "recognizes the body's place in the classroom and ways in which classrooms, teachers, learners, and institutions construct the body as gendered, raced, diseased, disabled, and sexually orientated." Further exploration of these aspects of embodiment are outside the scope of the thesis, but nevertheless are significant for researchers in the area. In a similar vein, it should be acknowledged that inequalities outside the classroom are replicated inside the classroom (Rudd et al, 2006).

An embodied approach to education involves senses, perceptions, and mind-body action and reaction, suggests Kerka (2002). A more holistic approach to curriculum development, teaching, learning and research will, "bring the body back into educational theory and practice". An example of this approach is nursing, where learners are offered opportunities to explore their personal experiences and beliefs about health, healing and culture (cf Pepa and Russell, 2000). The holistic approaches are currently explored also in the art and dance form (cf Crawford, 1998; Chapman, 1998) combining individuals' current and historical experiences and offering a new way to view the self (cf Sellers-Young, 1998). If tutors are going to move all or some aspects of their teaching online, and students no longer have the built environment within which to operate, what are the new parameters for learning? If physical presence is absent, how are students to negotiate their way around their new learning spaces?

Dreyfus (2001, p.7) argues that as we enter cyberspace and leave behind our embodied self, we necessarily lose some of our crucial capacities, including the sense of success and failure that is necessary for learning, and further, "if our body goes, so does relevance, skill, reality and meaning". For Dreyfus, the Net's limitation where embodiment is concerned is the absence of face-to-face learning, which "may well leave the students stuck at the point of competence" (2001, p.39). Dreyfus's arguments about embodiment are structured around a discussion of three variations of learning: a motor skill (example driving a car), an intellectual skill (playing chess), and what takes place in the lecture hall (where student needs both facts and an understanding of the context in which particular information makes sense). All these examples are worked through initial introduction, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, expertise, and finally, practical wisdom. His concern about moving through the stages, is that beyond the first three stages, involvement and mattering are essential, and this leads to his key point: "can the bodily presence required for acquiring skills in various domains and for acquiring mastery of one's culture be delivered by means of the internet?" He argues that our sense of reality of things and people and our ability to interact effectively with them depends on the way in which our body works silently in the background (2001, p.71). It is this ability of the body to do so pervasively and so successfully it is hardly noticed, which makes it "so easy to think that in cyberspace we could get along without it, and why it would, in fact, be impossible to do so" (2001, p.72). However, other authors do not take such a rigid stance. Markham (1998, p.23) commented, "To be present in cyberspace is to learn how to be embodied there. To be embodied is to participate. To participate is to know enough about the rules for interaction and movement so that movement and interaction with and within this space is possible." Thus a move into cyberspace for Markham is the opposite of a move into cyberspace for Dreyfus - one author is arguing the body is left behind, the other that embodiment is possible in cyberspace, but this is merely a presence in different kind of space.

Land (2005, p.158) suggests that Dreyfus does not acknowledge the "manifold learning benefits" to be found in cyberspace. Dreyfus's suggestions about the importance of the face-to-face learning experience, where the learner can take the risk of proposing and defending an idea, and "finding out if it flies or fails" (Dreyfus, 2001, p.39), is critiqued by Land as something that may be "deemed a privileged indulgence...and that certain groups of learners might feel vulnerable enough in physical environments to welcome the comparative safety that is on offer through the anonymity of cyberspace." Land further suggests that Dreyfus draws upon a "logocentic practice that privileges speech over the essentially written nature of cyberspace" (159). Thus it can be seen that there are very different interpretations of cyberspace and what learners can accomplish in terms of levels of the apprenticeship model suggested by Dreyfus. Of course, different tutors and different learners have very differing expectations, but an issue of concern is whether the learner(s) find the disembodiment a barrier to learning.

An area of tension was found by Bayne (2004) when the learner was immersed in the cyberspace classroom. In this research study, some learners experience frustration at the lack of visibility of the embodied self, the notion of 'I can't use my body'. 'Paulina' in the study says, "I can't use, you know, my body language". Bayne (op.cit, p.5) explains it is the discomfort of the online mode which forces 'Paulina' to construct for herself the emotions and responses of the person to whom she is 'talking'. This frustration can make learners unwilling to conduct the business of learning without each other's embodied presence. This research finding is related to the way in which learners speak about the technology positively, as enabling a different articulation of their embodied selves. 'Megan' comments, "They can't make any other judgement on you, your appearance or anything like that, so its almost like it's safer, you can change your whole personality".

Bayne (2004, p.8) posits two conclusions from the study, one of which is the view that structures of higher education depend on stable systems and hierarchies which are generally at odds with the potential of internet spaces

to offer an alternative, looser and not visibly embodied space. However, for some, the screen functions as a barrier, which, in masking the body, works to limit the intensity of interpersonal contact.

In her work on embodiment and (cyber-) texts, Kazan (2007, p.251) seeks to explore how "popular culture reinforces the notion that online communication occurs without bodies and that face to-face communication is not only a distinctly physical act but one that portrays a drastically different persona from the selves people create online." When we interact in cyberspace, we construct an online ethos and this ethos shifts depending on our audience and the 'self' we want to create. This is a challenge for both writers and readers, as writers strive not only to represent themselves, but also to decide which self or 'selves' to present. Hyper readers struggle, according to Kazan (2007, p.253), with interpretation and determining what "they will believe, and what they will reject. More importantly, they operate in a forum that invites response." This view of cyberspace is a long way from the impersonal and silent spaces reported on in Land (2005). The control over the persona is with the learner, as written text can be used to reveal chosen identities the body does not. This 'control' was a "significant and meaningful benefit of online communication" for those in Markham's 1998 study. These complex relationships remain poorly understood.

> "Emergent technologies will complicate and disrupt current understandings of presence, visibility and embodiment. By allowing physical 'present' embodied learners to interact with the teacher and other learners anonymously if they so wish, the boundaries between face-to-face and virtual become blurred. Learners are simultaneously visible and invisible, physically embodied and virtually embodied, identified and anonymous...Modernist spaces of enclosure, with their seemingly stable boundaries between subjects, bodies and reality, become, in this instance, less stable and more permeable." (Land, 2005, p.160)

Teaching and learning in time and space

In this section I argue that, despite huge changes in technology and ways in which it may be possible to engage with our learners outside the classroom, institutions retain conventional polices and practices, featuring familiar conventions such as the large lecture.

The bridging of time and space has, Ehrmann (1999) suggests, had a fundamental impact on our organisation of knowledge for research and teaching. He identifies three revolutions that have enlarged and reorganised higher learning. The first was from the oral dialogue of Socrates' day toward educational forms that included reading and writing. This developed with the reading-writing revolution where key technologies include pen, paper and, later, printing presses. The second was the geographical change in the early middle ages, from independent scholar teaching the independent learner to scholars and students grouping together in universities. In the 20th century this campus revolution featured lecture halls, chalkboards, laboratories, dormitories and transport that could bring scholars from their home. The "Third Revolution" stage is characterised by silicon chips, and a digital world of communications and data storage. The digital age envisaged here is not a virtual world such as Second Life, where students and teachers would meet only virtually, but a dissolving of the physical and time barriers that constrain more traditional teaching in educational establishments today.

There is no acknowledgement of power and authority issues that would remain with such a distributed teaching environment, yet Ehrman does recognise that these empowering technologies do not cause change by themselves. It is the choice of the tutor in the use of technologies that determines consequences, which Ehrman suggests can be truly transformative as part of a vision of scholars, learners and resources combining together in a rich learning environment. The potential of this vision can only be realised at a point where a balance is achieved between proposals that focus solely on access (which can create net losses in quality instead of improvement), and

proposals for quality (which can have the negative effect of increasing the gap between the 'have' and the 'have-nots' rather than narrowing it). The conundrum is how to effect change in enabling access concurrently with improving the quality of provision. Institutional change will be needed to share information and coordinate strategies as institutions prepare to make major improvements in teaching and learning which would no longer be the preserve of "a few experts and can be handled apart from the main academic concerns of the institution" (Ehrman ibid, p.7).

The view of a learner-centred approach putting the learner at the centre of institutional policies is supported by Hughes (2004), who argues for an institutional delivery that balances the support most critical for learners. In doing so, this will provide what the learner needs, not what the institution wants or is able to supply. Thus, Hughes suggests, "We identify real needs best if we know our learners" (2004, p.368).

Garrison & Anderson (2003) are much clearer about the exact differences to expect in a learning environment where e-learning does not represent more of the same. They suggest that the challenge for educators is to create a space for a "purposeful community of enquiry that integrates social, cogitative and teaching presence in a way that will take full advantage of the unique properties of e-learning, those interactive properties that take learning well beyond the lecture hall." Electronic communications technologies, with their multiple media (text, visual, voice) and their capacity to extend interaction over time and distance, are transforming teaching and learning. My research sets out to suggest that applying these principles to course design can, in certain circumstances, enable the individual to maximize their learning experiences outside the confines of the classroom.

However, Collis & Van der Wende (2002) are not convinced about the new digital age and digital revolutions in the classroom. Their term, "stretching the mould", encapsulates the key themes with respect to the use of ICT in higher education. Their research indicates that the sweeping claims made by

some e-learning writers are not being realised. Three main areas emerged from their study of the ICT experience of teaching institutions across Europe, the USA and Australia. The first area encompasses the pace of change, which the authors categorise as slow rather than radical, and based on a business approach, rather on teaching innovations that would excite and engage students. The second theme, ICT in teaching and learning, has become part of the blend of learning, but the "core medium" of instruction, most valued by institutions, remains the lecture. The authors argue that there is little sign of institutional change (and indeed academic demands) for a large-scale vacation of the traditional teaching classroom. The third area, and perhaps most pertinent to this discussion of learning in time and space, is that instructors are gradually doing more to develop the blended learning offerings for their students, but with a lack of institutional reward and acknowledgement. Thus instructors are stretching the mould by incorporating more IT into their daily practices; they are not radically changing the ways in which they teach.

A possible reason for the lack of radical change could be the institutional barriers to change. Collis, Vingerhoets & Moonen (1997) developed a framework for increasing the options available to the learner as to when, how, where, with what materials, and what he or she learns - options that are becoming increasingly important as institutions look to develop their blended learning offerings. The factors were portrayed as a series of aspects of how fixed or flexible time, content, entry requirement, instructional approaches and resources, and delivery and logistics could be for the learner. Given that there are many institutional constraints, what would happen if it were possible to move learners towards a more flexible approach to study outside these parameters?

A framework for conceptualising mobile learning space.

Recently, definitions of mobile learning have shifted their focus from the mobility of the technology to the mobility of the learner. Sharples et al.

(2007) set their research questions in the context of, "...how the mobility of learners augmented by personal and public technology can contribute to the process of gaining new knowledge, skills, and experience". The emphasis is on the learner, and thus their work has some key parallels with the empirical work that will be carried in chapters seven and eight of this thesis, which focuses closely on the learners experience of the personal spaces they create for learning.

The movement between formal and informal learning spaces is explored by Sharples (2005), who advocates the use of mobile technologies to students (and other learners) to link educational content within the mobile learning context. A re-conceptualisation of education in the mobile age is suggested, to recognise the essential role of mobility and communication in the process of learning. This approach conceives of 'space' in terms of a physical learning context coupled with social surroundings. However, his work does suggest that, even with mobile learning, most learners still choose to 'study' in a familiar location - which can be their home, a community centre or a place of worship, and so this research helps me to locate the 'student preferred learning environment' as a familiar space.

Sharples et al (2005) suggest that a re-conceptualisation of education in the mobile age is needed, to recognise the essential role of mobility and communication in the process of learning. This work suggests that mobile learning has broader implications than that of educational interaction; they see mobile technology education being conceived as conversation in context. A starting assumption of this position is that learners are on the move, thus not constrained by the time and space of the classroom. Thus, the learner learns across space by ideas and resources gained in one location being applied and/or developed in another. The learner learns across time by revisiting knowledge that was gained earlier, and even in a different context. This leads to a second assumption, which suggests considerable learning takes place outside the classroom, especially in a society "in which people on the move increasingly try to cram learning into the interstices of daily life"

(Sharples et al, 2005, p.1). An interesting aspect of the research is that findings suggest that it is most appropriate to view the learner as mobile, rather than the technology. The team found the interactions between learning and technology to be complex and varied, with learners making use of whatever technology was to hand as they physically moved locations, for example using their own mobile phone as well as the phones of others. The team also suggest the traditional model of the classroom with the locus of control remaining firmly with the teacher changes for mobile learning, as the control and management of learning can be distributed, thus disrupting the carefully managed environment of the classroom. This has profound implications, namely a "cybernetic process of learning through the continual exploration of the world and negotiation of meaning, mediated by technology" (Sharples et al, 2005, p.7).

This offers those seeking to create different approaches to learning, a framework more in tune with learners and their experiences outside the classroom. Green et al (2005, p.11) report that young people spend 85% of their time outside the school gates. "We know that how people learn is not only shaped by where they learn, but also their family circumstances, their health and well-being." This approach may go, in some way, towards a learning future where "it should be possible to design into our technologies ways to reduce student passivity, floundering and cheating" (Ehrman 1999, p.6), and to move towards learning environments that Pykett & Lee (2006, p.2) say will: "improve learning capability in the UK, in a context where teachers and pupils alike have become systematically disengaged from schooling".

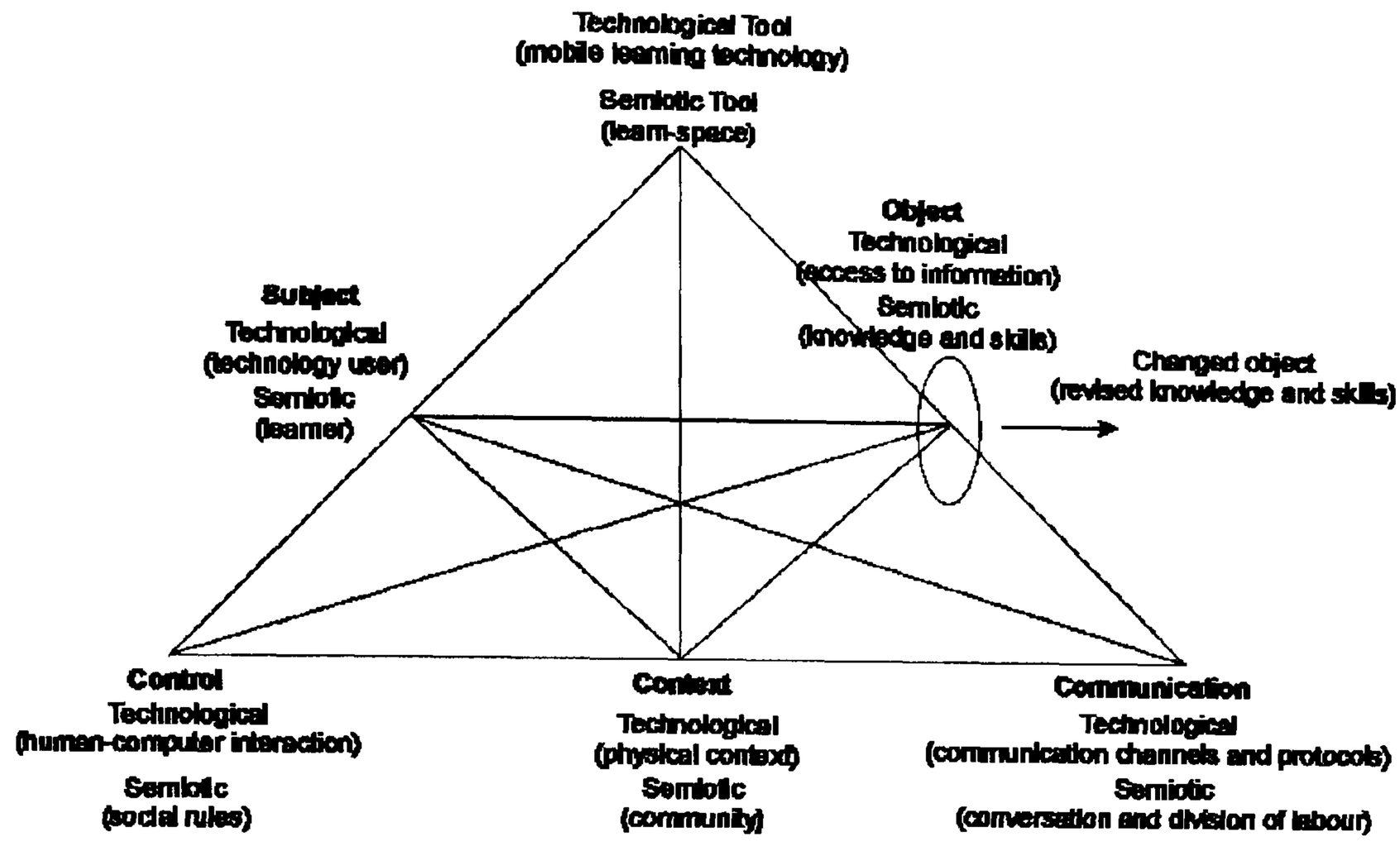

Figure 4.1: Sharples et al, A Framework for analysing mobile learning.

What is of particular interest to researchers in the area of learning outside the classroom is the question of who controls this new world of learning? Is it the student, the lecturer, the management? The framework for analysis (Fig. 4.1) indicates that control moves from the tutor to the learner who can then access materials when convenient, and control the pace and style of interaction. So can this framework assist when applied to students taking a campus-based degree? It suggests a way forward for analysing student-tutor interactions and suggests that technology can assist with removing control, and thus arguably some power constraints within the classroom. However, it remains to be seen whether today's tutor is willing (and indeed able) to make use of emerging theory and apply this within the classroom. This framework offers the potential for describing trends that are currently under-researched in HE, and the terms 'control', 'context' and 'communication' suggest ways of conceptualising the world outside the classroom. It does, however, lack the context of resistance (identified in chapter three about the tutor experience and in chapter five about students' experiences of e-learning). What happens when staff, as Jones (2005) suggests, try to introduce digital resources into practices that can be highly resistant to change? Their crucial role as a gatekeeper is unacknowledged by government, and, as far as technology is

identified as a driver for change; "the capacity for academic and teaching staff to resist is largely ignored (Jones, 2005, p.111).

Conclusions

This chapter has suggested that there are different ways of thinking about space in terms of student learning, and these all have an influence on the student learning experience. Some aspects of space are more relevant than others for conceptualising the student learning space in 'cyberspace' and there is an unresolved debate about the embodied self and its context(s). In terms of this work, Hughes (2004, p.367) comes close to addressing issues posed in this thesis when she alludes to a 'third situation' emerging, where (online) learners are now seeking out ways of structuring their environment, and in doing so, she comments, "the ability and potential of online learning to enhance access to education, particularly higher education, is largely determined by the potential learner's circumstances, which in many ways define the learning environment." The weakness of this study in terms of my work is that more physical access issues are addressed, rather than a study of how learners access the online space and what they do when they are there. Thus, a better way of describing the forthcoming work is to define learning space as "the match (or mismatch) between the potential learner's circumstances and how these circumstances impact on the ability of the learner in the creation of their own unique learning environment" (Holley, 2007).

In this chapter it has been shown that there are different concepts of space, but none adequately captures the complexities framing the student experience. Of those reviewed, none really has the student focus I am seeking, apart perhaps from the preferred location work carried out by Vavoula (2005). Of particular relevance to this study, then, is the literature on mobile learning (Sharples 2005, Sharples et al 2005), which offers us insights into the changing importance of place enabled by new technologies, i.e. the place where the student selects to study. This is a key aspect in

understanding new ways of student learning within blended contexts, and the empirical work that follows will be designed to reflect the importance of place to the student, as well as exploring the creation of individual learning environments within the context of students' spaces.

The issues of power relationships between the tutor and the student in these new contexts is still of significance. The methodological approach will need to pay attention to this important, but often hidden, aspect of the student experience.

To conclude, following the work of Temple (2007, p.54), "changed physical design features on their own may not be enough to achieve improved learning outcomes: a change in the whole pattern of university organisation may be needed to make the new learning spaces work properly." The student experiences in their individual learning spaces are relatively neglected in the literature reviewed, and this is to be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

The Student Experience: Understanding how students engage with education

Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapters, the combined policies of massification and widening participation have had implications for pedagogic practice. Pedagogy no longer remains solely in the domain of the academic, but has become part of the managerial remit. Similarly, recruitment is no longer within the individual academic domain, as centralised systems and services operate to maximise entry. For post-1992 institutions that are dependent on tuition fee funding, student retention is a key issue. Indeed, withdrawal or early student dropout can have "catastrophic consequences" (Godfrey, Richards and Hunter, 2006, p.31). Student retention is a supply side concept that is important for institutions, given its implications for revenue streams and government performance targets. The student idea of 'success' is rather different. Yorke (2004, p.19) suggests the student view is more likely to be measured "as the successful completion of the programme components that they wanted to complete in order to satisfy personal ambitions". Yorke suggests that the student perspective is at odds with current policies where students have to fund themselves through a higher education programme, and thus "the less the funding that is provided by government, the weaker is the rationale for making retention a performance indicator" (Yorke op.cit). Sharpe et al (2006, p.78) concluded, "student conceptions of the learning process and their role within it could be crucial to their experience, and suggest further research in this area."

A diverse student body combined with policies firmly steering both institutions and academics towards e-learning has made some academics question the values held by new students to the academy. This chapter will explore aspects

of the contemporary debates around student engagement in an era of change, and critically explores the tutor-student relationship.

Student engagement/ disengagement

There is a lack of students still wanting to pursue challenging courses, and their numbers are shrinking relative to the number of those who are 'disengaged' from academic pursuits and values (Trout, 2000). He highlights some of the 'problems' with students:

> "Here is a typical complaint: 'Last semester, many of my students drifted in late, slumped into chairs, made excuses to leave early and surrounded my desk when papers were due.... [complaining that] "Nothing interests me."... When called upon, the students often slump in their chairs, shrug their shoulders and mumble, "I dunno." Often, I feel as if I am invading their space simply by asking them a question. When they do interact with me, they sometimes seem resentful and angry. Other teachers complain of unprecedented numbers of students who rarely attend class, do not read the texts, and show scant interest in mastering required material.'"

Elton (1988) suggests that student learning falls into three main dimensions of study strategy: personal meaning (which, he argues, university teachers favour), reproducing (which university teachers deplore) and achieving (which university teachers tolerate). This argument is developed further in Elton (2001) where it is claimed that in the current teaching culture of universities it is only the 'best students' who will learn in ways that are valued by academics.

As policy initiatives bring increasing numbers of non-traditional students into a changing higher education sector, Haggis (2004, p.182) suggests that there is the "need to look again at what is understood by learning (and, indeed non-learning) in this context". The implications of the current populist models of deep and surface learning are discussed, with examples of authors that have contributed to this work (cf Entwhistle, 2000; Trigwell et al, 1999; Biggs, 1999). The variety and worth of research projects and approaches is not

disputed. Despite these variations and interpretations Haggis (2004, p.182) concludes that "the overall conceptual framework remains unchanged", and thus reflects a rather one-dimensional, institutional perspective, which implicitly follows institutional agendas. The implications of this model for mass higher education reveals a rather elitist set of assumptions about student purpose and motivation.

Four assumptions are challenged in her work, the first being the idea that "students' aims are, or can be made to be, the same as the aims of academics" (Haggis 2003, p.97). Academics' aims, it is mooted, arise from the belief that teaching and learning at university is about discovering, questioning and creating knowledge. Haggis suggests that not all students can be 'made' to interact with their subject both personally and meaningfully; not all students want (or are able to) become intellectually curious. The second assumption is that the deep/surface learning model assumes students are able to make sense of the higher education system, articulated through institutional terminologies, and transmitted through teaching and assessment methods. The original research on deep and surface learning was undertaken with students and their reading strategies, and suggested that students varied their strategy according to the task (cf Marton & Saljo, 1976; Marton, Hounsell and Entwhistle, 1997). Thus a model of students and how they choose to engage with study in a particular instance was developed. This has been polarised in some texts to imply deep learning as 'good' and surface learning as having more negative connotations (cf Richardson, 2000). A further assumption is the level of student experience at the time of entry, where students are expected to arrive already prepared to engage with ideas, texts and debates. The plethora of universities offering "Study skills," "Transferable skills" and "Higher Education Orientation" courses indicates the fallacy of this assumption. The final issue for Haggis is that academics assume that students have the confidence and skills to engage with their studies. A different view of the learner is offered where the learner may be a person who is experiencing difficulty with unexplained norms and values in higher education, and "he or she may be exhausted from part-time work or

parenting, distracted by family or financial problems, or lacking the fundamental confidence, self-esteem or health to engage in the ways that are assumed to be both desirable and possible" (Haggis op.cit, p.98).

Thus, the experiences of these different kinds of learners, now pushed through a mass education system by a plethora of government initiatives, do not meet with the expectations of academics driven by a research agenda. New and different ways of teaching and learning are needed. If "the system is to grow into a genuinely accessible form of education for 50% of 18 year olds, in addition to the widest possible range of adults learning throughout their lives, it is going to have to find new ways of conceptualising its core values and activities" (Haggis op.cit, p.102).

Different approaches for engaging learners

The range of research into student learning presents a complex picture in which the personal agency of both learners and tutors is influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, income, ideology, culture, education policy and institutional ethos, which are outside the remit of this thesis. However, it should be acknowledged that tutors' struggles to engage students are not a new phenomenon.

Brookfield, for example, sets his book (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999) in the tradition of a liberal democracy. Issues of discussion and democracy are explored in the context that these concepts are inseparable because both have the same root purpose of nurturing and promoting human growth. Both aspects imply a process of giving and taking, speaking and listening, describing and witnessing, which help expand horizons and foster mutual understanding. Thus, Brookfield suggests, a collective wisdom emerges that would have been impossible for any participants to achieve on their own.

For Brookfield the purpose of discussion is:

1. to help participants reach a more critically informed understanding about the topic or topics under consideration
2. to enhance the participants' self-awareness and their capacity for self critique
3. to foster an appreciation among participants of the diversity of opinion that invariably emerges when viewpoints are exchanged openly and honestly
4. to act as a catalyst to helping people take informed action in the world.

Students and teachers alike need to practice the predispositions of hospitality, participation, mindfulness, humility, mutuality, deliberation, appreciation, hope and autonomy. Moreover, whatever students are asked to do must first be modelled and demonstrated by the teacher, thus creating some expectations of classroom practice that need critical review. Britzman (1991, p.227, cited in Brookfield & Preskill, 1999) argues that both learner and tutor have expectations that everything depends on the teacher. This work takes the socialisation process of the teacher and student alike, where teachers are socialised "to believe they must take responsibility for maintaining the pace of the class, for keeping up student interest, and for enlivening things when the proceedings become too dull." In this view of the role of the teacher, if learning doesn't occur, this is the teacher's fault.

A similar area of concern is when students have "collective patterns of expectation and behaviour" with regard to their instructors (Davis & Sumara, 1997, p.114 cited in Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). The result is a formidable barrier to changing norms and expectations where the teacher is the authority. The third expectation is that teachers underestimate their students, assuming students are poorly prepared, unaccustomed to thinking critically and unable to learn difficult material, and Brookfield suggests that this can lead to didactic practices and discussions carefully led and controlled by the teacher. However, there appears to be an underlying assumption that, despite his acknowledgement about the role of the teacher in regard to power

relationships, the teacher needs to "set the stage" and that all students will engage and learn from the process.

A limitation of the writing is the lack of application of the role modelling to the online environment. For Brookfield, e-mail lacks the immediacy and spontaneity of face-to-face discussion, although he acknowledges that e-mail discussion does allow time for reflection and is a less anxious experience for many introverted or intimidated students. A more controversial view is Brookfield & Preskill's opinion that in cyberspace,

> "everyone is equal and there is the same opportunity to participate, no contribution is louder than another, and no comment is privileged by the modulation or accent of the speaker's voice. It also has the advantages of few clues about ethnicity, socio-economic status or sex of writer, we are less likely to stereotype." (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, p.98)

This claim is controversial, and writers such as Jones (2005), Bayne (2005) and Herring (2000) would make counterclaims in the light of their experiences.

Abercrombie has a common concern with Brookfield for the power relationship of the student and lecturer, and considered the authority-dependency relationship to be "at the centre of our difficulties with learning" (Abercrombie 1993, p.39).

Abercrombie examines the influence of individual assumptions upon perception. The traditional roles of tutors and students are explored, and it is suggested that learners are selective and transformative. The information that gets across and is used is never quite the same as that which was given. The basis for this assumption is the traditional lecture, where didactic methods are applied and there is little or no feedback to the teacher; "he [sic] cannot know what is selected or how what is absorbed is distorted, the more heterogeneous the audience and the more unfamiliar the lecturer is with it, the more it is likely that there is significant distortion in the information accepted" (Abercrombie op.cit, p.33). So it can be said that each person brings a complex of interacting attitudes about the nature of the world

into which new information (education) must be integrated. For Abercrombie, the didactic lecture will not assist in this process, especially when the lecturer will finish with the "norm" of "any questions" after the lecture. The questions articulated at this point give cause for concern, because the greatest difficulty is that the listener usually does not know how much he [sic] has missed, how much misunderstood, and so cannot ask the questions where they are most necessary.

The answer to encouraging "each student to become an authority in his [sic] own right" (Abercrombie 1993, p.40) is the use of discussion groups to facilitate change. This happens by groups learning to get security from their peers, in small face-to-face groups, for then, "when we have confidence in each other, we can begin to recognise our own assumptions by comparison and contrast with those of others and begin to evaluate their usefulness." The large-scale lecture is not a suitable space to do this.

However, the move from didactic learning, where both students and tutor were playing out familiar "norms" of education, to group based work was not necessarily a comfortable experience for the participants. Indeed, Abercrombie acknowledges the painful and frightening effect upon individuals of questioning by themselves and others of their basic assumptions. Leaders of groups therefore had to be prepared to make themselves equal members within the group. This included exercising self-denial, attentive listening, speaking little and being bound by the group's rules, yet being open to comment and hostility from other participants. Abercrombie believed that through their own behaviour, teachers could offer alternative models of the learning process.

Although Abercrombie does acknowledge the lecturer as an authority figure, much of her work has been devoted to weakening the authority-dependency relationship and to encouraging the strengthening of peer relationships. The didactic situation offers the student the teacher's judgement, the "authoritative correct one" with which to compare his own. By comparison, in

the group he [sic] is confronted with the opinions of his peers, which he [sic] must evaluate on their own merits (Abercrombie 1993, p.11).

Brookfield and Abercrombie have in common a concern for the student voice, and a different vision for the teacher than the didactic transmission of information. Both voice concerns about power relationships in the classroom, and have a firm belief in the role of groups to develop student learning. Brookfield comes to the discussion group from a political perspective, Abercrombie from her practice as a scientist. Both see the teacher as the facilitator of the group, and emphasise the importance of modelling behaviour for the student before and during the group learning process. The next section will explore aspects of design for online student engagement, and we will see that the complexities and relationships outlined above are still present when designing for students in a different learning arena.

Designing for student engagement

The work of Laurillard (2002, p.181) suggests that the design of learning materials for any medium should begin with the definition of objectives and analysis of student learning needs. An example of these principles can be seen in the work of Davis & Denning (2001), who designed a cross-cultural MBA module. The MBA students had significant experience of working in groups already. As in the traditional classroom, the online groups did not work for all students all of the time. Their paper examined how some groups bond and others are less successful, despite the students having the benefits of face-to-face contact for a one-week intensive course with the tutors and each other before being expected to debate online. The weakness of the paper is that although there are real issues raised, there is no conceptualisation about the role of tutor in this environment. "Equally inevitably, tutors are held responsible for their failure to make groups work more effectively and members deny their collective and individual responsibilities for the difficulty the group is experiencing" (Davis and Denning, 2001, p.71). The authors are reticent about power relations within the group, and rely on a classic

depiction of group behaviour. They talk about what happens in groups, and hypothesise about the motivations of individual contributors. This leaves the question of how and why the individual comes to view online space in a particular way unanswered.

Further, the role of the tutor needs to be considered. Thorpe (2002b) suggests that collaborative forms of learning are particularly demanding for tutors and students alike, and thus the tutor plays a very direct role in helping to shape interactions.

Holley (2002) designed a student experience online for a lesson where the scheduled class was replaced by an online discussion using the bulletin board facility within webCT, a Virtual Learning Environment. This study indicated that as a voluntary activity, only the more active learners participated. These were students that already engaged with their learning in other arenas: in discussions in the classroom; in contacting the tutor by email for clarification of points; asking for comments on draft coursework and so on. Students at the other end of the spectrum were unwilling to engage with anything new or additional. In addition, student feedback at the end of the course indicated unhappiness from students (both those who participated and those who did not take part) that a face-to-face class was replaced with an online offering. How, therefore, can the 'less willing' or 'less motivated' students be encouraged to extend their learning experiences online? The student responses indicated that students did engage much more in the learning process. The study indicated that students welcome a diversity of approaches to their learning experiences. Students that are traditionally disengaged from the higher educational system did participate when offered the opportunity to take part in learning experiences that were fun, innovative and more visual than text based offerings (Holley & Haynes 2003). However, students that succeeded under the usual lecture/seminar format expressed concerns when faced with an alternative to the teacher in front of the class. Arguably, these students may be concerned for the erosion of a system of teaching that works

well for them. They can be typified as Elton (2001) suggests, as the 'best students'.

Hidden issues for design

"In cyberspace, everyone is equal and there is the same opportunity to participate" (Brookfield, 1999, p.98). This statement makes a claim that will be challenged as the empirical work of this thesis is developed. I will argue that moving aspects of learning online is not value-free and straightforward; and indeed, that we should not expect issues of power, authority and participation in a differing medium of learning to be straightforward. This section provides an overview of critical theory that will raise questions as to the participation (or lack thereof) by female students and explore whether moving learning online can act as a catalyst for change.

Herring (2000) suggests that claims of gender anonymity have not been supported by research on online interaction, citing Self & Meyers' 1991 work which indicates that that males and participants in the group who enjoyed high status offline dominated the interaction, under normal conditions and under conditions of anonymity, although some individual women reported feeling freer to participate when their messages were anonymous. These findings were rapidly followed by a series of reports of aggressive tactics online by men, some explicitly targeted at female participants. Herring outlines the paradox: how is it that gender disparity is retained in a medium where gender is allegedly invisible?

The solution to this paradox, Herring suggests, lies in the technology of anonymity, as most users present themselves in their real-life identities, without the attempt to disguise their gender; and in the transfer of gender 'unconsciously'. Herring's own research (1993, 1996) points to the participants' discourse style as an indication of gender, thus text alone is enough to give clues:

> "Verbosity, assertiveness, use of profanity, politeness (and rudeness), typed representations of smiling and laughter, and the degree of interactivity... gave clues as to the gender of the author. Females are much more likely to post relatively short messages, and more likely to qualify and justify their assertions and apologise, express support of others, and in general manifest as 'aligned' with their interlocutors... politeness is one common means through which gender is cued in asynchronous CMC" (Herring 2000, p.2).

Similar findings are report by Blum (1998), who suggests that males dominate the online learning environment just as they do in face-to-face (F2F) environments, and tend to exhibit higher confidence levels. This work compared F2F with communication in computer mediated communications (CMC), and found that female students included personal information in their messages, citing examples of spouses, children and home, and contrasts these findings with the male impersonal communication style. In both circumstances, when males dominated the communication, females were silenced. This has implications for both policy and practice of those involved in the design and facilitation of student groups. Blum suggests that a learning environment needs to be designed which promotes and encourages collaborative learning for the female online learner, but still allows for the separate male connected learner the freedom of learning 'in the abstract'. It is, however, not enough for staff to create the environment; good practice is to inform students of the acceptable etiquette for online communication, for example "how to be polite on-line, how to address and end each message, ethics on rudeness, jokes..." (Blum 1998, p.7).

However, accessing education online is not a simple process, and whilst it has the potential for assimilating and joining people together on any number of topics, "experiences can easily lead to a feeling of loneliness and isolation" (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002, p.9). There is a paucity of studies exploring online learning experience from the perspective of the non-traditional group member. What are neglected in many contemporary studies are the students for whom learning under the current system is an experience

of "struggle, challenge and difficulty" (Haggis, 2003, p.99). It is the experiences of this neglected group that will form the focus for this research.

So, we can see that in the examples above, cases of engaged, motivated students taught by committed and enthusiastic tutors are evident in the postgraduate, professional sector. Indeed, professional students in the undergraduate world, such as those taking professional courses on a day-release basis also seem to portray more engagement with their studies. However, there are real issues about students accessing university, especially at undergraduate level, as part of the widening participation policy. At macro level, the politics of HE make it increasingly likely that non-traditional students may make up a significant proportion of the 50% of under 30-year-olds that enter HE in the next five years. Is the development of the online learning and the move to student-centred learning as value-free as many writers would have us believe? Bennett (2002) raises concerns with the post-Dearing agenda of resource-based-learning. If students are given responsibility to do the work, what happens if they are either unwilling or unable to engage with online learning? Indeed, for many institutions, students are currently either unwilling or unable to engage with the traditional classroom offering.

At institutional level, these concerns are replicated with the system of funding and reward. Given the politics of higher education, will lecturers have to make learning technologies work? The increasing agenda of new managerialism and a 'what gets measured gets done' approach can lead to situations where students are offered online resources as a matter of course (for example at Middlesex University, all new students have their WebCT accounts set up for them as they register). Looking closely at the literature, in many cases the students that realise the potential of utilising the online medium are mature students, professional students, postgraduate students or some combination of the above. At micro-level, within the classroom, the power and politics are once again replicated. Moving resources online is not a panacea to the real issues of expanding student numbers and a dwindling resource allocation. The pressures from management to offer an ever

increasing range of online resources may, indeed, need to be seen to be providing the students 'as customer' with some added value for their investment in their studies. As Davis & Holt (1998, p.312) point out, "It is clear that the technology genie is out of the bottle, and there is no stuffing it back inside".

The student voice

In all the accounts of tutor/student experiences above, how can accounts of the student experience be separated from the narratives of those with a vested interest, that is the tutors, reporting research findings? Issues of the 'tutor as researcher' raise a central tension that remains unresolved throughout the thesis, that of the influence of the teacher as researcher within the classroom. Rowland (2000) explores this role, and his work acknowledges that however hard a teacher may try; it is impossible to disentangle the authority figure in the classroom from the figure of an empathetic researcher without causing tension for both student and tutor. Rowland suggests that, when teaching face-to-face, the underlying assumption is that, too often, the teacher sets out the ground rules for their own teaching and research, and persuades the students to agree.

> "This dilemma relates to our central question: how can tutors be both researchers into their own practice and tutors at the same time?....what happens when the tutor's need to enquire comes into conflict with the students' interests? Perhaps the enquiring tutor needs to be a practical philosopher without being an overbearing epistemophiliac: to temper a desire for knowledge with a wisdom which takes into account the part which ethical and educational values play in the transactions between learners and teachers." (Rowland, 1993, p.52)

Gore (1993) builds on the argument, articulated in her book The Struggle for Pedagogies, that pedagogy carries its own set of power relations, and that a tutor cannot relinquish the authority role, but that it may be possible to have authority with, rather than 'authority over' students. Critical theory can offer insights into this possibility, as it calls our attention to places where choices

have been made, and clarifies whose goals those choices have served. It is, above all else, a way to ask questions about power (Hinchley, 1998, p.17). More than anything, critical theory is political, in that practitioners use the function of praxis, the mechanism of change, to "knit our thoughts and actions together, so we develop a coherent way of living, in and out of our classrooms, in support of a particular vision of the way the world should be" (Hinchley, 1998, p.149).

Therefore as a white, female lecturer, I will bring a particular element of praxis, or action based on reflection, from my own internalisation of critical theory. However, my view of the world will always be that of the privileged 'outsider', shaped as Ellsworth (1989, p.321) suggests, by a recognition that a "multiplicity of knowledges are present in the classroom as a result of the way in which difference has been used to structure social relationships inside and outside the classroom, but that these knowledges are contradictory, partial and irreducible". However, there is no attempt made in this text to reduce the experiences of all women "within the white, middle-class, Western experience...to a simple monolithic form" (Lewis 1993, p.73); but rather an explicit assumption that my classroom experiences, whether online or face-to-face, are informed by critical theory and my own praxis. Thus for example, in an early effort to view my students' experiences of my course, I used a focus group as a method, and found that this silenced some group members, both male and female. Thus my selected method of one-to-one interview for my empirical work is drawing on both theory and practice. It behoves all those involved in higher education to consider gender equity as "more than putting women on an equal footing with men. It is eliminating barriers to participation and stereotypes that limit the opportunities and choices of both sexes" (Blum 1998, p.7).

Developing a model to explain disengagement

A framework for analysis has been developed to hypothesise about the students in the group, and their relationship to studying. This model was

developed from the various strands of the debate covered in this literature review, especially the ideas about 'best students' as explained by Elton, and 'challenged students' as explained by Haggis. The model is set within the context of student difference, drawn from work of Abercrombie and is illustrated in Figure 5.1, below.

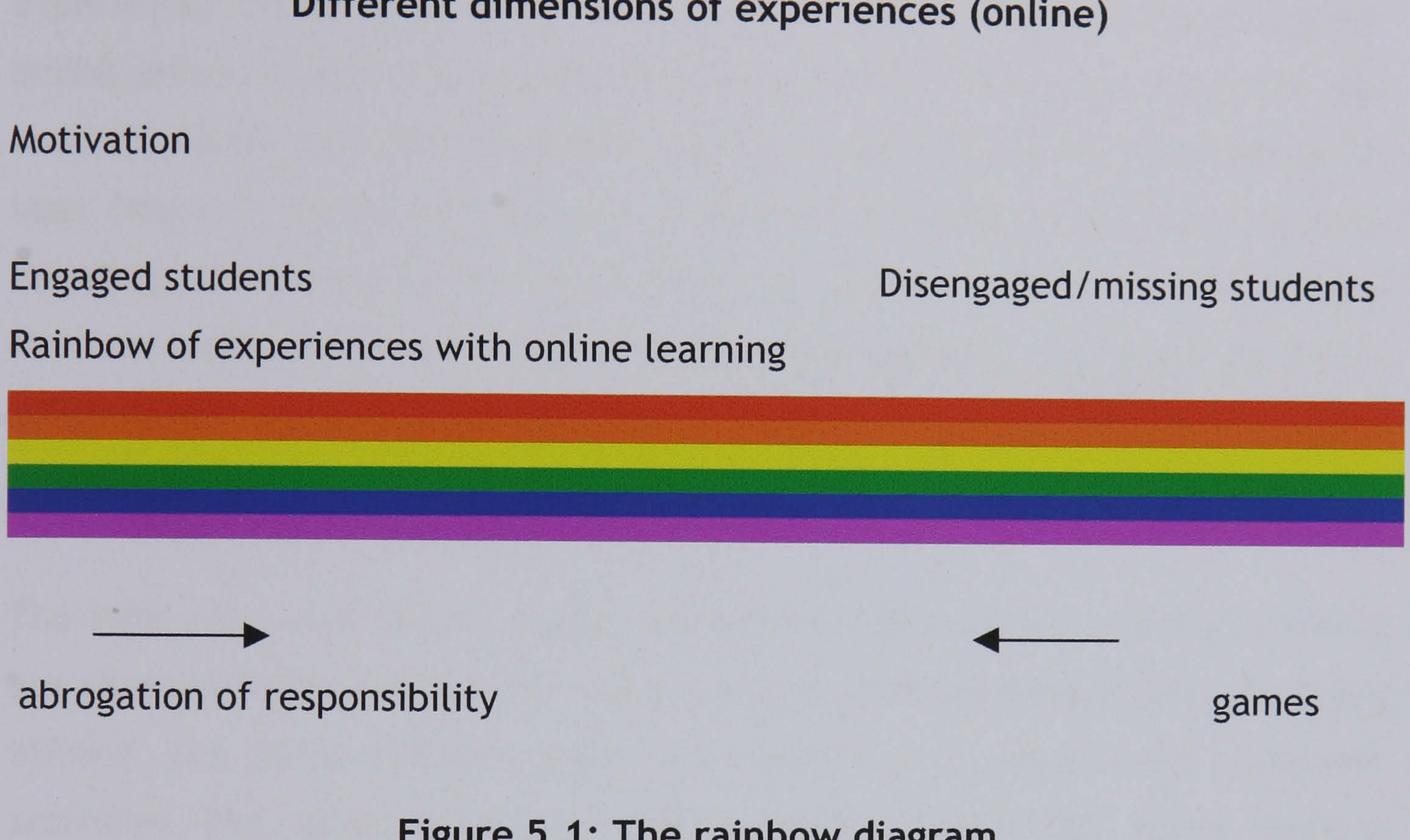

Figure 5.1: The rainbow diagram

The left axis of the diagram (labelled motivation) represents the motivated students. In my class, typically these would be white, middle class and better educated, or professional students, from a cross section of society, where the working culture is one of qualification and reward. Although it is not possible to say explicitly that all the professional students attend for financial gain, it is significant that the subsequent qualification would put them in a position of moving to a higher level within their organisations, with at least a £5000 pay increase. Students in the 'motivated' category welcomed the introduction of online materials, whether these were the multi-media games or the opportunity to contribute to an online discussion in between taught classes. It was when I withdrew from contact teaching (that is, at the front of the class) and said we would have an online lecture and seminar with no physical attendance on site that some of these students complained bitterly, and

equated withdrawal as an abrogation of my responsibility to the student. Some students then 'moved' from totally engaged with all the various learning experiences to less engaged with online learning. Indeed, one particular student refused point-blank to take part in any kind of online activity.

The different colours of the rainbow represent different kinds of learning experiences offered within the teaching environment, such as case studies, online games, videos in class, online and in-class discussion, learning from one another, books, lectures and seminars. This model, which will be developed in later chapters, should at this stage be conceptualised as an individual student engaging with a variety of online resources. Some will only want to explore the first layer, others will want to explore fully with all the online resources offered, and, indeed, some will refuse to engage with or explore any online learning at all.

The right hand side of the model, where the disengaged or missing students are situated indicates that the same types of learning experiences are being offered, but these students were very unwilling to engage with classroom activities. The introduction of the multi-media 'INCOTERMS' game made a significant difference to some of these students (Holley and Haynes, 2003). It was interesting to note that when I showed a short clip of the game we would be using to support learning the following week, and said the seminars would take place in the IT studios, some students I hardly knew arrived to take part in the seminars, and enjoyed the session. They also revisited the site from home, whereas no activity had been registered previously on their webCT account. They began to use the account for the game, and then moved on to visit other pages.

The Pilot Study

Research aim & study methodology

My research aim with the pilot study is to explore whether semi-structured interviews would give deeper understandings and insights into the student experience inside and outside the classroom. The emphasis for this pilot study was upon exploring and seeking to understand students' own views of their engagement with the course. Because these aims are interpretative a qualitative approach was selected. No attempt will be made to argue the findings are typical since the study did not involve gathering data on the prevalence of opinions, beliefs or attitudes. Instead it was intended that the study should illustrate differences in engagement by exploring the experience of students who have participating in contrasting ways during the course. Open-ended interviews were then conducted with each to explore their experiences as "engaged" and "disengaged" students.

The interview topics were informed by observation and field notes gathered during the course. This was intended to act as a complementary approach, confirming, challenging and expanding on themes arising from the interviews, to offer a better understanding of the context of the research, given the phenomenological methodology.

The research aim for the pilot study derived from previous discussions with students - how do they experience the course? The course comprised of three distinct learning scenarios:

1. Lectures (didactic) delivered in a very traditional way - lecturer at front, students sitting in rows;
2. Seminar (discussion) where the case study nature of examples leads to much more discussion; and

3. Online weekly activities, for which a maximum of 10 marks would be allocated (the assessment tasks that form the basis for subsequent interviews).

The online activities were designed to complement the weekly lecture and seminar topic. Some modification and development of online activities occurred after student feedback from the previous year (Holley 2003). To encourage the students to collate information and discuss a current issue online a set of discussion activities were offered (discussion tasks). These tasks were designed to offer an alternative to discussion based seminars, where confident, articulate students perform well and gain advantage, and the less confident students are reluctant to take part. A separate set of online activities was structured with a games element, an example of which is the multi-media INCOTERMS game discussed earlier (game based tasks). The final set of activities were knowledge, "research based" activities where students needed to research material before responding, for example an online quiz based on research around the topic of counter-trade (research based tasks).

Bull & McKenna (2004, p.4) suggest that Computer Aided Assessment (CAA) offers the potential to make supporting material available, which may be of particular benefit to those students who require study skills and learning support. They go on to add, "however, sometimes convincing students to undertake valuable but unassessed work can be difficult." The 10 marks, (one mark a week scenario) was designed to encourage all students to participate, not just the confident, articulate students.

The formal course feedback to go in the 'official' module monitoring form was gathered in the penultimate teaching week. Students were given a "post-it" note and asked to write any positive or negative comments on them then stick them to a piece of flip chart paper near the door on the way out. A summary from reading the notes (all 28 students present that day contributed to feedback, but this does not include a number of poor attendees; the class had 49 students in all) indicated a high level of satisfaction with the course.

Selected comments follow (selected because they mentioned online assessment in terms of some of the pilot aims: motivation, fun, engaging). There were no negative comments at all about the use of the 10 online tasks.

> "The course was very interesting. I particularly liked the way the lecturer encouraged student comments. It is one of the few classes in which I was actually talking because I felt confident. The project online was very good. About the coursework I think the word limit should be longer. BUT OVERALL EXCELLENT (L)"

> "Lectures I found most lectures very interesting and a clear understanding of the overall subject. Also lectures were very encouraging to continue reading on about the subject in my spare time. On Line Tasks I found the online tasks great to me it did not feel like I was completing work but more of a fun activity among friends. Very good & enjoyable thank you Seminars Again very interesting and fun working together in groups. The coursework was very interesting to complete, I also have a clear understanding of the overall commodity market once again thank you \hope you have a great Xmas A"

> "Overall... It was very well organised and found the topics covered very interesting. I particularly enjoyed the online tasks. Well done!! (from course feedback semester A 2003-4)"

However, for the purposes of finding out in more detail how individual students found the lectures, seminars and online course, a more in-depth research method was needed. The method selected was semi-structured interviews with a small sample of students, (initially two) to try to understand their engagement in the learning process in the three learning scenarios offered, with particular attention paid to the online assessments.

Two students were selected from field notes written after each taught class, the field notes acted as an aide memoire as to my perceptions of the classroom experience. These notes were added to after the taught seminars, and the WebCT tracking tools were useful to identify which students were taking part in the online assessment tasks. Field notes and journals are "the building blocks of qualitative research, a place for the accumulation of data and reflections" (Coffey 1993, p.217). Short unstructured interviews were

scheduled, which provided a very open space for them to comment on their experiences as they wished (Rogers, 1951).

Muhanned participated confidently in all the learning arenas - lectures, seminars and online. Abeeku was selected was at the other end of the spectrum and showed extreme reluctance to participate verbally in any of these areas, although his excellent attendance record indicated that he was in fact interested in the course.

Interview Schedule

Both participating students were interviewed during the last teaching week, to enable transcription and initial analysis to be completed before developing a sample framework for the main study with this cohort of students. The set of students invited to participate in the main study would be carefully selected and asked to take part after the assessment period was completed. In timing the study this way, I anticipated students would feel freer to comment on their experiences of my course more freely, as I would no longer be "their" tutor, and the power and authority issues in the classroom identified by Brookfield & Preskill (1999) would be lessened. Observing students and looking at back at field notes and online activity (and lack of activity) helped to identify students at either end of the rainbow diagram.

The interviews were held in my office at the University, at the students' request. I had offered to meet them in a neutral location, or to travel to their home, if this would be easier for them take part. The interviews were taped with the students' consent, and both students were asked to read through and sign the ethical consent form, (appendix a) which outlined the nature of the study; the use I make of the material; and ensuring confidentiality. The form also indicated that students could terminate the interview at any time, and I reiterated this to each interviewee.

Both interviewees were briefed fully as to the nature of the research, it was emphasised that they could stop the interview at any point, and that the tapes would be kept only as long as the PhD research, and then destroyed. The students were also given written notes about the research procedure, and assured that they would never be identified by name in any subsequent publications. I was very aware of the power dynamics between student and teacher, and conscious that these were students still being taught by me on the course. The data collected was of limited use, as explained more fully in the subsequent discussion of the student interviews.

Both the interviews open with an open-ended question asking the student to reflect upon his experiences of the course.

Muhanned[1] and his experiences of the course

In terms of the spectrum of learning experiences, observations in class noted a very attentive student in lectures with a good attendance record for both lectures and seminars. However, despite attending the course from week one, no online activity had been noted. This seems out of character, so I asked for a short interview. Muhanned's biographic details are significant in terms of the study, as he is 'typical' of the London Metropolitan student body - a mature student; an immigrant from Nigeria with English as a second language and a series of lowly paid manual jobs in the public health sector as an employment history. He has a grown up family, and now wants to develop his own career, and sees possible work opportunities as an assistant buyer in the NHS.

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[1] All student names given are pseudonyms, selected by searching appropriate names databases according to year of birth.

Lectures:

Muhanned: "First the lectures are okay. They are in-depth and very helpful and I had to relate to personal experiences on reading matter and sometimes I get lost. Sometimes I find it difficult to keep pace with things but then I prefer it better than the Internet or the web because first I don't have a computer. Or I can't get the lecture notes. I just get a small piece of information, not the whole thing and I thought I might be able to get the whole thing but the seminar is very helpful too and in depth because we treat a lot of things that relate to the lecture, more than the lecture."

Seminars:

Muhanned: "When you go in to see the seminar discussion topics you cant get into them so how can you reply. I find it difficult. Sometimes I just click on and nothing happens."

Online tasks:

Muhanned: "I've just got a computer now and I find it difficult to navigate. Sometimes when I try to attempt the task, the quizzes, and I get logged off after the first question or whatever or I can't seem to find my way through. I sort of find both very useful but then using the WebCT I find it a bit frustrating because I've had to come down to the university on Saturday's to use the library and I can't download. I tried it a couple of times and I find it awkward."

In terms of his learning, Muhanned is enjoying the lectures, but when prompted said that he is finding it difficult to maximise the learning, as he has no idea what the next topic is. All the other students "seem to know" and he can see the powerpoint slides are available from webCT but can't download these as he doesn't know how. The online tasks are too difficult - not the content, but just navigating round and his home PC crashes. Muhanned is able to view the bulletin board within webCT, but does not have the necessary skill to participate. He prefers to work at home where it is comfortable and quiet and he can think about things at his own pace.

There is some frustration evident in his voice as he articulates the problems he is experiencing with using the computer. I asked what academic tasks he usually used the computer for, and these were summarised as internet searches via google and word processing for coursework.

Debbie: Can I ask, do you do the reading before you come along to the class, from the textbook?

Muhanned: Yes, most of the time... and I still recall it after the lecture

Debbie: Is that (ie the book) working better for you?

Muhanned: Yes. All I have to do is pick up my notes and just listen to the lecturer again. So whatever I can find I get it from the textbook as a back up.

Muhanned finds it 'easiest' when he can work direct from the textbook, and he has bought the textbook to follow the seminars and use for background information. It could be his age (47) and life experience thus far has excluded him from the IT world, and he has sought his solution from a learning approach from other modules, namely text based sources, instead of continually coming up against technical problems. This student comments on the comfort of familiar surroundings, and he can easily read his textbook at home. He clearly doesn't consider a 10% weighting for online assessment worth the time and effort and 'hassle' with the computer.

It is interesting to note after our interview, Muhanned did actually revisit all the online tasks with the exception of the discussion postings. He finally received 7/10 marks for this component. When I met him in the corridor the following semester, and commented how delighted I was that he had passed the module, and started to engage with the online tasks, he said he had finally asked one of his sons to come over and show him how to access the materials.

Abeeku and his experiences of the course

Abeeku is a 28-year-old Middle Eastern professional male student, who has been seconded to the University by his organisation. This student was selected for interview as he engaged with the learning materials provided at all levels. He is also representative of the group of professional students who tend to

engage well with the course and materials. My field notes indicated a positive contribution in lectures and this student always has seminar material downloaded and answers prepared. In terms of group dynamics, he is prepared to share knowledge and experience with groups in seminars. For assessed asynchronous discussions he was always the first person to post anything up online for starting off the online debates. It was noticeable that many students did the minimum required for the assessment point (specified as the posting up of a comment and also replying to a comment posted by another student). Abeeku often replied to several comments, and developed his knowledge of the subject by weaving together and summarising what had been said before adding a new dimension to the debate. This student was confident in utilising the full range of teaching materials, as we can see from some of his comments about the learning materials below:

Lectures

> Abeeku: "Lectures, I see it as because of the way you are teaching us is okay. We already know what subjects we are coming to talk about from the schedule you gave us at the beginning. So we prepare ourselves before coming and I find it okay and interesting."

Seminars

> Abeeku: "Yes. This is about the lectures. Seminars, this is something new to me. I didn't have any such experience earlier when I studied back in my country and I find it very interesting because we can discuss issues and I can know other ideas of other students. I like it especially when we work as groups."

Online tasks

> Abeeku : "Online activates are also new things to me. Maybe I like to do such things because I like IT stuff, so I am interested in such issues. I like to do research using the search engines and doing the online quizzes. I am happy about it... Maybe the question and the answers are more interesting to me because I might not have the time to go through the discussions, what other students are writing especially that there is no limit of time to have the discussion. Sometimes you find comments at 12 o'clock at night, sometimes 7 o'clock in the morning. So it is a little bit difficult to follow up especially if you have other things to do."

Abeeku is a very confident learner - he reads before hand, and comments that he scans chapters as well as doing more targeted reading for each class, which indicates higher-level cogitative skills. For Abeeku, lectures are well structured, he enjoys seminars despite having had no experience of this type of learning before coming on course, and he thinks online materials are great. It is also interesting that he comments on the timing of when others are posting their comments to the asynchronous bulletin board, which does indicate a student experience of eroding time/space barriers for their learning activities.

I was left with the slight feeling that I was hearing what I wanted to hear, in that even when prompted, no flaws with the course design or materials were identified, when as course designer I knew there had been issues of network crashes during the course. An alternative interpretation could be, of course, that this student is capable and well organised, and was very able to sort out for himself any technical issues arising. A more in depth interview would give more space to explore issues in depth, and to explore further particular aspects of learning and the reasons why some areas are easier than others.

Discussion

The exploratory interviews showed that a simple question/answer session was not going to provide the depth needed for analysis and interpretation. It also highlighted the deficiencies of the rainbow diagram model, as a simple spectrum of student experiences only drew information about the 'here and now' and lacked the students own insights into their life experiences and how these factors influenced their patterns of study. Therefore the grid (fig 3) has been developed using my module results and student feedback in the module monitoring form as well as the initial interview material to triangulate data and help with the selection process. Initial issues that will be explored in greater depth can be summarised as:

Student attitudes to learning before the course seem to influence their experience of the course, at least early on.

By end of the course, some students have changed their attitude and engaged in ways they didn't previously.

This suggests that a follow-on study is required designed to explore these themes in more detail. The revised framework for sampling is discussed fully in chapter six, the methodology chapter.

Issues raised by the pilot

These short interviews provided a snap shot of an individuals experience on the course, but they are limited in the depth of information they provide. Abeeku, cannot really be categorised as 'disengaged' after the interview, in that he is obviously keen to learn and study, but is happier with his books than with using on line resources.

However, based on this pilot it became apparent that students can not be classified on a simple continuum of 'engaged' to 'disengaged' because their experience varies across different parts of the teaching process. For example Abeeku was selected as there were issues around his online learning engagement; after the interview, he changed his pattern of online involvement, and by the end of the course, had successfully completed all ten online tasks to maximise his marks. This may, of course, also be theorised in terms of the effects of my intervention.

Methodological Issues

The discussion above also illustrates that unstructured interviews did not give me enough information to explain student engagement, as these took place quite early on the teaching. I was concerned that the students may also say things to please me as their lecturer given the issues of power and authority

associated with our roles. The interviews did not explain changes in behaviour, and indeed it was not until the course was finished that trends for particular student's engagement with the learning materials emerged from the field notes. What these conclusions suggest is that to develop the model and explore the issues of difference further, a more sophisticated sampling framework is needed.

Conclusions

Garrison & Anderson (2003, p.7) state that blended learning is "about doing things differently, not about entrenching deficient face-to-face approaches such as lecturing by using e-learning to access more incomprehensible information. Nor that e-learning is about having students accessing the same deficient approaches through a different medium". If this is so, is it then possible that by moving some aspects of learning and teaching online that some of the issues posed by the writers above will be resolved? My own empirical work to date suggests that students develop a presence online that they do not in class and that some groups of students are obviously more motivated by online learning activities than by conventional classes. These findings suggest that, to engage a diverse group of students, varied approaches to teaching and evaluation are required. In terms of the student experience, theories of 'good' students as suggested by Elton, and 'challenged' students as suggested by Haggis, have been described. Students are now entering a mass higher education from a widening participation policy agenda system. It has been suggested that the advent of online learning experiences has, in some ways, changed the ways in which these students engage with their studies in terms of their use of time and space.

Is it possible for the teacher to model the behaviours outlined by Abercrombie and Brookfield to ensure learning takes place, or would the move to cyberspace simply replicate the students' expectation that the teacher should take responsibility for all that happens? Given the political interest and debate into resourcing and funding higher education, along with issues such as

who should, and should not, be entitled to access university education, it is not surprising that there is a great deal of material available that explores the multi-faceted aspects of the student experience. The focus of the student experience has, therefore, been confined to the setting where the main body of work in the thesis is contained, that of non-traditional students, and their engagement with ICT.

The next chapter looks to explore what kinds of methods may be suitable to explore the student experience of a blended learning course taking into account the issues raised in this chapter. The tensions between the tutor and power politics inside and outside the classroom will be considered. For academics, this is a key area for consideration. Sharples (2005, p.2) considers that "the most successful learning comes when the learner is in control of the activity, able to test ideas by performing experiments, to ask questions, collaborate with other people, seek out new knowledge and plan new actions." Thus, the teacher has no ontologically privileged position, but, as Sharples (op.cit) suggests, is "simply another participant in the conversation of learning. This does not fit easily with traditional classroom schooling".

Chapter 6

Methodology

This chapter explains why I have taken a social constructivist approach to address my research aims. It is appropriate in order to understand the phenomena of time and space, and how these affect student use of online learning resources. Hence, I will argue that this is the most appropriate framework for my research, since it examines students' perceptions of learning. In this way I seek to explore the underlying meanings of education from this epistemological position. I will outline the research strategy and explain why an evolving methodology is a key component in endeavouring to understand the student perspective. To this end, I will provide a brief outline of alternative research paradigms in order to locate and inform the development of the methodology. The second part of the chapter explores in some detail how the research was undertaken, and explains how an understanding of the issues was developed through a biographic-narrative interpretative research method (BNIM).

To recap, the focal research question is "To seek to understand how students use of time and space relates to their experience of online learning."

There are three inter-related research aims that will contribute towards developing our understanding of this research question.

Research Aim One:
To provide a framework for conceptualising student learning spaces.

Research Aim Two:
To find an appropriate methodology that will enable a more intimate, revealing glimpse into student classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences.

Research Aim Three:

To explore how students are creating new and innovative ways to negotiate their own learning experiences.

This chapter will outline how the methodological issues of research question (2) will contribute to the focal research question.

Although there are a range of research traditions, my particular research question does not have an 'ideal' method that would address the questions I am asking. There are approaches to research that would be both appropriate and relevant; however, these approaches are located within fields outside of ICT and education. Consequently, in this thesis I will identify these alternatives and seek to apply this new methodological approach to address my research aims. This chapter will conclude with a summary that outlines the method undertaken in the pilot study, and explains why the approach is consequentially modified to encompass a biographic narrative research method for the subsequent empirical studies.

The epistemological basis for this work

As introduced in the literature review, theories of social constructivism, where learning is viewed as a social process, underpin the teaching described in this thesis. The 'learning with assistance' concept, developed by social constructivist writers (cf Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Laurillard, 2002) from Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' as a move toward independent learning form the pedagogic approach for my work. This approach offers a rationale for changing the curriculum, and indeed assessment practices to match the social constructivist framework. As we will see in the pilot and two subsequent classroom studies, where elements of teaching, learning and assessment are redesigned, students respond very positively to this change in the curriculum. Indeed, they take time and space offered within the course and colonise this in a way that meaningful for them.

The constructivist framework is also useful for my research, as these principles underpin the design of the two classroom studies. As we will see, the first classroom study introduces some of these concepts into the curriculum design, offering students opportunities to learn face-to-face, either in a large lecture or in smaller seminar group, with elements of online learning. The second study builds on the student evaluation of the classroom, and in a blended learning approach develops the curriculum further. This is not an arbitrary decision, but draws upon my own experiences of teaching, where I have most success with students when I can actively engage them in the learning process - be this discussions in the classroom or online, working through case studies in small groups, or, more recently involving them online on an individual basis by constructing a learning environment that is fun, engaging and directly related to the learning outcomes of a module.

This view of the world, where I am seeking to see my course through the lived experiences of the individual student, can be situated within the phenomenological research paradigm (see Fig 6.1, below). A reflexive approach to the empirical studies is incorporated within the analysis of the interviews where, "the project of credibility is (at least in theory) abandoned in favour of a decentring of writers' authority in order to allow voices that are otherwise suppressed or contradictory to emerge" (Seale, 1999, p.169).

Research paradigms

To set the research framework for the work in this thesis, therefore, it will be useful to locate this perspective on what counts as learning within existing research paradigms. Collis & Hussey (2003) suggest that the phenomenological research paradigm emerged as a result of criticisms of the positivistic research paradigm. Positivism is drawn from the scientific school of thought, where the emphasis is on measurement and the researcher tries to remain unengaged and as objective as possible. It has been defined as " a model of the research process which treats 'social facts' as existing independently of the activities of both participants and researchers. For positivists, the aim is

to generate data which are valid and reliable, independently of the research method" (Silverman 2001, p.306). Usher (1996) traces the positivist epistemology to the outcome of the Enlightenment's dismantling of tradition as the source of knowledge, and the corresponding move to ground validity of knowledge into scientific method in the form of measurement, testability and the right use of reason. Usher (1996, p.12) explains, " One of the most important aspects of these epistemological 'good grounds' are that the researcher was 'objective', i.e. that he or she was unbiased, value neutral and took care to ensure that personal considerations did not intrude into the research process." Usher suggests that when we do research, there is a tendency to treat objectivity, including the exclusion of subjectivity, as taken for granted, and hence there is a failure to see that in implicitly accepting objectivity in this form we are accepting a particular epistemology and all the commitments and assumptions which that contains.

Usher's critique of adopting a positivist framework for research lies with the assumptions that the research outcomes will emphasise determinacy (that there is a certain truth that can be known); rationality (there must be a convergence on a single explanation); impersonality (the more objective the better); prediction (that research is making generalised claims from which future predictions can be made and phenomena controlled) and finally, that this is an unreflexive approach because it focuses on research methods and outcomes, yet fails to ask any questions about the research process itself. However, there are alternatives to the positivist approach (see Fig 6.1).

Alternative Research paradigms:

Positivistic paradigm	**Phenomenological paradigm**
Quantitative	Qualitative
Objectivist	Subjectivist
Scientific / Experimentalist	Humanistic
Traditionalist	Interpretivist*

Figure 6.1 (Collis and Hussey 2003, p.47, emphasis my own)

As Figure 6.1 suggests, I will be locating this work within the interpretivist tradition. How I construct what I have "found" in terms of academic writing depends as to how I think about the world, and, indeed, the construction of knowledge. This research is situated within the social constructionist approach; this challenges the traditional objectivist/ rationalist views of inquiry "which keep the world at a distance" as an independently existing universe, and which holds knowledge as corresponding to this world (Steier 1995, p.1). The role of the reflexive researcher is significant, and this person looks not to an "independent world out there, but to our own constructing process" (Steier 1995, p.2). West (1996, p.19) suggests that the capacity for dialogue and shared insight is "strangled in its infancy" by the use of objectivist, detached methods which can alienate, disempower and silence people, thus impoverishing their narrative contribution and the understandings they could bring. In this thesis, these accounts will be the student view of their classroom experience, thus a more interpretivist, and arguably reflexive approach is appropriate.

The need for reflexivity in social research is encapsulated in the work of Hammersley & Atkinson (1995, p.15) who comment that, "there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it". This approach suggests that it is a waste of time trying to eliminate interviewer bias, for example, but instead that a researcher should concentrate on understanding the effects of bias. For data analysis, therefore, data should be collected at differing levels of reactivity, and the theories used made explicit. This resonates with the work of Coffey and Atkinson (1996a, p.78) who suggest that:

> "One must always be mindful of the fact that research interviews are particular social contexts and that extrapolation from them is always problematic, one should also recognise that narratives and reminiscences that are produced in the interview are not necessarily unique to that context. Many will have been rehearsed,

> either as a private repertoire of recollections or as part of a collectively shared stock of narratives."

Delamont (2002) suggests it is as essential to be as self-conscious about the construction of texts as one is about the processes of interviewing or doing participant observation. Furthermore, the individual researcher needs to be self-conscious about her role, her interactions and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates.

> "As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served" (Delamont 2002, p.9).

Reflexivity can therefore reveal itself as awareness that we should allow ourselves to hear what our subjects are telling us, not by imposing our categories on them, but by trying to see how our categories may not fit. Thus by looking for incongruence in the text, seeking out difference, not similarity, the world of my classroom takes on a different perspective - one where the students refuse to comply with my carefully defined definitions of where they may be. By following through this theme, in the interviews the student participants each tell their story; and ultimately this leads to a richer and deeper understanding of their learning experiences.

A more reflexive approach to research can be found in the work of Rowland (2000). Rowland takes a reflexive stance when exploring the relationships between teaching and research for the university teacher. There is an acknowledgement of the power issues arising when the academic is a student as part of a teacher training course; the power the silence of the tutor has on a group, even when the tutor uses silence in an effort to leave space for the students to share; and the relationship between power and innovation. As Rowland (2000, p.66) points out, "As soon as the teacher introduces the innovation, they increase their own power by becoming the 'expert' of this innovatory process."

The power relationships apparent at all three levels of the literature review, at national, institutional and the classroom level are, of course, replicated in the methodological stance within which researchers locate their research. In a previous study (Holley, 2002), for example, focus group discussions were used as a means of garnering feedback on student's experiences of a course, and in particular of their learning experiences with an online multi-media game. The focus group had the potential to exclude some students from making a contribution. The quieter group members were uncomfortable articulating their thoughts in front of some very confident female students. They took the opportunity to raise issues privately later in the week; these students clearly had things that they wanted to say and wanted to be able to contribute. Without involvement from the tutor, a very one-sided version of events would have been documented. Discussions around the role of the tutor revolved around being seen as a power and authority figure versus the facilitator of the debate. The tentative conclusion was to suggest that working with students on sensitive issues needs particular consideration; therefore one-to-one interviews have been suggested as the main means within this thesis of drawing out from the students how the course materials had worked from their point of view for this thesis.

Criteria for judging research

The debates around appropriate research paradigms cut across subject specific approaches. Although the qualitative approach/paradigm is often criticised for its lack of applicability to situations outside of the setting, Janesick (1994, p.217) warns that "for too long we have allowed psychometrics to rule our research and thus to decontextualise individuals". In other words, a preoccupation with employing positivist procedures for defending methods undermines what is arguably the cornerstone of qualitative research - the interpretation of different people's behaviour and situational events.

In health, and nursing in particular, there is a growing realisation that qualitative research can 'provide fresh insights, particularly through the study of people's unique lived experiences' (Morgan & Drury, 2003, p.2). Labuschagne (2003) suggests that understanding in qualitative research is akin to the understanding gained from an art, rather than from a science. This does not mean it is an inferior kind of understanding, but it does mean it is different. This difference is the requirement for the active participation of the reader to identify with the situation and relate the findings to his/her own situation. Morgan & Drury (2003, p.5) outline the way in which the fundamental questions in qualitative studies should be addressed when writing up the narrative:

1. What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity and accuracy of findings?
2. What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of experience & qualifications?
3. What assumptions under-gird the study?

These documented descriptions should leave an 'auditable' trail that can be followed by others so that the other researchers can trace the decision making processes which led to data production and analysis. In terms of reliability, it is suggested that an 'appropriate' level of external reliability can be achieved by documenting the succession of moves thorough the stages of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

> "This can be achieved by explaining the methodological framework and the range of strategies that have been used within the study. The rationale for the way in which participants were selected to take part should also be described, as should the researcher's role and their perceived relationship to those participants. It will be necessary to document analytic constructs and meanings, which derive from data alongside the methodological approach and procedures that were used for producing data. This would include providing descriptions of phenomena with appropriate narrative of the social context in which they occurred, particularly in terms of persons, places and events." (Morgan & Drury 2003, p.6).

Drawing upon the developing qualitative approaches from health for studying phenomena may offer a way forward in my own study. The health research sector has parallels with research of ICT, in that it has traditionally been typified by a positivist quantitative research paradigm, used by doctors and other health professionals, yet a significant minority are working through health issues with the aim of encapsulating the user experience. As Labuschangne (2003, p.1) concludes, " To sum up, traditional quantitative methods such as randomised controlled trails are the appropriate means of testing the effect of an intervention or a treatment, but a qualitative exploration of the beliefs and understanding is likely to be needed to find out why some patients choose not to adhere to the prescribed treatment". Thus, for the topic I am studying, seeking to understand the nature of the problem to be studied has led to an emphasis on describing and analysing the research process as criteria for judging the work.

Phenomenology

In the previous section, I argued that qualitative research, drawing upon social constructivist principles, was a sound basis for exploring the sort of research aims to be addresses in this thesis. In the following section, I will explain how the phenomological approach typifies this tradition, and link this to interpretive methods for an analysis of the empirical work.

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon (Cresswell 1998, p.51). There are four major challenges to be overcome if this approach is taken: the need for an understanding of the philosophical precepts of this approach (the concept of epoche); the participants in the study have to be carefully selected; the researcher may find it difficult to bracket their own personal experiences; and the researcher also has to decide how and in what way his/her personal experiences will be introduced into the study (Cresswell 1998, p.55). Ideally, the phenomenological report ends with the reader

understanding better. The reader should come away with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne, cited in Cresswell, 1998, p.55). Furthermore, as discussed this methodology "should not be judged solely by the criteria used for the positivistic paradigm, but by criteria more appropriate for this particular methodology" (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

What should not be judged

Silverman (2001, p.5) discusses the issues arising from identifying research topics from 'social problems' to be found in the world around us. Thus my "disengaged student" debate can be seen in the context of issues arising from the governmental agenda for the sector - the widening participation debate; new managerialism where management has become involved with pedagogy and pushes to move teaching and learning online; the numerous examples of rhetoric with so called "old" Universities looking to be socially inclusive; the ongoing issues of exclusion of new Universities from research funding; the issues perceived by staff related to teaching students that have not come up through the traditional 3 "A" level route. The issue could be translated into, "here in our university we have a problem with the students - they challenge our established 'norms'. Managers support online learning, this is therefore the solution. So all that needs to be done is interview a few students and find out why they are disengaged."

Because this research project is starting with such a personal focus on my own work and drawing on my own students' experiences, a phenomenological approach to the interview seems appropriate, explained in Cresswell (1998, p.54) as "seeing something from another's viewpoint, acknowledging your own assumptions, setting these aside." I wanted the student participants to explain their experiences in their own words, with as little prompting from me as researcher as possible. The two pilot interviews followed the work of Wengraf (2001) where space was offered for students to contribute their thoughts with no unnecessary hindrance. The interpretation brought in my own experience as an academic of several years' standing, with an interest in

student engagement and IT. The sections chosen for interpretation were selected from the "narrative story" text sort, described elsewhere in this chapter. This follows the approach of Coffey and Atkinson (1996a) who suggested that stories could be used to "give voice" to otherwise silenced groups and individuals. (This may, perhaps be better understood as a means of representing voices that previously remained unheard.)

To summarise, to research social phenomena, a more qualitative approach method is called for. As Collis & Hussey (2003, p.47) point out, "It is important for the researcher to recognise and understand their own personal paradigm as this will determine the entire course of your research project".

Approaches to research in the field of ICT & Education

In the previous section, I have outlined the foundation for the work of this thesis. In this section, I will explore how this position is related to that of other researchers working in the field. In order to explain this adequately, it has proved necessary to look both at how other ICT researchers work, and also at how researchers from related fields conduct studies.

With such a wide field within which to locate this research, it will be useful to briefly summarise the main traditions, selected from widely cited and/or established authors that typify approaches to study in the field.

One approach to measuring student engagement has been to look at existing monitoring data such as server logs of their technology use. For example, tracking devices embedded within Virtual Learning Environments have led to a plethora of papers and projects endeavouring to measure student engagement with the technology (e.g. Wise, 2003). These kinds of study are useful for examining student behaviour and collating reports on student usage. My exploratory research, prior to this thesis, undertook an analysis to see if student activity and achievement could be measured by correlating the number of students' visits to the WebCT web site with success or failure in

assessment. No meaningful statistical correlations could be established, so this approach was not pursued further. Further, it was apparent that measurement of student use of the website would not provide an explanation as to what the student interpretation of the visit would mean. This exercise did, however, raise a number of interesting issues, concerned with surveillance and power. Land and Bayne (2002) point out that teachers can also be monitored more easily in an online environment and that they risk losing power upwards (to the watchers) and downwards (to the students) when teaching online. However, the authors urge caution with interpretation of 'measuring' what happens on and offline: 'you are capturing what you think is going on' the student may actually just look at a page, print it off, take it away or they can print off three copies for their friends....you're not actually capturing what you think you're capturing' (Land and Bayne 2002, p.12, emphasis added). Thus, for my research, such measurement of student activity was not an option.

Another approach has been to look at patterns of reported use. Computing and the ability to programme in student or staff responses (or both) lends itself to survey work, both of the qualitative and quantitative kind. This enable broad patterns and trends to be established, which are extremely useful for setting a context for the developing work covered in this thesis. There are well-documented funded large-scale survey-based studies of the student experience of ICT. An example of a large scale US study can be found in the work of Hiltz, Coppola, Rotter, Turoff and Benbunan-Fich (2001). These authors used multiple methods to explore differences in outcome between traditional classroom-based university courses and courses delivered using Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN). The project looked at the experience in three US colleges and multi-methods were used to gather data. There was a 26 course 3-year longitudinal study evaluated by student questionnaire, an embedded field experiment and semi-structured interviews. The findings support the premise that when students are actively involved in collaborative (group) learning online, the outcomes can be as good, or better than those for traditional classes, but when individuals are receiving posted online material

and sending back individual work, the results are poorer than traditional classrooms. The authors themselves suggest that the student experience is under-researched and poorly understood, and a different way of exploring the student experience is required, rather than the methods they used in this study. Even semi-structured interviews did not capture the learning experience of the students adequately to explain some of the research findings.

Noble (2001, p.3) takes an economic view, and argues that the move to ICT in colleges and universities in the USA and Canada is a feature of the management seeking to divide up and commodify the educational experience into 'discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things or packages of things.' The tools of education then are removed from their producer, the teacher, and given an 'independent existence' apart from the creator. The final step is the assembled course sale in the market place, at a profit, where the market determines their worth. Thus teachers become producers, students become consumers and education becomes a shadow of its whole. Certainly new managerialism in the UK can be seen to follow these ideas, where increasing state control of the educational curriculum is evident. However, the political and economic backdrop to HE, although a key theme in explaining the student experience (for example large classrooms, poor facilities and lack of investment) does not directly help to explain individual student experiences of ICT.

Psychometrics are utilised extensively for those drawing from a positivist, psychological perspective. For example, de Boer and Collis (2005) undertook a collaborative funded international project covering nine countries, seven of which were within Europe. The method was a questionnaire asking about instructors' current teaching practice and their expectations of teaching in the future. Once again, this research provides valuable insights into how instructors see their role and the role of ICT changing, but the student experience is lacking. The results are reported as a set of psychometric data drawn from 347 instructors, the aim being to find a more 'systematic way' of

designing course management systems. This study identifies patterns but does not seek to explain or understand them.

Thorpe (2002a) takes a comparative approach to explore the effects of changes in practice that have been fuelled by the application of ICT. This paper offers an excellent theoretical basis for understanding changing professional practice, and emphasises the worth of new collaborative practices for professional learners. The topic of professionalism is relevant in my own work, where in the first study; there are a number of day-release students taking the course. Thus notions of professionalism cannot be ignored or discounted. However, Thorpe's study is based mainly on postgraduate students, who arguably have a vested interest in belonging and linking to others in the same community, whereas my study is of undergraduate students. Thorpe focuses on comparing course formats, while I am seeking to understand the different kinds of student experience on one particular course.

Another approach used in the field of ICT and education is the case study. Collis & Hussey (2003) suggest an individual case is used to examine a single instance of a phenomenon. This approach implies a single unit of analysis, within a single setting, and this leads to one of the weaknesses of the approach. It can be very difficult to establish the boundaries of the study, as the case under scrutiny has a past and future that will colour the researcher's view. Thus, case studies can be better suited to more phenomenological research paradigms as the detail of the case and its context is crucial to the analysis. Researchers drawing upon this tradition include Hutchings & Saunders (2001) who examine an institutional context for curriculum development of an e-learning project; Kirkpatrick (2005) who analyses one student group and their 'chat' within the Virtual Learning Environment of Blackboard; and Holt, Oliver & McAvinia (2002) who use the case of individual students, who suggest that moving discussions online can change learning experiences, in ways that are influenced by personality, background and fluency in writing and speech. The case studies outlined above focus on 'the

case' as the institution; or 'the case' as the classroom, not the experiences of the learners. The biographic-narrative approach has not been applied in the educational context before. Thus, the cases commonly reported in the literature are either not at the level that would be appropriate for my thesis, that is at classroom and individual level; or do not address the diversity of the student body, as many tend to focus on mature, postgraduate learners (cf Davis, 1997; Davis and Holt, 1998; Davis and Denning, 2000).

So far, each approach described has proved problematic. There are some examples of work in this field that come close to what I want to achieve, however. Pena-Shaff and Nicholls (2004) use a case study method based on social constructivist learning theory to investigate the communications patterns and knowledge construction process of students using a bulletin board system. They suggest that the attributes of the technology may provide the potential to increase student participation. However, they found that it was not easy to integrate online discussions into the traditional classroom environment. Their conclusions recommend further research into the variables that need to be 'added' to technology to create an interactive educational experience online, especially with regard to understanding better learners' aptitudes and attitudes. This research paper demonstrates clearly that ICT has the potential to make a difference to the student learning experience, but its technology-centred perspective is unable to offer insights into the student experience.

Others have sought a more student-centred view of the changing world of ICT. Jones (2002) uses a phenomenographic approach to his work on understanding students' experiences of collaborative-networked learning. The student experience aspect of this three year Joint Information Systems Committee of the UK Higher Education Funding Councils (JISC) funded project is based on 10 interviews with Open University students. Thus it offers a phenomenographic methodology drawing upon a social constructivist perspective showing how curriculum design may offer a better understanding of what is happening online, from the perspective of the student user. However, once again, here

we have a set of arguably motivated students equipped with the necessary computers to ensure participation. Nevertheless, the findings within the student online groups differ and students report incongruence in learning experiences. This demonstrates the strength of the phenomenographic approach; it really gets to the heart of the individual student experience. The study also focuses on the limitations of a 'measuring' approach - the student interviews show that students communicate informally outside the online learning environment, thus what you see online isn't actually encapsulating what happens. Therefore here a suitable method is modelled within the phenomenological research paradigm; however, the students that form the sample are not comparable to the diversity of the student group I am working with. Hence, this broad approach helps to take forward the phenomenological research paradigm, but the interpretation of the interviews does not reveal the kinds of insights I am seeking from drawing upon life narratives.

Thus, although the field of education and ICT is extensively researched, with a variety of research tools and methods available to address various aspects of student learning, the studies above do not offer an existing method that can be adapted to view the classroom from the student perspective. My empirical work is based at London Metropolitan University, a post-1992 institution with a student intake reflecting its widening participation focus. The department within which the work is situated has a multi-cultural mix of 62% ethnic minorities; 162 languages are spoken among the student body; only one third of the students enter at age 18; and finally only 12% of students enter with a traditional 'A' level profile (Pheiffer, Holley and Andrew, 2005). Research into access to university from potential working class students in the local areas indicates a reluctance to enter higher education, because HE institutions are viewed as "full of middleclass white tutors and have no relevance to us" (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). This reluctance to enter university is linked to attitudes to tutors when students do make the decision to enter higher education. It proved extremely difficult to attract students to interview who were seemingly unengaged with their studies.

For my research, I wanted to explore further the ways in which rich multi-media can offer an alternative to the classroom for the individual student. I also want to find out about individual attitudes to ICT, and a questionnaire or field experiment such as the cases above would not address my research aims. However, the multi-method approach does have strengths in that it assists the researcher to explore the student responses in a variety of ways, and thus there is an ability to triangulate the data. Nonetheless, there is a shortage of research that has really explored how students' life histories influence their engagement. The next section explores research methods from related fields that enable some of the difficulties in the studies above to be overcome.

Research Methods

Having explored the differing kinds of methodological approaches that typify studies in ICT, there seems to be a dearth of studies taking a narrative approach. My study involves talking to my own students, and one must be mindful about the power dynamics within this relationship. A reflexive stance will assist, but in terms of the interview itself, given my student body is diverse, from mainly lower socio-economic groupings and given my concern with silence, the approaches in my own field are not sufficient. In this section I will draw upon the work of two studies from outside my area, in which the writers have had to grapple with issues of power and authority.

Willis (1977) and his study of working class boys is a sociological study, and an example of a researcher being 'involved' with the group and trying to understand the phenomenon of growing up in a working class area. The research follows different boys in their struggle to create their own identities, and offers excellent insights into how the researcher can make a valuable contribution to knowledge despite building a personal relationship with the individuals being studied. Indeed, it is the personal interaction that builds confidence and trust and thus the boys are prepared to offer greater insights into how they view their world.

The work of West (1996) is useful in taking forward interpretations of the student narrative. The research project explores issues raised by mature learners accessing higher education. West's project started with a literature review, and a pilot phase was designed to clarify various conceptual, methodological and ethical issues in the study (West 1996, p.25). The pilot phase consisted of seven interviews with students and sought to clarify themes to be explored more extensively in the main phase of the project. The project draws upon the narratives of the students and highlights the impact their fragmented life history has upon the student and their experience of returning to learning as a mature adult.

The team visited several colleges as part of the familiarisation process, and selected past or present access students for invitation to interview. All seven preliminary interviews were transcribed and discussed by the research team, and the quality of the analysis was excellent across the data set. The analysis from the West project team reflects my own findings - that there is not a simple linear progression towards confident alternative identities as a student, rather a sense of education provoking ambiguous consequences (West 1996, p.25).

These kinds of study demonstrate that it is indeed possible, with careful consideration, to work with, and draw upon the experiences of people that the researcher knows, (for example Willis worked with the boys for a period of time; West subsequently taught many of the students he interviews). The researcher drawing upon a relationship adds value to the accounts in the interpretations; and the final outcome gives us a rich picture of how others view and make sense of their own world and the world being researched by the outsider.

Interviews as a method

Having argued that a phenomenonological study is most suited to address my research aims, the justification of method will be addressed in this next section.

A return to the literature and the work of qualitative writers provided more insight into the interview process, and I realised that to explore student attitudes further, a semi-structured approach would offer the possibility of more avenues to explore with the student. Selecting the students from a more carefully determined framework would, I hoped, answer some of the issues raised by Mason (2001, p.87-88):

> "If you decide for intellectual or pragmatic reasons, to treat people as your sampling units, you will need to ask yourself whether the ways in people are classified are relevant and useful to you in your sampling. So, for example, how useful and meaningful are conventional classifications, which use characteristics or 'attributes' such as age, gender, ethnicity or social class? Whatever your view, you must ask yourself what it is that you think these kinds of classification represent, or what you see them as standing for...You may of course reject the idea of characteristics or attributes and develop more sophisticated classifications based on, for example the division of social existence into types, themes, experiences or instances. However, you still need to begin to engage with the question of how far these can or should be conceptualised as variables for analytical purposes, since you may be creating a different set of variables rather than rejecting the notion of variable labels altogether. Although this is a question which relates more directly to your analytical than your sampling strategy the two are in fact closely tied up together so that you cannot effectively sample without having some ideas about data analysis."

The students invited for interview were all students studying subjects with me. As I was their lecturer, this raised issues of power, control and authority that will be addressed within the study. This study introduces the approach of Rowlands, West and Willis, and it is within this reflexive tradition that the work of this thesis is situated.

As with any empirical work, a number of routine ethical issues had to be considered (http://www.bera.ac.uk/. Accessed 17/10/05). I finally decided to ask each student agreeing to be interviewed to sign an ethics form (see appendix A). This form very simply explained the research I was undertaking, stated that their names would remain anonymous, and that the tapes would be destroyed upon the conclusion of the research project. The form also explained, as I did verbally, that at any point during the interview, the student would be free to withdraw, and at that point the tape would be returned to them.

However, the reflexive, biographical approach employed also raised some specific concerns. To fully appreciate the richness of the narrative from the students, the reader needs to visualise the student interviewees as 'real' people. Equally, the students had been assured that their names would not used in any text drawing upon their interviews. A strength of this work, is undoubtedly the mix of students from very diverse backgrounds, ethnic origins and differing life experiences. Therefore, to personalise the interviews, yet to protect identity, the interviewees have been given real names, drawn from a list of typical names characterising that person, their country, and their culture.

My study is looking at particular issues for particular students - generalisations may or may not be possible after the process. Ascribing meaning, therefore, to the student responses is going to be a key issue in developing understanding about the contexts within which students engage. Looking to a package such as SPSS where common themes would be identified or ascribed would perhaps identify overarching issues to conceptualise. Even utilizing a software qualitative package such as Nvivo would follow the approach where certain words, themes and patterns may be ascribed to interviewee responses. This approach draws upon a positivist framework for analysis. It may be that seeking difference and incongruence offer a greater insight.

The tutor as researcher

Rowland is largely concerned with the process of interaction and reflection. Attempting to investigate the quality of such processes amongst a group of people or in a one-to-one tutorial is difficult. Much of what is thought and felt "never reaches the surface of speech". (Rowland, 1993, p.11).

For Rowland, the central dilemma is:

> "In a situation where little direction is given, those who require more structure are likely to latch on to almost any intervention on the part of the tutor as a directive or an opportunity to provide structure. This can make it impossible for the tutor to intervene as a co-learner for, upon any attempt to do so, she or he is forced back into the traditional leadership role. On the other hand, if the tutor does not intervene, this is likely to appear manipulative, since the tutor is deliberately withholding knowledge and experience. Such a course of action (or non action) contravenes an implicit norm of openness, while at the same time can make participants feel that there is a hidden agenda which is not being shared by the group" (Rowland, 1993, p.46).

Rowland (2000) discusses the concept of an "ideal speech community" where a learner cannot be empowered until conditions are created in which each is free to communicate sincerely and honestly, undistorted by the influences of power. A model to develop the resources for learning is suggested, in which each have a part to play:

The public context (knowledge from different disciplines)
The personal context (knowledge from different teaching experiences)
The shared context (knowledge of the present process)

Thinking through some of the issues of power relations within the classroom, the ideal situation where the student will be able to communicate to the lecturer on an equal basis seems unlikely as "contributions as tutor were inevitably given special value" (Rowland 2000, p.66). And if Rowland, writing about teaching and researching with small groups of adult educators

undertaking Masters level study at an 'old' university has such difficulties with power relations, what might it be like designing an empirical study with an undergraduate group of students at a 'new' university? As Rowland acknowledges, "education is value laden" (op.cit., p.45). The relationship of a tutor undertaking research with her own students will require careful structuring and there will be implications for the research design of the empirical work for the thesis, and the methodological stance, as both reflective (private practice) and reflexive practice (practice shared with one's community) will have to be considered. Tenni, Smyth and Boucher (2003, p.5), talking about the researcher as autobiographer, suggest that a willingness "to see, confront and discover oneself in one's practice and to learn from this is at the core of this work and central to the creation of good data". The principles of this paper will apply in my data gathering and analysis, given that I will be drawing on my own field notes and impressions of students to assist the selection process.

Differing approaches to interviews

Silverman suggests that a constructionist model is one which encourages researchers to focus upon how particular phenomena are put together through the close study of particular behaviour (Silverman, 1991, p.304). Constructionists are interested in documenting the way in which accounts offered by the interviewee are part of the world they describe. A constructionist approach to interview preserves a concern for what Silverman (2001, p.97) terms 'what interviewees are saying as well as how they get to say it.' This approach is useful as it can in part challenge the criticism of the research interview, where, "it assumes too easily that an interview is an unproblematic window on psychological or social realties, and that the 'information' that the interviewee gives about themselves and their world can be simply extracted and quoted" (Wengraf, 2001, p.1). A criticism of the constructionist approach is the deliberate narrowness of its focus, in that this is, in fact, what Holstein and Gubrium (1997) term an emotionalist position. Emotionalist interviewers are concerned with the lived experience, and their

aim is to access emotions by describing respondents' inner experiences, by encouraging interviewers to become emotionally involved with their respondents and to convey their feelings to both respondents and readers (Silverman, 1991). Reason and Rowan (1981, p.205) describe situations where, "Interviewer and interviewee are becoming 'peers' or even 'companions'". The emotionalist approach has to be firmly rejected in terms of the student interviews undertaken as part of this research study, as it is not possible for me, as lecturer/researcher to overcome the barriers of power and status with students I have taught for a full semester. Therefore, I require a method that enables me to access life stories or narratives from my students, without crossing ethical boundaries by becoming a peer or companion to them.

Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method

Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) draws upon the German school of thought from the early 20th century and is a particular method used to draw out the "stories" or narratives from interviewees' lives (Wengraf, 2001). What is of interest to the researcher is what the interviewee selects to tell us, and the way in which the story is told. The interview is structured such that the interviewee has the time and space to develop their own narrative contribution. The interview transcripts are then interpreted through a microanalysis of the lived life, with the aim of encapsulating the 'part' of the transcript, as representative of the whole interview. Thus, the Biographic Narrative Interpretative method (BNIM) method starts from a 'deliberately narrow position' that interview data are only about a particular research conversation that occurred at a particular time and place.

The BNIM approach, Wengraf (2001) suggests, limits counter transference, which is the emotional reaction of the interviewer to the interviewee's subject matter. The BNIM method has a key advantage for interviewing participants known to the interviewer, as it can, in part, address issues of power relationships. Thus, this particular interview method recognises that power relationships do exist, and sets out a robust framework within which

the researcher invites the participant to set the agenda, and by staying silent yet demonstrating empathy, encourages narrations of the participant's choice. The interview method of three 'parts' enables the researcher to stand apart from the interview emotionally and therefore examine power as a topic in its own right.

Each session (interview) is divided into three 'parts'; the first is introduced by a single question aimed at inducing narrative (SQUIN). In the second part of the interview, the interviewer paraphrases key themes back to the interviewee and elicits further explanation. The latter stage of the interview is where the interviewer's agenda comes in; in my research, this involved asking specifically about the student's experience of online learning.

In this research, at the beginning of the interview, participants are invited to talk around carefully constructed open-ended questions. These are carefully worded to induce narrative, or as Wengraf (2001) explains, to elicit a 'story' which may offer an opportunity for more interpretative analysis. In the BNIM method, interview analysis focuses upon the 'story', and this tends to account for around 30% of what is said in a typical interview lasting in excess of an hour. It was hoped that more careful attention to interpretation would offer deeper understanding of the phenomenon of my classroom.

The first part of the interview is perhaps the most important, as it gives the interviewee time and space to narrate life stories that are meaningful to them. The SQUIN is used as a starting point, after which the interviewer is, in the main, silent. This is, for most of those new to this approach, quite uncomfortable, and a key aspect is learning not to intervene. Thus the only focus is on the interviewee and their contribution. This space helps the interviewee to tell their own story in their own words, and thus the power dynamic within the interview moves toward the interviewee. The 'SQUIN' I used for my interviews was:

> "I am interested in your experiences of learning. Please tell me about your educational experiences, both good and bad, and the people and things, inside and outside formal education that have affected your life... Start wherever you like... I will just listen, I won't interrupt..."

Thus, the BNIM method offered an approach to both interview and analysis that would draw out the student's experiences and offer insights into the phenomena I am exploring. The approach draws upon aspects of ethnography such as use of description and a high level of detail; telling a story "informally" as a storyteller; exploring cultural themes of roles and behaviour; description of "everyday life of person"; and finally interpreting through a format that is descriptive (case study of each person, analysis and interpretation). The full context of the interview and interviewee, utilising tape transcripts, are considered through both interviewee and 'researcher-self' (Coffey, 2003, p.131, cited in May, 2003) where the personal narrative of the researcher has formed part of what has been told, collected and (re)presented in the research and writing process. The transcriptions are complete to give the fullest possible potential for analysis; so, for example, pauses, participant's "errms", "ahs" and so on are included, as it may be possible to derive most interpretation from extracts following a point in the interview where time has been used by the participant to frame an exact response. The Wengraf method of identifying text 'chunks' was followed by sorting text into 'description', 'argumentation','reporting', 'narrative' and 'evaluation'. The narrative extracts are the focus for interpretation.

Having transcribed the interview in full, the next stage is interpretation. The BNIM method for interpretation has worked successfully for many social policy issues (Chamberlayne et al, 1999, 2000). In some cases, a team of researchers has begun by undertaking blind 'chunking' of data extracts. This works by developing multiple hypotheses and alternative ways of predicting the next text section. A key recommendation of the approach is to 'always try to work with others' as the individual can easily slide back into their 'defensive self'. Wengraf (2001) suggests that as we all have blind spots, we work with others

who will challenge our assumptions. I followed the BNIM approach to sorting and selecting the narrative extracts for analysis, then more traditional coding for the interpretative work, which was carried out as an individual, because this research project is not funded externally. I was, however, able to use my supervisor and a research students' forum as a 'sounding board'.

Protocol for empirical research

To summarise, the protocol for the empirical research will be as follows:

Pilot Study

The 'Rainbow Diagram' is explored through the pilot study, where interviews with 'Muhanned' and 'Abeeku' failed to shed any light on reasons for these students' engagement. All it did was show the patterns of their engagement and non-engagement with the course learning environments - face-to-face and online. The linear basis of the model suggested students at either end of the spectrum would be useful to provide insight into the student experience. This was limited to the visibility of the online engagement. Abeeku was not visible and preferred his books, whereas Muhanned was clearly visible in all learning environments. However, both were engaged with the course topics. The interviews were semi-structured, and only offered limited scope for analysis in terms of the research aims. The result of this pilot indicated that a different method would be needed to address more fundamental issues in this research, namely, how it is that students construct their identities as learners.

Study One: Use of face-to-face, classroom and online teaching

This study sought to build on the work of the pilot by exploring the experiences of three very different students taking the course. In order to do this, I followed the Wengraf (2001) approach to glean information that would be useful from a researchers point of view context. To address these issues, I wanted to find out how students viewed their online and face-to-face

interactions, to illustrate some of the complexities of student engagement/non-engagement with the course in its various environments. This study offered insights from interviews with 'Kwame', 'Charles' and 'Juanita' into the student experiences of time and space, the focus of the second research question. The three interviewees had their own stories to narrate, and the interpretation of events drew from the concepts of social constructivism, where each person in the 'story' has their own way of constructing reality. The issues about power and authority remained a concern, and thus, when selecting participants to be interviewed, students were not approached until they had finished my course, received their results and commenced their study on subsequent university courses. The interview sampling framework and interpretative method were revisited in this study, and more consideration was given to placing students invited for interview in the revised sampling framework. Sampling included using the field notes to identify students who model behaviour change. I initially selected students that had not taken part in the online assessment activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the three students I identified as being suitable for interview in the latter category had failed the module, and they did not respond to my requests. The first contact was by email, written in an informal manner inviting the student for an interview. This was followed by the email being printed and posted to their home address with a hand-written request for an interview at a place and location of the students choosing. I then wrote a letter requesting an interview, to no avail. The power and authority issues I have been addressing throughout the research really became a focus at this point, as I am seeking to interview students who have had their final module assessment results, and have no reason to wish to take part in a research project. I had no power or authority over them now, and they exercised their own choice by deciding not be interviewed.

Quadrant A Students engaging online, and engaging face-to-face 'Charles' takes the course as a 'virtual' student	Quadrant B Students engaging online but not face-to-face 'Juanita' more confident online than in the classroom
Quadrant C Students NOT engaging online, but engaging face-to-face 'Kwame' unable to access the materials	Quadrant D Students NOT engaging online, and NOT engaging face- to-face 'no volunteers'

Figure 6.2: Revised sampling framework

Thus power and the role of tutor were part of the difficulties experienced with getting certain groups of students to participate in the study. As a result, the methods were refocused away from semi-structured to the biographic narrative interpretative method (BNIM), following this approach through to analysis. Of particular relevance to my own research is the attention paid in this method to the researcher's own conceptual frameworks and to constant refining and clarifying of the research question. It also has the advantage that much of the interpretation can be carried out after the event. It is the single interview given at one point in time that is significant, not a series of interviews undertaken at different points in time. Finally, this is a very engaging and rewarding approach in that the interviewer encourages "stories" from the interviewee, and gives the interviewee time and space to talk about issues broader than, and not confined to, the teaching experience itself. This modified approach (developed more fully in Chapter 7 and 8) illustrates some of the key issues facing students, and articulates their experiences in a way that is meaningful to them - in the phenomenological tradition.

The student voice coming through in Chapter Seven, where students retell their experiences of the classroom within their lived experience, gives a real insight into the experiences of students and how they relate to the concepts of time and space. However, these students were very much pushed towards using the time and space within the assessment design of the curriculum by the tutor, where a weekly task was set. The study did not address how and when an individual student would select and choose to study, within their own lifestyle constraints. Thus, a further study was devised where students who were new to the university and had not yet developed their own studying strategies were interviewed.

Study Two: A blended learning approach

This subsequent study helps to address the final research question, which considers the implications for tutors in curriculum design and development within the online learning environment, given our improved understanding of the student experience. The biographic-interpretative interview method is at the heart of the interviews and subsequent analysis. The whole seminar group was invited to be interviewed; this was because, in the previous studies, the students who would have been most interesting to talk with declined to take part. This alternative approach made the research process more transparent to the students, which resulted in a much higher level of participation. Appointments were made with 11 students, of whom eight attended and were interviewed. Of these eight, three were selected for detailed analysis because this is the number recommended in the BNIM approach; these particular three were chosen because they offered the greatest contrast in terms of background, experiences and approaches to study.

The year one student experience is seen through the narratives of 'Nyela' from Somalia, 'Joanne' from a second generation African family and 'Marco' from Italy. The narrative is of interest because a blended learning approach of classroom teaching and multi-media was offered to the students, and the

findings from these final interviews offer insights into the final research question. As tutor, I did not get to know these students as well as I knew the third year students, and thus it is interesting to hear their frank narrations as to their experiences. These interviews and the subsequent analysis, take us in a full circle back to the political policy considerations outlined in Chapter One. The experiences of Nyela, Joanne and Marco are the focus for the analysis in Chapter Eight.

Summary Interview Schedule

To provide an overview of the data collected, the following tables summarise who was interviewed for each of the studies, where this is discussed in the thesis, the length of the discussion and the approach taken to the analysis of the data.

Pilot Study (reported in Chapter Five)

Participant	Method	Interview Time	Analysis
Abeeku	Semi-structured interview	45	Coffey (1996)
Muhanned	Semi-structured interview	25	Coffey (1996)

Study One (reported in Chapter Seven)

Participant	Method	Interview Time	Analysis
Charles	BNIM	60 minutes	Wengraf (2001)
Juanita	BNIM	50 minutes	Wengraf (2001)
Kwame	BNIM	45 minutes	Wengraf (2001)

Study Two (reported in Chapter Eight)

Participant	Method	Interview Time	Analysis

Nyela	BNIM	55 minutes	Wengraf (2001)
Joanne	BNIM	35 minutes	Wengraf (2001)
Marco	BNIM	50minutes	Wengraf (2001)

General issues across all the studies

The role of the tutor-as-researcher remains an unresolved issue throughout the empirical work, and the implications of this are discussed as part of the methodological implications in each of the empirical chapters. The selection of students is a key aspect in any pedagogic research project, and student participation in terms of both selection for interview and willingness to be interviewed has been of concern. This has led to an evolving strategy to identify students that would meet with the objectives of the second research question, "To determine an appropriate methodology that will enable the study of individual students from a diverse student body, with regard to their use of online learning."

Conclusions

In this chapter I have established an epistemological basis for the research, and located the research approach within the phenomenological paradigm. Differing interview approaches have been explored, and a rationale for using the biographic narrative interpretative method put forward. The role of the tutor-as-researcher has been highlighted as a possible weakness in the research approach; however, by taking a reflexive stance when interpreting and analysing the interviews, this concern is addressed. Given the power relationships within the tutor-student interview, concerns will remain throughout the research, and be addressed more fully in the discussion chapter.

When students clearly have very different experiences of engagement within courses, this raises the question of how best to design curricula so that students who are confident and experienced in one setting are enabled to participate fully in this new context. This is a key aspect of the research question addressed in this thesis. Thus, the empirical work is based on a series of interviews with students at different points of their studies. The pilot study is based on narratives from two interviewees, one from each end of the Rainbow diagram model (Figure 5.1). The analysis of the interviews found that a linear model to explain student engagement with course materials, both online and in the classroom, was too simplistic, and led to a re-defining of the linear model to a two-dimensional sampling framework for the first study. In the first study, three students were selected for interview, and their narratives form Chapter Seven. Both the pilot and first study focus narrowly on the student experience in a specialist third year module, and this narrowness is arguably a weakness in trying to assess the applicability of the concepts developed in different settings. The concepts developed from the analysis of transcripts from the pilot and first study are developed further in the subsequent study, where three students share their experiences of attending university for the first time, and as such offer insights into how useful the concepts of time and space are for differing students in differing groups.

A full cross case analysis can be found in Chapter Nine.

Chapter 7

Study One: Face-to-face, classroom and virtual teaching & learning

In this first study I have selected three participants studying a specialist third year module, International Purchasing. Charles is a professional student who usually attends University on a day-release basis, and in this instance, negotiated to study the module on a completely 'virtual' basis as his recent promotion involved significant overseas travel. Juanita is an overseas student who attended regularly and took advantage of the blended learning as well as face-to-face provision. Finally we meet Kwame, who is attending the University to obtain a Higher Diploma in Purchasing and Logistics, and he will study eight specified 'business' modules within one academic year to attain his Diploma. The format for analysis follows that from the literature review - after a short introductory biography, I will move on to interpret the interviews by theme - learning, technology and space.

Charles - confident in his work and study

Charles is a white middle class student in his early thirties, and a feature of this analysis is his strong self-identity. He is confident in his abilities both as a worker and as a student, and transfers skills from one arena to the other. In terms of negotiating his own time and space to study, he is prepared to work hard and effectively in the comfort of his own home, where he can shut out the world. His language reflects the Thatcherite notions of success and the reward of the individual, and indeed he would have grown up with this philosophy in his formative early 20s, before the Labour landslide victory in 1997. Middle class values of deferred gratification and the commercial values of the professional in industry can explain in part his determination to succeed and his view of the educational process as a series of tasks to be undertaken. He sees himself as an excellent student and applies terms that

classify the other students in terms of a measure of success or failure on a sliding scale.

Learning

Learning and 'self'

Charles displays independent learning characteristics by minimal contact with the lecturer - only checking when there is a query he is concerned with. He displays white middle class confidence in his own ability to negotiate with the lecturer an alternative teaching mode that is not available by strictly following rules. The communication process meets his needs, and he is satisfied with this. Reasonably good is good enough; he does not see the need to have an excellent communication process - communication is two ways and he is satisfied with the support he is getting, yet knows that there is still untapped support from the lecturer should this be needed. This approach suggests an economy of effort, which reflects the business world in which Charles operates.

Charles is pragmatic and determined to succeed in the group coursework for his studies. A significant incident is narrated by Charles, when, as part of the course, he is required to work with two other students on a piece of work. Power and control of the situation is initiated by Charles and accepted by Andrew, another part-time student attending the class on a day release basis. These two students accept they must have the third person, who clearly does not have their experience of work. The response initiated by Charles is to collude with Andrew to perform well, despite having the third group member. They are content to let the third student have a free ride so the 'group' succeeds. They choose to model the world of work's team working approach to solving the perceived problem of including the young student. The 'task' must be accomplished at any cost. Other options were of course possible - a mentoring or coaching relationship may have been beneficial to the triad, or to encourage the young student to share in the views and experiences of the working students. It may be possible that this approach was adopted;

however, Charles also comments that early efforts on work provided by the young student were "late", and by implication thereby had no value to him.

Charles talks about others with an emphasis on difference - mainly the differences he perceives between himself and the other students. "It was interesting seeing the difference in general world view between the younger and older students...some younger students were a bit naïve I think". He explores issues of teaching and learning in a similar vein: "the seminar its notionally an hour long and by the time everyone gets in gets settled and you end up getting put in groups where you have 5 people and 3 of them aren't interested." Noticeably Charles does not see himself as one if these implicit timewasters, and wouldn't categorise himself as a non-interested participant. Throughout the interview, he uses scores to categorise 'good' and 'bad' learners, thus drawing upon the competitive business arena and applying this to his learning forum. He has high expectations himself, and is intolerant of others who do not meet and share his expectations.

Learning and 'others'

To create groups online, Charles explains, "I think it would be easier for the top end of the group to make those kinds of calls (forming groups online) than the bottom end. If you left it to the students' devices then the lower end of the group would be excluded from that I think. The top 10% would be able to form themselves into sensible groups who could work together." Talking like this about people means that Charles is looking at the student group from his viewpoint, where there are winners and losers and these can be measured. The educational process of the whole group is not considered, neither is the experience of working with diverse groups valued. He has assumed that top 10% of students categorised by him would reflect his ethos and values, and thus it would be easier for Charles to work with students drawn from this pool. Charles clearly positions himself in the top 10%, and is confident to assert this during the interview. There is an assumption that lower groups by this measure are in some way lacking, and that it is here that the teaching staff may have to become involved in group formation. Charles puts a high

value on student autonomy for those that are explicitly at the top of the group. He thus puts a high value on his own autonomy to negotiate and work the educational process in line with strategies that clearly work for him in the world of work. Charles is implying a normative, competitive orientation to assessment.

Charles is able to draw upon his work experiences to ensure he is able to gain the high grades he considers he deserves. Charles himself sees value in setting goals and working hard to achieve these goals. Charles can be seen to be ruthless in his quest to succeed and utilises in his studies 'hard' commercial skills that would be valued in the workplace. This is illustrated by his comments on group work. By rationalising he is thus able to justify to himself, and to his colleague, the ruthless exclusion of the third (younger student) from the group assessment process.

> "The third person, to be honest, it was, it's difficult really without being critical but he was young and he didn't have a clue. We decided between us that actually there's no real contribution to either pieces of work. He had a free ride...and no disrespect I can't even remember his name, but looking at practical examples both assessments have to use a company as a case study. I used mine and SI used his. Its difficult to bring a third party into that and have them make a sensible contribution because they don't know anything about the way companies work. ...and the small amount we did sort of getting to pull together earlier on, was always late. I find it easier to do a piece of work on my own...."

Despite trying to justify this solution by saying "without being critical" and "no disrespect", Charles goes on to be both extremely critical and extremely disrespectful, claiming that the third group member "hasn't a clue" and has no idea "about the way companies work." The young student is disempowered and left with very little option than going along with the older, more experienced group members. The young student, however, does not try to change the arrangements, and may indeed see value in tagging along as a non-performing third, as the reward would be a share in the good marks on the basis of the work of the other two group members.

Technology

Charles is aware of his privileged position, and explains that he has an advantage because he is working and has the money to buy textbooks, "even when they're not essential." There is a sense of privilege from the resources Charles has access to in his home environment, and privilege is a reoccurring theme. Field notes show that email was this student's main mode of contact. Charles used a telephone call as initial contact, and we agreed that email would be best as Charles would be working abroad for prolonged periods of time. Emails were initiated by Charles to clarify information, elicit feedback on draft assignments and request feedback and provisional grade information after marking.

Charles draws upon the traditional teaching/learning expectation, where there is an expectation of the teacher providing material for the student. He very much appreciated that the material was structured in a way that he could make sense of and use outside the traditional teaching location of the classroom. Charles would have preferred to be able to come to classes - and this is explained earlier in the interview where the student vocalises the reasons he is unable to attend, namely his career aspirations. Charles sees the lecturer/student relationship as partnership and views communication as the key to the learning experience, not the medium. He is more willing to take the risk of using technology online because he can 'fallback' on phone/email.

Surprisingly little is said about technology and use of technologies per se, a possible explanation could be the use of technology at this stage in a degree course is so embedded that comment is not explicit.

Space

Materially, Charles has negotiated space and time in the home, a settled environment within which to study. He has access to a lap top computer.

There is a feeling of physical space where notes can be spread out "as far as you can see". He feels free to make a mess at home. Internet access is also evident, as Charles would not select to work in an IT room at University, nor a quiet study area designated for student writing.

Later in the interview, Charles talks about how he works independently. There are clues to a privileged existence, which may be very different to that of other interviewees. His educational needs almost colonise his home life in terms of time and space. Here we have an example:

> "When you're at home you just get home from work, sit down and say 'this is where I need to be by the end of tonight' and you just sit down and you do it until it's done. And if it takes an hour or it takes to 4 in the morning depending how close your deadlines are, then that's what you do and you just get down and focus, and you can block the rest of the world out."

University space is definitely not of equal value to Charles, as he comments, "Whereas in the University, the IT rooms are generally ...quite noisy and there's no space to spread out and I'm a very messy worker. I sit there with my lap top in front of me and there's paper as far as you can see, in every direction." His use of home space and time means that he is able to set his own parameters for study time, and has all the necessary resources to assist him.

The home space does not have to be negotiated, and Charles is able to use his time to meet his own needs first. There is no evidence of a partner or family sharing this space, and it is noticeable in the transcript of the interview that Charles only talks about work and study, and these concerns frame the world that he constructs. Family and friends of Charles presumably share his values, as there are no concerns shared about having free time to work on his studies. There is a sense of privilege that echoes back to his perceptions of his power in terms of the rest of the world, issues of power, authority and control.

Summary

Charles and his experience of the course reflect some of the key themes from the literature. Power, the role of the tutor and eroding time and space dimensions in terms of his study were themes that emerge strongly. What is interesting in the interview, and unexpected, is his colonisation of his own space, where the home space is allocated using work-based principles. Here we see for the first time a different perspective on the erosion of time and space theme. We can conceptualise space in the home in terms of bringing work-place power to bear in the home environment. Further, Charles can marshal the resources he needs to enable learning; we see a work-place competitive character being competitive in his approach to group tasks with 'others'; we see him challenging the inclusive approach modelled by the lecturer. There is an innate honesty in this interview, and this leaves us feeling we know much more about how Charles perceives his world.

To summarise, we can conceptualise Charles in terms of his strong work ethos. He is used to negotiating with employers (his promotion) his lecturers (doing the courses remotely) and his partner/friends/family (giving him space, physical and mental). The latter are encouraging him to study now for reward in the future. Skills that he has developed in the workplace are evident in his attitude to study - time management skills, handling deadlines skills, a focus on the task, shutting out the rest of the world. This may reflect a masculine style of identity in a world where the male is still rewarded as the main income source within the household.

Kwame - "It was horrible"

The following case follows the experiences of Kwame, a black male student from Ghana, who came to the UK to study a one-year post graduate Diploma. As Kwame tells his story, we find this is one of overcoming challenges, and finding alternative strategies to solve his problems without engaging with those he perceives as 'in authority'. He uses friends and family to help him

make sense of an alien new world - coming from Ghana to study in the UK, he finds settling into UK life difficult. Because he starts classes late, Kwame experiences difficulty in making sense of the online component of the learning. In this interview, he puts a high value on the technological drivers of the course, and this is reflected through his explanations of his country, and its need to move forward with technology. It is reflected also in his previous study experience - Kwame has (on paper) computing and IT skills, but the explanation of how this is taught in higher education in Ghana (in large classes of 70, where students were offered theory but limited access to machines) offers insights into how important he personally values access to this scarce commodity. Finally, this interview offers an insight into the role of the assistance of a more experienced friend, and can offer a conceptual framework to help to explain how this man has come to succeed on his own terms.

Field notes indicate he was a student that started late. He first attended class in the fourth teaching week, and at the end of his first class, I had talked him through the module booklet, explained about the supporting site and suggested he go to the Learning Centre to access a copy of the textbook before the next session. He had approached me at the end of the following week about online logins, and I had given him a sheet detailing the University systems, and reiterated my office hours and availability if any problems occurred. Kwame was selected for interview as a 'non-engaged' student as his attendance was sporadic, he did not engage online and never spoke in seminars when present. He did not respond to the email and subsequent requests for an interview in the February, despite attending University until his course was completed in June.

Kwame decided to stay in the UK and gain some work experience after his studies, and approached me for a job reference, and I asked him to bring his CV along the next week. After careful consideration about the ethics of pressuring a participant into an interview situation, I then emailed and asked if he would mind talking a little about his experiences of the course when we

met, and emphasised he would have his reference whether he agreed or not. When we met I then completed his reference, and then explained my study to him, and he agreed to stay for the interview.

Learning

This interview was unique, in that when I first opened with the Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN), the response from the student came straight back immediately, with no pause for thought:

> "It was horrible. It was very, very horrible because I didn't know anybody in this country. It was just a family friend I know in Milton Keynes and you can imagine coming down from Milton Keynes to London as a new guy, the whole thing looked very strange and confusing. So basically the first week I found myself keeping on asking people a lot of questions. I didn't know anything at all. So in the first weeks it was horrible and I also came late. I was a bit late, about 3 weeks late, so when I came the program had already started so I had to force myself into the program."

Later in the interview, I probe further: "Can you give me any examples about, you said you had a very horrid experience, is there anything particular where you really felt 'I could just pack up and go home now?' Was there any particular point?"

> Kwame: "Yes, why I can't synchronise transport. I don't know the transport system and where I was living was very far from the university so that was the first thing and apart from that the system, especially the computer system in Ghana, it wasn't like that. So when I came here and everything was about a computer and everything was about the technology. It was quite new to me so that was a bit of a problem."

Kwame uses very emotive words in this extract. I ask him about his first couple of weeks "here" which could be interpreted either as the UK or the University. Kwame talks about "horrid" in terms of space - a long way from the University, in terms of not knowing anyone, in terms of starting the class

late. He talks about "forcing" himself into the programme, and this seems to be very difficult for him.

Learning and 'self'

Kwame chooses to share the story of his aspirations by travelling away from home, and we can see in the extract below he is acknowledging how he will have to move physically to achieve his career ambitions. There is a sense of 'others' achieving success, and Kwame wants to be part of this. It seems possible to do this at home, but not in a realistic timeframe. His decision to move is based on a desire to see what else he can do to help himself - there is no-one going to help him to pursue further education. He sees limited opportunities for progress at home, and thinks a new location, meeting different people and exposure to different ideas will give him a competitive edge.

> "I wanted a fresh idea and as well as that things were moving very fast in Ghana. People are learning now. A lot of people are going and achieving schools and qualifications and I thought why can't I pursue mine? If I'm meant to stay I will be here and it will take me a long time before I can achieve what I want to achieve here. So I decided to move, from Ghana in the first place, so I could see and what else the other part of the world in the further education field, what I can do to help myself. So that was basically the idea, to change the environment and to pursue further education in the field of purchasing."

Learning and 'others'

> "You came with the international purchasing, this online programme, I didn't know it. It was a new thing to me. I knew the answer but how to communicate it, it was a difficult problem."

Kwame talks here about his dilemma - he knows the answer, but not how to communicate this in the online environment. It is interesting that he internalises this as his own problem, and does not expect the tutor to work with him to solve this problem that is clearly impacting on his chances of a successful outcome to his studies. This can in part be explained by his previous education, of large classes, tutors explaining theory and not having resources to practice what is being taught. He seems not to expect (or

believe) that the tutor would want to assist him, despite the tutor modelling this practice in both lectures and seminars.

His expectations of the tutor are minimal - "You even gave me a sheet to go and look at and I used that one." When he remains baffled and confused by the course, he does not approach the tutor again, but looks, instead, to a friend he makes within the class - another male black African student attending in very similar circumstances. The friend acts as a coach to Kwame, by talking to him on the telephone while Kwame is on the Internet accessing the course.

He solves his problem by finding a friend. It is significant that this friend doesn't have to be physically present to provide the support Kwame needs, but the reassurance provided by the friend is fine, even though there is a physical space dimension between where Kwame is staying with the family friend, and the college friend from London. The technology itself is enabling Kwame to resolve his technological problems - having broadband and being able to use the telephone at the same time. In terms of self-confidence Kwame, as the interview is coming to a conclusion proudly announces: "and I have my own computer now".

This is a key achievement for him, and he is obviously delighted that he has moved from being a 'have not' in terms of power and control of the online environment (and hence power and control in other aspects of his life) to being a person that 'has'. Here he acknowledges this by stating "it is very simple to use if you know" and the knowing, for Kwame, is the achievement.

Kwame: "It's very simple to use if you know. I think that the way at the moment its technology driven so you have to get that technology, especially with the computer. We know it in Africa, in Ghana that it was good but we don't have it. We did not have access to it even though it was good. So basically that's it. Its very effective and easy to use and the speed it gives is nice and also you can learn a lot of things online and by use of the computer."

Technology

In terms of his previous experience, Kwame draws upon his previous course, studying computing at a local polytechnic in Ghana. He explains how the teaching is: "so we learn it, we can not actually practice it. We could not use the computer but we were taught to, we learn about use of the computer. We learn, we write, we learn, we write but having the access like what we have here, that was the problem."

I probe further, asking, "So for you really the technology was a barrier?" and Kwame's response reproduces the paradox of the student coming to the UK to study - he says "yes, even although it is good. In my circumstances it was quite difficult for me". Kwame acknowledges that being able to use a computer is an essential component of success, whether in the UK for study, or in Ghana to access work opportunities.

The power issues around the classroom experience are also an issue for Kwame. He starts by describing a little about what his classroom experience in Ghana was like for him:

> "Basically it was blackboard teaching. You go for lectures and then the lecturer would be there and writing and you would be following and he would be dictating for us to write."

In the classroom in Ghana, the tutor is firmly in control of the subject matter, and the student is expected to comply with the method of delivery and agree the context. Kwame's experience in the UK classroom is very different - he is expected to think through ideas on his own, to articulate these and post them online to discuss them with others. He values the ideas of online discussion groups, but experiences a real sense of frustration when he knows he has a contribution to make, but physically cannot access the site.

> "I was asking but I didn't understand it. You even gave me a sheet to go and look at and I used that one."

However, he does not see the tutor as in any way responsible for his problems, and the fact an extra information sheet was offered seems to be more than enough, even although Kwame is still unable to participate, and is also losing marks by not engaging with the online context. Kwame comes across in the interview as an intelligent, bright man with commitment, drive and the ability to succeed. However, in a large group, he is silenced - by the online course, which he cannot access; by the other students, who speak out in the lectures and seminars and ask questions of the tutor in a way he finds disrespectful; by the seminar time, where students are expected to work together in small groups - "and in Ghana we did not have seminars."

> "It was not new to me anyway because in Ghana we are about 70 in one class. So that was not new to me. I was trying to speak out, trying to see how they speak and how they understand the course and when I came I was quite quiet. I didn't know how to handle everything so I had to keep quiet and listen to people, how people deal in class and stuff like that before I finally got myself involved in it."

Space

"access to technology is a huge issue"

This is a really significant extract, as with these few words, Kwame is conceptualising the need for both his country (Ghana) and himself personally to succeed using IT. It is not just about IT for one teaching module, but IT for life. Kwame realises that being computer literate is important in life chances and choices, and unknown to the tutor, is working through alternative strategies to enable him to word process essays for all his classes, using Internet sources for research. He sees the computer not just as passive in terms of seeking information, but as interactive as he is now using it within a social context of 'talking to people'.

> "Then *****, my friend, he had knowledge in that area so he was the one who taught me how to do it. That was the time I got a computer as well and would talk to him while I was on the Internet. He would tell me where to go."

Kwame is delighted with his new IT skills. He talks enthusiastically about his own computer, and the fact he can now type and access the Internet through broadband. He now finds he can talk to people "and it is easy". He comments on his success using the computer for research work, and the fact he can access various types of websites, "So you can imagine it was good. It's very excellent."

I try to develop further the idea of merging time and space by using technology. Picking up on an earlier comment, I ask: "You know I had quite a comprehensive website up, would it have been useful to you. you said about coming 4 weeks early, if say I'd been able to send you a website and said 'Hello Kwame, welcome, this is a website, have a look at some things'. Would that have been useful to you?"

> "Obviously yes. It would be nice in the first place but how the person is going to understand it, it would be difficult because when I came they send me this underground map in Ghana but I didn't know how to read it. So its obviously going to be helpful but the other problem with it is how the person is going to understand it."

Kwame really touches on the essence of online technology, of breaking down time and space. He is open to the idea, but very carefully puts me in my place - all these ideas are fine, but using technology is only as useful as the ability of the receiver to understand and comprehend it. The tube map example conceptualises really well the time and space and understanding divisions between a well-meaning lecturer and a student coming from a background where theory is available, but practice impossible.

> "Its very simple to use if you know"

> "We know it in Africa, in Ghana that it was good but we don't have it."

These two extracts illustrate the significance of the power and influence of the computer, and can be interpreted as showing the importance of the computer both for him, Kwame as an individual, but also for his own country. The power of those that 'have' and 'don't have' access links into theories of globalisation, economic and political power and control. Hence time and space dimensions for Kwame in the home environment represent to him the freedom to work as he chooses, and the technology (PC and internet access, plus mobile telephone) enables him to access his friend and mentor when it suits him.

Summary

One of the most striking aspects of this interview are the huge inequalities in who has access to computers in the polytechnic in Ghana. In his own words, "we did computers in the first year and that was theory. So you can imagine and then when I finished the first year, the whole of the second year, no access to a computer, the whole of the third year no access to a computer and then when I finished it, I was about to come here, then we got computers. So all the things we were doing were manual. So when I came here the computer system was quite different and then how you enter the university you have to go and log into the system. All these things were a problem for me."

The power issues regarding IT are one aspect of Kwame's experiences in arriving in the UK. The frustration of having the theory of how to use a computer but finding that he is unable to transfer the knowledge and skills to practical use is evident. It takes time for Kwame to find his feet, and in an HE system where the teaching lasts for eleven weeks, this is not sufficient. Kwame scrapes through my course, incorrectly labelled as a disengaged student; and he succeeds despite any assistance I have offered him.

Juanita – a 'professional' student

Juanita is a Spanish student in her mid-twenties. Juanita has travelled extensively during her childhood, and a feature of her case is the rapid adjustments she has had to make in a series of different educational establishments in different countries. Juanita speaks four languages fluently, yet talks about struggles with learning languages in a school setting. This she explains as the type of teaching she was exposed to. Juanita has definite views about the role of the tutor, and articulates a childhood experience of humiliation in the classroom, which has influenced her attitude to study since.

As a young adult, Juanita views herself as a 'professional' student, professional in that she places a high value on the business experiences she can bring into the classroom from her paid work experience the previous year. She uses time management and IT skills to bring a sense of reality to her studies – as she says, "when people illustrate something by real life example or show me in which context I can make use of the things they want to teach me, then it interests me." Juanita has a particular way in which she prefers teaching and learning to take place, which is very much grounded in what she calls "real life".

Learning

Learning and 'self'

For Juanita, bringing a sense of the workplace into the classroom matches her preferred learning mode. Juanita considers the teaching approach offered in the International Purchasing class a particularly suitable medium for this matching to take place. The online tasks encourage her to develop her own ideas after considering the contributions made by other students. She also likes the more anonymous feeling of using an online discussion, "because sometimes you are not sure of your ideas. It's more anonymous on the internet." Juanita has found value in sharing ideas with other students using the online discussion board available from webCT. The time and space

dimension helped her reflect and think through her own ideas, and often this was at home, where she is more easily able to concentrate. The use of the online discussion helps her to think through her own opinion, and it seems less threatening than speaking out in class, because the internet is more anonymous. It is interesting that Juanita makes this point, as in common with all the other students; she put her name to her work before leaving the site. Being anonymous therefore can be conceptualised in terms of not being face-to-face with others, rather than being totally anonymous.

Juanita has definite ideas about the sort of person she is in academic terms, and is aware of her strengths in terms of types of preferred teaching style. "I'm not a very theoretical person and when people illustrate something by real life example or show me in which context I can make use of the things they want to teach me, then it interests me." This extract is significant because she narrates two 'stories' from her past learning where a lack of context in the teaching offered has caused her humiliation and failure. The first is when she is 14, and has to repeat a whole year in school because her English language is not at the required level. This sense of failure is compounded by the offer of a summer resit, when she had, "worked really hard and I still didn't make it because I just couldn't get English in my head. I just couldn't". The frustration of being unable to achieve is evident in both tone of her voice, and also in the repetition of the "just couldn't" phrase. The second example she chooses to share is after the family move to Brussels, and her mother writes a hand-written note to the teacher explaining why she has missed a day from school. "He was holding it in front of the class.. making fun of the fact it as handwritten, he was making fun of my Mum I hated French because of him."

Despite the series of setbacks, Juanita goes on to become fluent in four languages by the time she goes to University. The difference is, she says, the difference in language teaching at her International School, where there was a practical approach "and immediately my brain just said this is a real life experience and then I wanted to learn". She concludes by saying that she

thinks her teachers who made her repeat the whole year would be surprised that she actually did pick up languages.

Learning and 'others'

Juanita has a preference for working with others, particularly when the activity is not driven by assessment, for example a group of students preparing for a presentation. But she also forms study partnerships with friends for revision purposes. She was very interested in the online experience of the group discussion, and felt able to contribute online more confidently than in class.

> "I think it's also nice because you have a chat room. If you have a question you can always post it, like sometimes you don't know too many people from your course, it gives you a good opportunity to ask everyone for some sort of help. I think it's a really nice way of communication but not many teachers use it."

Here we can see that Juanita is viewing the online bulletin board not just in terms of a forum for discussion, but also from a social context. She is acknowledging that large lectures can seem big and impersonal, and there are limited opportunities to get to know fellow students. It is also interesting that she has the desire to get to know others, instead of just accepting the large, impersonal system offered by so many undergraduate module schemes. Asking for help is, of course a way to develop links with others, and could suggest that this is a strategy she has used in the past, with the myriad of moves, to forge links in new situations.

There is a compliment to the tutor as well, in the use of "nice" - it is "nice" to have a chat room, and it is a "really nice way of communication". This notion of 'nice' is clearly important to her, and as her narration unfolds, it becomes apparent that resources with this label are scarce - and her childhood experiences of learning indicate a paucity of 'nice' teachers.

Technology

Juanita appreciates many of the benefits of online learning resources. She finds it easy to log on and access the system, and indeed, had previously used webCT on a course at Bristol University. She likes the fact it is "already programmed for you". She appreciates the weekly online tasks: "the tasks were more useful because you always have a reading list. I don't think that too many students would follow the general reading list." For Juanita, the weekly task helped bridge the gap between the general reading list and reading for a particular assessment task. She found the weekly tasks fun, she liked going to lectures and contributing the bulletin boards - both in terms of reading other students' work and using this to think about her own ideas.

Juanita is keen to integrate her work experience into her academic studies. In doing so, she expects other students to defer to her expertise in preparing presentations, and as we see in the extract that follows, she is taken by surprise when this doesn't happen.

> "I stated that it was professional and again that it was 50% of the mark and they were like okay but we can't use it. I was really surprised. They didn't really know how to install the computer web thing, the technical bit but as well their computer skills. They just wanted to do slides and I think that's very unprofessional. I'm not saying that everyone was like that but 40% still don't know really how to do it in a professional way." (powerpoint presentation)

The above extract shows how effective collaborative working can be when it works well. Conversely, it also shows how difficult it can be for others in a group when things do not run smoothly. In terms of Juanita and her view of herself as the professional student, she is keen to demonstrate her skills learned in the workplace in a different context, and she thinks this will bring some reward in terms of an enhanced presentation grade for the group. Juanita is claiming power in group, her choice of words in starting this section is significant - "I stated" She is surprised at how few IT skills others have, even in preparing something as simple (to her) as a powerpoint presentation.

In this particular group setting, where the students were allocated to groups, instead of self-selecting, she is almost contemptuous of what she sees as the lack of professionalism in the other group members. For Juanita, a presentation has to be prepared in powerpoint, and anything else is "unprofessional", and the other group members are naïve by confining their efforts to slides for the OHP.

Space

Literature on female participation within study groups, and online groups in particular suggests there are still some issues for female students. In common with many female students, Juanita displays a reluctance to participate fully in oral discussions. Using web-based technology to help develop her ideas led to her becoming more confident in the classroom, the face-to-face environment. Her comment in the end of term evaluation (where students placed comments on post-it notes and stuck these to a poster on the way out of the classroom) said "It is one of the few classes in which I was actually talking because I felt confident."

One interpretation of her reaction to this particular class could be that the teaching style of the tutor very much matches her view of "real life" and the world of work. The course, designed for professional day-release students, appeals to her sense of self, her appreciation of a work-based context and also her appreciation of a 'nice' tutor who is encouraging and supportive.

Being physically present at a meeting is different from being physically present online - here we see how Juanita values messages posted by other students, and she acknowledges their contribution to developing her thinking before she ever posts her own opinions to the bulletin board area of webCT. Juanita appears to see this space as a professional or real life forum, and views student peers contributing to the bulletin board as 'professional' in their approach, despite the contribution being made at various times during the week running up to the discussion in class. There seems to be a

difference for her in terms of being present in class (where typically she feels unable to contribute) and an online discussion, which she terms as 'good'.

> "Its easy to go on the internet, post your opinion and finish but if you have to give your own opinion you don't just read through one, you read through a couple of them to have a good discussion...the opinion of other students really helped me to think. There were some great ideas."

Space issues can be analysed in terms of working with others and working on her own. The online material is viewed from different perspectives. Earlier, Juanita sees technology in terms of development of her own ideas, which includes drawing on the work of others. Here there is a much more social aspect to the online engagement, that of getting to know others on the course. "I think the chat room is also very useful because it's nice to know that people are there and can help you". Here Juanita engages with the idea that although the person isn't physically present, there is a virtual presence that provides reassurance - that people are there for her outside the usual teaching hours.

In terms of her own use of time and space, although she values groupwork, and enjoys studying with a friend, she freely acknowledges that she learns 'better' at home. "I'm more concentrated at home". This theme was echoed when a class was cancelled, and lecture notes and seminar activities were posted online, so attendance at the University was not required. This meets with Juanita ideas of use of space (hers) and also what she terms as 'professionalism' (mine).

> "....what was really very important for me was the professionalism"

Juanita uses comparisons to relate her experiences of teaching staff, and from the extract above she is relating her experience of this class to experiences with 'others', who presumably would cancel a class due to illness.

> "....the preparation for the class was still there the day before and this has never happened on another course... If a teacher doesn't turn up, he doesn't turn up."

For Juanita, her professional aspirations matched the teaching and learning approach offered by the course.

Summary

Juanita appears to have a mixture of positive and negative' in her relationships with others. There are 'good' friends and fellow students, who presumably share her 'real-life' approach to study, and with whom she is prepared to share time, effort and commitment to study. However, she is unequivocal about not working with other students because they do not share her values. Physically 'turning up' to meetings is a key part of commitment to study for Juanita, and not being present equates with unprofessional behaviour.

> "It really depends. If it's a good group like, for example, I'm learning with a friend and we are learning together, I know we can teach each other a lot because we prepare each other a subject and we teach it to the other one when we prepare for exams and it works really, really well. But, for example, I just had a group for a marketing project and I couldn't work with them because we just didn't agree and people didn't turn up."

To summarise, Juanita is modelling 'real life' and work values that are important to her in terms of success in her studies. She is a sociable, engaged student that enjoys her studies and is keen to do well. She has a need for learning experiences to be set in the context of 'real life' and where possible, within the work context. Her use of space can be seen as mastery of the home environment, and also mastery of the online space for both individual and social space for learning.

Thematic conclusions

There are fascinating similarities and differences displayed by all three interviewees. In terms of similarities, participant views of 'self' as a student

are constructed in part from their previous life experiences - and in the context of this study, the participants chose to define this in terms of educational background and working life.

Learning

The importing of work skills and values into the educational context shows a role for professionalism as a key theme for the participants in the study. Charles and Juanita both use their time management and organisational skills drawn from the workplace within their studies. Kwame is very keen to develop professional skills, with computer literacy as his priority, and it is of interest that the following semester he completed a successful research project with merit.

Technology

Differences are significant and offer an insight into these students' perceptions of what is distinctive about learning online. The use of the computer appears to be different from other teaching tools introduced into classrooms of today - for example, interactive whiteboard, video and PowerPoint have been very effective in transforming the environment within the classroom. However, access to IT outside the usual time and space in the classroom is changing the use of the learning tools described in this study, and arguably moving access to learning into the more personal context - which can be home based.

The use of the computer can be conceptualised in more than one set of ideas - participants do not merely see it as a tool amongst a range of others and as such as simply a part of teaching and learning. Their experiences draw in the contexts of other debates, such as power and authority, access to scarce resources, the role of the tutor, and also socially situated learning - where the computer is viewed as a tool of social engagement in a variety of contexts.

Space

Space constraints are not necessarily eroded across the variety of contexts for the three participants - an idea the study set out to explore. However, there is emerging evidence to suggest that control over one space seems to permit flexibility elsewhere. For all three participants, colonisation of their home environment seems to have an impact on their approach to study.

Implications for further study

Methodological issues raised from this chapter can be summarised as a continuing need to empathise with the student narrating their 'story', and giving them the time and space to continue to speak, even when it is obvious to both of us that issues raised are not those the interviewer would agree with. An illustration of this is when Charles is talking about how he and his colleague, both white, middle class men acknowledge that they have dis-empowered a young black student working with them. Charles is well aware that the interviewer has a different set of values and indeed, he had attended face-to-face lectures the previous year where an inclusive and supportive approach to group work had been modelled. This need to empathise also needs to take place when it becomes transparent that as 'the lecturer' my best has patently not been good enough, as we see in the way in which Kwame tells of his experiences. Issues of gender are also evident in the transcript with Juanita - with both interviewer and interviewee being female, and holding each other in shared high esteem, the interpretation of this interview was particularly difficult. Gender appears to play a role in this study, but is still not the main focus, since it (like ethnicity) is only one element in a complex biography that seems to influence students' actions. However, Juanita has raised significant issues that may be gender related. Is gender a factor in her preference for the anonymity that the web brings? Or can this be generalised for less confident students?

The participants in this study were all studying a specialist course at Honours level. As the interview analysis above indicates, I had made assumptions about the IT skills the student group would have, and how they would use these skills. To take this work further I now plan to focus on a year one group of new students, who would not yet be 'culturally indoctrinated' into higher education. I will aim to interview both male and females, and to include an appropriate ethnic mix to explore the issues further. A key aim would to explore further the social aspects of online learning, and the space constraints flagged up by this study. The following chapter will seek the views of particular individuals, drawn from a group of students who come into University as new entrants and are interviewed about their experiences in the eighth week of their course. The themes of Learning, Technology and Space for analysis will be carried through to this new case study.

Chapter 8

Study Two: The movement between spaces

The participants in Study Two were new entrants to the University, taking a core module: "Studying Marketing and Operations". The blended learning approach to the module enabled students to take part in a series of online activities leading up to a small group presentation. Lectures were offered each week to the whole group of more than 200 students. Seminars typically had 8-15 students and supported the lecture. Multi-media support was available online (http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/bssmquickstart. Accessed 1/09/05) and students were given a laminated business card with an image of the Quickstart project on the front and web address on the reverse (Holley & Dobson, 2005). Each of the online multi-media tasks was designed to lead small groups of three students through the process of familiarisation with the expectation of becoming an academic learner. By incorporating digital media elements, it was hoped that, "students would be able to learn better since they use multiple-sensory modalities, which would make them more motivated to pay more attention to the information presented and retain the acquired knowledge better" (Neo & Neo, 2005, p.52).

The module had a creative base involving an active field trip to a museum or art gallery in London. The chosen institute needed to be accessible by public transport as the university was spread over a wide geographical area. It also needed to have good online resources so that if a student joined the course after week 1 it would be possible to take part in the project remotely. It also had to have a free admission policy as many of the students are from low income families. The Tate Modern Art Gallery was chosen after the team visited a variety of institutes within central London. The Tate Modern encapsulated a new experience for most students, as many had no previous experience of visiting museums or art galleries (Holley, Dobson & Yau, 2005).

The Quickstart project was designed and developed using the macromedia suite of products including Dreamweaver MX, Fireworks MX and Flash MX. The Quickstart project was intended to be a web based resource enabling flexible access. As long as the student had access to a computer with an Internet connection they could use the web site at any time. However, developing a web-based resource immediately generates limitations and restrictions. There is compromise between low file size and good quality for graphics and page sizes. Fast download times are crucial for the user accessing the site (Holley & Dobson ibid).

The participants

Having experienced significant difficulties with Study One in talking to students who were not engaging with their learning, a different approach to selecting interviewees was needed. The blended learning approach offered in this core module, "Studying Marketing & Operations", made a complex model of selection unnecessary, in that all students had to engage with online materials in order to complete the assessments. My seminar group only had sixteen students, so I decided, after discussion with my supervisor, to be very 'up front' about my research project, and to invite all the students to take part in the interviews. This had the added advantage of having a wider selection of narratives. Thus the selection of cases followed the Wengraf technique of selecting interesting and different case studies.

The students in my seminar group were all invited to participate in the interview process, and appointment times agreed with eleven students out of sixteen. The seminar time was used one week to explain the rationale for the interviews, what would be asked, the interview process and to agree times with willing students. One student subsequently 'dropped out' of the University, and two students didn't make the agreed appointment time. However, the remaining eight students attended the interview to discuss their experiences of the blended learning course, and all were briefed in the same way as the participants in Case Study One in terms of taking part, freedom to

terminate the interview at any point, publication of selected comments on an anonymous basis, and that the tapes would be destroyed at end of the PhD.

Three students, Joanne, Nyela and Marco, were selected for analysis from the eight interviews. The remaining five were transcribed fully, read through, and discussed with the supervisor. The interview with Andrew was discarded as he was totally focussed on setting up his own business, and didn't answer questions posed in a meaningful way for this research. Diego was only available for interview after class on a day when building work was going on outside the window, and sections of the tape were extremely difficult to transcribe. This student was not willing to rerecord the interview. Rose was one of two working parents juggling a series of tasks with childcare, and although she had a similar profile to that of Joanne, I selected Joanne for analysis as she was experiencing a diverse set of circumstances and juggling her combined roles. The interview with Xin Qian was discarded as she came across as painfully shy, and answered each question in monosyllables, mainly yes or no and was unable to elaborate even with gentle prompting. The final interview to be discarded was with Manual, a Spanish student who was extremely articulate and confident. Reading the transcript, it was very similar to that of Charles in case study one, so for this reason it was discarded for this research.

Marco - giving up sleep to manage his study space

Marco is an Italian student who came to London for what he describes as "a new experience, new challenge." He has held down a number of jobs (office administration in Italy, hotel and bar work in London) and also studied to gain the ticketing qualifications needed to work in a travel agency in the UK. He is used to combining work and study, and is keen to attain his degree in England, as this holds a high status back home. It is noticeable how often he chooses to describe his life choices as a 'challenge', and he appears to enjoy planning for and overcoming challenges in his life, especially those linked to the educational context.

His interview characterises him as a man seeking new opportunities, who is willing to take risks with his career/education and gradually find a role that he is comfortable with. The extract below illustrates his ethos:

> "Marketing was one of those subjects that I wanted to study so I said I can start and see if I like it and I will stay or change in the next semester, so I started this new challenge."

He takes opportunities as they come along. For example with starting at the University, he attended an open evening, accepted the offer of a place, and started studying a degree within two weeks. "So I just went for it and see if I like it or not".

Learning

Marco is a confident risk-taker, as we can see from the extract below. He also is confident with managing his finances and he knows he has to both work and study fulltime.

> "I will try because actually I didn't even know if I had the time to manage between full-time work and full-time studying, so I wasn't sure if I could make it. So I said I would try for the first weeks and I saw that I could manage so I kept going."

Time management is an issue for him, as he has to continue to work to fund his studies. He is unable to spend time on the University premises to study. He prefers to study in his flat, where his flatmate also works shifts, so there is peace and quiet. He is very good at prioritising his work, and when he finishes his shifts in the bar, he can use the Internet there, and so regularly logs on and works between 1am -3am. His manager is keen for him to progress, and also allows him to use the Internet if there are any quiet periods during his shifts.

Marco values access to education in its broadest contexts, for example he completed the training for the travel agency flight system despite deciding

that this was not the career path for him. He worked in administrative post learning about accountancy in Italy before travelling to London. He has been employed in a hotel - an industry characterised by rapid staff turnover - for four years. He expected access to London Metropolitan course materials to match the ease with which he was accepted onto the course. In this he was disappointed. He expected more input and explanation from the staff as to how to maximise use of the University Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The barriers to access of technology do not last long, as Marco uses the skills he has developed from his previous work and study to practice and within a couple of weeks "I was using the system".

Technology

Technology at the University starts out by being a challenge, but Marco swiftly gets to grips with the technology he needs to progress. He is seeking out the information that is relevant to him as a student; it seems that technology is not the only issue a new student needs explained in a meaningful way.

> "Maybe I was expecting, at the beginning more explanation about this from the staff of the university or from someone, about how to log in, how to use the WebCT, but like many people they just didn't explain. They thought that the student was already, had already known this but the new student didn't know."

Marco does not see himself as a typical student; this is partly because of his shiftwork. He prefers the peace and quiet of his home to study; student areas of the university are noisy: "I don't like to study with the TV or music on." His home space offers a contrast to the general busyness and noise elsewhere in his life. The home space also gives him an environment he can control to enable him to maximise his study effectiveness. His patterns of study either in the quiet at work after the bar has closed, or late afternoon, indicate the discipline of study on a regular basis.

Part of the assessment for his course is group work, and I ask how he manages to fit this in along with the needs of a fulltime job. Marco negotiates his time by maximising the use of online space, and says:

> "We share the phone number and we share the email but this is mostly by email that we exchange information or we give deadlines to each other, for example, we know by Thursday we have to do some part of the report. So the phone is still not used yet but the email yes, it's used a lot."

When asked about whether it is the University email account, or an individual one, he comments: "We never use it we just use the personal one." As a mature learner, Marco prefers to be totally independent of the University, and it is suggested that others in his group take this approach as well.

Space

I ask about potential use of mobile technology to keep students in touch with the course, and Marco says he would find this intrusive. He says:

> "Yes, because it's something, I think its something personal and studying or working is something separate from my private life. So I don't want the university to get into it. I don't really feel comfortable with it. If I see a text message from the university I'm not really happy about it."

The above quote illustrates how Marco compartmentalises the different aspects of his life, and how he wants to manage his life on his own terms. He is prepared to work anti-social hours to earn the money to study, and to study at antisocial hours to keep up-to-date with his study. However, he wishes to manage his sleep/work/study balance on his own terms, and thus deal with any issues arising at a time that suits him.

> "Maybe because the technology at 3 a.m., I chose to look at it. I can control it, when to look at it but the phone that the text message can come at any time and I cannot control that."

Thus, Marco is keen to use technology at a place and time of his choosing, and he wants to keep the University side of his life separate from the rest of his life. He manages a combination of work and study by strictly controlling the impact of his study to regular periods when he has carved out the space, either in his preferred location of home or the post-work period when there is quiet in the office behind the bar. He is blocking out time to create space, and giving up sleep to enable him to pursue his aims of a degree while living and working in London.

Marco presents himself as being an opportunist - he knows that he will have to learn in certain ways (for example, through online access) and takes what opportunities present themselves, such as studying in quiet moments at work. Importantly, in his account, technology involves a negotiation (and segregation) between educational and social uses. He is wary of formal education intruding into his social uses of technology. Thus here, although technology has enabled flexible study, it is at a price and at the risk of losing control of what he sees as personal spaces.

Nyela - home comforts

A refugee from Somalia, Nyela starts her narration by talking about how hard she has found the move to the UK both in terms of social and educational integration.

> "You know when you can't speak the language it's even harder for you to actually go down the high street or buy certain products, let alone start school and then not only start making friends with people you've never met in your entire life and completely different people to you, its harder to learn at the same time."

Her story is one of difficulties - with making friends, settling into a different education system, with not having the familiar extended family support network around her. Her very expressive language shows how hard she has worked to learn English as a foreign language, and she is able to use tone and intonation to convey the depth of her feelings. Her selection of words 'even

harder' and 'you've never met in your entire life' hint at the resistance she has come across when trying to adapt and enter a new community. It is significant that Nyela has chosen to start her narrative from her childhood experiences of first entering the UK.

Learning

Learning is a key objective - it does not matter how hard it is to 'learn', Nyela will endeavour to do this. As her narrative develops into her University experiences, we can trace her determination to 'learn' from her childhood experiences. Unfamiliarity with places, people and events has enabled Nyela to develop successful strategies for overcoming barriers in her own way, as we can see from the next extract:

> "But now I think it probably has something to do with the more you grow up the more you learn and everything else but I feel more comfortable with myself to actually go about learning a certain subject, managing my own time and then gradually bit by bit go and force myself to overstress myself but gradually learning bit by bit."

She talks about forcing herself to overcome the stress of learning, and is starting to develop strategies to cope. Managing her own time and space is important, as having small steps works for her. Her aim of developing 'learning' is being achieved.

However, the difficulties remain with Nyela in terms of making friends and starting to be, as she puts it, grown up. She would prefer to talk things through with peers rather than ringing her mum at home.

> "I think the sooner that you know certain people within your group, the better. It's because they can be your support at uni so if things go horribly wrong instead of ringing your mum or your friend back home you can ring them and talk to them. Having friends in university life would be great."

It is clear that her aim of having friends at University has not yet been achieved, and the pressure of study and time for friendship is an issue. There is a sense of not having achieved this social capital, and the next extract suggests a reason why this is the case: it is that Nyela is prioritising personal capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

> "It's still a bit difficult to find friends at uni. On top of that, getting to know people while you are trying to get an essay in on time is extremely hard."

Nyela starts her narration about how she sees studying at University by referring back to her secondary school, where she says:

> "I just wanted to be invisible and to go into class and just see what it would be like to just sit there. So it would be nice for them to actually get an overview of what the place would be like, what the food is like, what the people are like."

There is a sense that she wants to find out what the 'norms' of a learning situation are before she exposes herself to it. This would help her to blend in when she arrives, to sort out in her head how things should be. Being a visitor first would help her understand the rules. She relates this through to University induction:

> "Maybe it would be nice if the students actually came in and look around the university without someone guiding them going this is this room etc. Somewhere they could just have an overview of what their days may be like if they do go to the university."

We start to get an idea of how these kinds of pre-entry experiences would be useful, when we explore further how Nyela negotiates spaces in other aspects of her life. In the next section, we contrast the use Nyela makes of space - both virtual space and physical space. In both sets of circumstances, she feels she must learn how to negotiate use of the spaces in order to gain some control over the context for study. When this is achieved she feels the conditions to work well are set up.

Technology

The physical space is evidenced through the technology at home, which is clearly an important part of Nyela's approach to study. It is of great importance to her family and the support she draws from them at home. She is so proud that she has bought a computer, and beams when she explains that she has acquired this with her first paycheck.

> "It's because I always wanted something that was mine and you know when you're working and you buy something with your first pay check, that computer, I felt kind of good. I felt like I was working, old enough, I'd bought something to the family, so it was something that I also did for them, as well as for me. So it was something kind of precious. It was something that I did for myself and for the rest of the family."

Here we can see that her economic capital as a worker is paying back the social capital to her family, and she is delighted that she can contribute to the family in this way. Nyela shares a house with her mother, brother and sister. She says, "we don't have much room at home" and is grateful that her sister shares a room with her mum, "she doesn't sleep with me". The computer is in her bedroom, and access is negotiated to suit all the family members. "So we work our way around it, its not really hard." Her sister uses it before Nyela comes in from college, and "my brother, he actually just surfs the net, normally when we're out. He's at college as well."

Thus for Nyela, being able to study is something that follows from a feeling of knowing how to use a particular space for learning. She has struggled to learn how to use several different spaces - classrooms, home, and the online environment. It is this approach that has enabled her to overcome her initial difficulties and engage successfully in education, as the following extract illustrates:

> "Actually I was quite excited because I thought we'd get loads of notes on how to actually start doing the stuff but instead it was

> quite simple. You type in the website and you go into it and then bit by bit you do the parts that you feel comfortable with. I preferred that, it was really good."

Here her narrative is much more positive, because she has found a way in which she can succeed with her academic study. This develops her confidence, because with her previous educational history, access to study has been a series of struggles and challenges. Here she can be confident and approach the institutionalized state of cultural capital, accessed by educational qualifications (Bourdieu op.cit, p.72).

Space

The 'virtual' space is evident as Nyela goes on to discuss the course in some detail. In her narrative there is a sense of an overwhelming space - the course is too vast for her to comprehend, and she is seeking a guide through both the formal and informal learning on offer. She reverts to time management skills to map out and gain control of the space, and applies her IT knowledge to sequence the learning.

Nyela has negotiated the space to access the technology. Although it is 'her' computer, she sees the wider implications of technology as a key part of studying, and she wants her brother and sister to share in the experiences. She retains control by the PC being in her room, so she can control the environment. She does have to compromise, but for her the compromise is viable, involving strictly segregated access. Having the computer at home has definite social benefits for Nyela, as the following illustrates:

> "Definitely, because you can access it at your own pace. You can recap on things that you don't understand. It's so much simpler and more easier to have some sort of a website or a quickstart package, definitely. The library shuts at certain times, for example, if you're doing work and you have to ring your friend you cant be on the phone and be in the building at the same time because you'll be disturbing people. It's more easier."

Her narrative here suggests a blending of her preferred way of learning with the support of home and friends. Having access at 'her own pace' is significant, and this reassures Nyela that language barriers will be lessened. Her learning space is managed in small 'chunks', which enable her to know where she is before approaching the space. Having created her own comfort zone, she can then work on the space, mapping it all out until she has smaller areas that are comfortable for her to work with.

Joanne - life and learning

Joanne is a single mum with an older son of thirteen and young daughter who is attending nursery school. She started University six years ago, and had to give it up when she became pregnant, as she says, "I had some problems and had to stop". During her time at home, she feels she matured and started to learn to manage her time. Latterly she got fed up and decided to return to University to finish her degree. She changed courses to a broader based business course, as she would like to work for herself in the future. As Joanne comments, "single parents, women who have kids. Sometimes even if you are married it's still your responsibility to take care of the kids."

Talking about her previous course, she says, "sometimes you come to class and you just come to have fun but when I got pregnant I had to stop". It is hinted at that when she got pregnant not only the University course stopped, but also the fun at University with her friends stopped as well. The previous course, selected because she loved the subject, had to give way to broader based course that would fit her ongoing life as a single parent. Asked about the current course, she simply says, "It's been okay".

Despite having attended the University some years previously, the first week was difficult and confusing for Joanne. She is, however, very glad she considered her course choice carefully at home before returning to the University, as, "Even now some people are still confused because I heard someone saying it in my class that they are changing their course and I was

like after how many weeks?" Despite the student welcome team being around to help, "all the same people still get confused."

Learning

Joanne thinks her approach to learning is very different now, compared to her previous time at the University. "Yes, I try to get to my classes early now. I try to concentrate on [the topic] before, especially when you have loads of friends in the classroom and you're doing something else. So I try to concentrate more, early." This extract has echoes back to her introductory narrative, where she suggests her previous attendance could be categorised by friends and fun. Now she is prepared before the class, and while the social contact with friends in the classroom is still enjoyable, the learning is now Joanne's main objective. This new approach is applied not only to the time in class, but to the subject context as well, as illustrated here:

> "I'm thinking it's me that is different because quantitative methods and information technology... I used to do quantitative methods before and I found it really hard at that time so I was like this time 'no, I'm not going to think it's hard'. I don't want any course to be hard in front of me. I just want to be able to face it, to be able to do it. I don't want any course to be like I'm finding it too hard to do. So it's much easier that way then when you sit down and do harder ones. It's okay."

Joanne has had to mature bringing up a child on her own, and this maturity is reflected in her comments. She is not going to be beaten by a difficult module, and she has a strategy for coping with this difficult context, which is a positive mental attitude. She is accepting the challenge of University life by accepting that some areas of study are going to be harder than others for her, and she is determined to work through her problems with the subject matter.

In terms of time management, Joanne says:

> "I'm here I'm free to use the library. I usually sit down there to read as well or use the IT room to do some, I normally concentrate

> more when I'm at school than when the kids are with you, you can't concentrate sometimes."

She uses the term 'concentration' frequently in the opening narrative. This seems to her to be an action that enables her to take control of her situation, whether it is at home or at University. The circumstances that allow concentration to occur are typically when she has been able to split her time up and create a learning space. Sitting down is important, in the peace and quiet of the university library, away from home. The space and freedom of the library is liberating for Joanne, and offers her far more now as a mature learner than it did as previously as a young undergraduate student. Online materials help with creating the circumstances for concentration, and Joanne prefers to make use of these. The university has IT studios where she can sit and focus on her work. She sees online materials as advantageous because they are available to her and she does not have to ask anybody for help. If she has to, she can access the online materials at home late in evening, even although she is tired.

Technology

Joanne makes the most of the technology offered at the University: "Yes and I try to sit down at home to do my work as well and to come and use the library or the IT rooms."

She comments on her previous lack of technological knowledge, citing an example when a lecturer gave the class details of the class WebCT website. Joanne had, in common with other students, looked up 'web city' on google, and become totally bemused by the search results. But instead of talking to the lecturer, she remained baffled until a friend showed her how to access the site.

> "It depends on what I'm doing because I love to sit down with the computer and know what I'm doing. I don't really like asking people, unless its my friend, because sometimes when you ask people they say they don't know what you're talking about or

> no....I'd prefer to do it in the IT room to find out about it. Most of all I like to find out from friends too. Sometimes you go in there and you don't really know what you're doing but if you actually have a friend to tell you more about it, its helpful."

Joanne is reluctant to ask for assistance from university staff, whether lecturers or support staff. The years at home have had an impact on her, as she has had to struggle to bring up her children on her own. Negotiating with those in authority for example, in claiming benefits during this time has reinforced societal divisions, and the University does not seem very different. She prefers, instead to rely on friends who will, she feels, understand what she is asking.

She has a computer at home, and here explains how she tries to juggle her complex life:

> "I do and I've got kids as well. So its like I have to split my time up. I've got a 13-year-old, a 5 -year-old and my school as well. Every mum always manages her time. I just have to split up my time. Sometimes in the afternoon when I get back home I feel tired but I still have to give them something to eat. After that sometimes I will sit down and do their homework with them and after a while I will start my own."

As well as using her computer for University work, Joanne uses her computer to fill the social isolation of being a single parent, "I use the Internet to burn music on CD's, to listen to music, to do all kinds of things. To learn more things to do on the computer itself sometimes and to learn to use some software, new software that I'd just ignored before." The contrast with her pre- pregnancy life is stark, and Joanne is filling the 'fun and friends' aspect of her previous life with study and preparation for study. She is reinventing herself as an adult learner.

Space

The blended learning module made a difference to Joanne settling into a group. As she comments, "Initially when I came into the class I was a bit

daunted but after a while I found it so easy to make friends with them.... I know getting to know people can be difficult sometimes but this time was really easy. We were all keen to get going and pass it well."

Finance and childcare make a difference to Joanne, and her approach to the group presentation is pragmatic.

> "I just told them to just tell me what to do because sometimes you are not here and sometimes when you call them they don't answer their phone. For them to call you back on the mobile is too expensive so they won't call you back."

Joanne uses text messaging to solve her problem with meeting other group members. This seems to be the best possible solution, but even so, it proves impossible to physically meet up and rehearse as a group.

> "We do that as well, even text. We do text each other sometimes but sometimes for us to sit down it's a different way you read the notes or not knowing who is taking this part, it's kind of hard. So that's why we always meet up somewhere and we know what this one would be talking about. We even plan to practice presentations. We never had the time to do it though because we are not always there at the same time."

This situation does not cause Joanne undue stress, as she says, "Some days I have to pick up my little girl from school". Her priorities as a mature student juggling her life are with the family, who require her physical presence. If she can manage to utilise virtual space by means of technology she will do, but if this is just not possible, her family come first and she will work hard on other assessment components that are within her control. The technology is definitely enabling her to take control over some learning spaces, but these are individual ones that she can work on in the home. The barrier to access remains the block timetabling system in the university and its incompatibility with the needs of single parents. Her ideal would be classes scheduled, "between 10am and 12.00pm"

To concentrate on her studies as a mature learner, Joanne attempts to get her physical space in order first. Barriers here are the timetabling system which means she has very little flexibility in the times to attend lectures and seminars, and these do not always meet her needs as a single parent. When Joanne is at the University, she makes the most of her time to study, using the university space to study rather than going home, when the needs of the family swamp all her learning space. If the physical space is not possible, she becomes a very strategic learner, for example when she is unable to make the meetings for the presentation, she explains that this is only worth 25% of the possible marks, and she can make these up on her individual work, which can be scheduled into either university (real space) or home (virtual space) where, even if she is tired and stressed, she can work after the children are in bed.

The flexibility in the course gives Joanne the opportunity to participate in some of the educational activities if she can find the space for study in her life. The difference the blended learning is making to Joanne is that the learning space no longer has to be physical, it can now be virtual and accessed at a time and place of her own choosing.

Thematic conclusions from study one and two

Close analysis of students' narratives about their learning experiences reflected many of the key themes from the literature. Power, the changing role of the tutor and the relationship between technology and flexibility all feature strongly in the accounts presented here. What was novel, however, was the importance of controlling spaces for learning. These accounts showed how easily Charles was able to colonise new spaces for study (at home, online) using principles from his work in industry. Further, Charles presented himself as a work-oriented character being competitive in his approach to group tasks; we see him challenging the inclusive approach with others modelled by the lecturer. He is in no way apologetic about this; there is a confident honesty in this interview, and this leaves us feeling we know much

more about how he perceives his world. Kwame, by contrast, felt powerless to even operate the online environment, let alone to bypass it. It was not until a friend supported him in learning how to use this resource that he began to feel able to contribute his voice to the ongoing module discussions. The irony here is that the online learning materials had been created to support the widening participation agenda; yet in these cases, it was the traditional 'good' student who thrived. Kwame, with his unconventional background, simply experienced this well-intended development as another set of barriers that delayed his participation in the course. Juanita is heavily influenced by her early educational experiences of rejection and mockery, and finds it difficult to be fully confident in the classroom, which leads her to really value the opportunity of 'having a voice' in the spaces enabled by online engagement.

In the second study, the students' struggles to engage with education have not been radically transformed by technology. Indeed, for Marco, Nyela and Joanne, introducing technology created barriers - new negotiation was required to create a space in which this kind of learning could be undertaken. As the cases here reveal, students may have to struggle to create a context in which they can learn successfully - and this applies just as readily to learning online as it does to classroom study. Introducing technology has not solved educational inequalities by providing flexibility and thus ensuring access for all. Nevertheless, these students have found ways to engage in this programme - and it is possible that, if the course were taught in a more conventional format, they may not have been able to do so. They reported that studying in their own spaces enabled them to engage with the discussions and materials in a way that they would not have felt able to do in the classroom. Arguably, this would help them prepare for successful classroom participation.

The three students in this case have found ways to study online, but this required one-off expense and effort for Nyela, ongoing sacrifice for Marco and a compromise for Joanne between her preferred physical space at the

University and the virtual space that is enabled when she has to study at home.

Chapter 9

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the cross-case issues arising from the empirical work, and to relate these back to the key themes identified in the literature review. The empirical work in this thesis explores how students experience their blended learning outside the classroom. Thus, following the headings of learning, technology and space, used to interpret the student interviews, the chapter synthesises the themes. The work develops further by applying the key concepts into a proposed framework for analysis, comprising a series of tables. A template for reuse follows the specific analysis, should others wish to develop the work for wider educational contexts.

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 explores different kinds of learning within the massification policy context of higher education in the UK today. It focuses particularly on the learning experiences of those from a widening participation background, who enter Universities and find the societal barriers from outside the institution replicated inside the classroom. E-learning is positioned as the universal panacea that will enable students to become independent learners. By offering resources online, accessibility is thought to be made available for all. Complications arise because students have lives outside the University, and the traditional lecture/seminar timetabling, so favoured by the institution, no longer meets the needs of a diverse student body. Student accounts of initiatives are less common, reflecting the power and authority structures inherent within the classroom. It is against this background that the discussion chapter is set.

Learning

The two studies revealed that there were local and specific practices that defined students' engagement with the course. As expected, this was not a

simple matter of access to technology; instead, these accounts revealed that engagement with education (including engagement with technology used for educational purposes) was shaped by the students' existing dispositions and social connections.

Professionalism and learning

This is a topic that emerged from the study narratives. The importing of work skills and values into the educational context shows that professionalism is a key theme for the participants in the first study. This is interesting because literature tends to assume that widening participation students are coming to University to obtain any degree; that is, it is the qualification that is the desired output, rather than engagement with a specific discipline.

All three participants in the first study already had some work experience. Charles and Juanita both use their time management and organisational skills drawn from the workplace within their studies. Kwame is very keen to develop professional skills, which he characterises as becoming computer literate. Accounts of three students' experiences on a specialist third year module, and narratives from Charles and Juanita, illustrate how the privileged were made even more privileged through their access to choice of study mode and location. The inequalities of those excluded by the digital divide can be seen in Kwame's predicament, where he can see the advantages of online participation, but is unable to access this for himself, and he is silenced by his perceptions about the authority of the tutor. In terms of similarities between the cases, participant views of 'self' as a student are constructed in part from their previous life experiences - and in the context of this study, the participants chose to define this in terms of educational background and working life. The participants in the second study also chose to define their self as student within narrations of work or aspirations of work in future.

Professionalism is described by the students in different ways, and draws upon their 'out of college' identity as well as their preferred student persona.

Charles is perhaps the most explicitly businesslike in his application of work experiences to study. However, he replicates the worst of business (his ruthlessness, exclusion of others and racism) as well as more positive business skills - reliability, timekeeping, and social skills (for example, when he wants to negotiate to complete his study by online learning with the tutor). Juanita uses skills from her experience in business to improve some aspects of her work (for example powerpoint presentations) but is unable to manipulate groups as ruthlessly as Charles, although it is evident there is a desire to be more influential on other group members. Marco has professional skills already, coming from his earlier career in Italy and then working in London. He prefers to use these skills in a much less overt way to Juanita and Charles, and selects when to utilise his skill portfolio carefully. He is quiet and reserved, but achieves good results independently, seldom coming into contact with the tutor.

Kwame is passionate about his development of IT skills for the workplace. As he comments, this is not just an issue for him, but applies more widely to inequalities in the real world. He says, "We know it in Africa, in Ghana that it was good but we don't have it." Nyela is also extremely conscious of the need to develop professional skills, and this is reinforced by her mother, who is determined that all her children will receive a good education and be able to support themselves. Both these students, coming to study in the UK from developing countries (Ghana and Somalia), are the most motivated to succeed, yet have the highest barriers to overcome to enable them to participate fully in University life.

The students place a high value on the links between learning and subsequent careers, which is not surprising given that the modules involved are business based. It is the degree of difference that is of interest, and reflects the diversity of the students. Charles conceptualised his learning in terms of his strong work ethos. He is used to negotiating with employers (his promotion), his lecturers (doing the courses remotely), and his partner/friends/family (who are encouraging him to study now for reward in the future by giving him

physical and mental space). Juanita is similar in the way she tackles her studies, making links between what she is learning and what she terms 'real life'. Nyela and Kwame both aspire to professionalism but are unable to fully develop this aspect of their learning, Nyela because of her constant need for family support and Kwame because of his inability to access the tools of professionalism, which he sees as those available online.

This section has revealed the complexities faced by the students as they endeavour to develop their sense of disciplinary awareness, and to develop the skills needed for the future workplace. Professionalism is an attribute held in abundance by those already privileged and which those lacking in social status and struggling financially strive for to lift them out of their current position. The sense of achievement, not for self, but for family comes across very strongly in Kwame and Nyela's narrations.

Role of the Tutor

James Mackenzie's work on The Wired Classroom (1998) talks about the move from the 'Sage on the Stage' to the 'Guide on the Side' and this phrase can be tracked through numerous authors' work on the changing role of the tutor with e-learning (Jones, 1999). Mason (1994, p.47) comments, "The idea of the expert teacher must give way to a network of supports and resources in which everyone has some kind of expertise to be tapped." The literature suggests that in the move towards more flexible learning, the role of the tutor needs to change.

The students have quite different responses to the role of the tutor. All the students in the studies had the same tutor, albeit for different subjects. The third year group from the first case study could be expected to rely on the tutor less, while the first year students wanted more tutor time and attention. Charles (Study One) very much saw the tutor as a source of support, guidance and encouragement on the occasions he needed it, and this was very much an adult-adult relationship. Marco (Study Two) viewed the

tutor much more as a guide to accessing the resources needed; he valued the freedom the tutor had created through the design of the blended learning environment which enabled him to learn independently. Thus the 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side' model of change for the role of the tutor discussed by Jones (1999) matches Marco's learning needs. Kwame views the tutor as an unapproachable figure of power and authority, and is unable to use the tutor as part of his learning strategy. This view is echoed in Nyela's account of her learning, as she is too shy to ask for advice and finds talking to her peer group uncomfortable and miserable. Joanne is also reluctant to approach the tutor, but finds the classroom a place where it is easy to make friends and so find out all that is going on. The most traditional relationship is that of Juanita from the first case, who is quite quiet in class, but finds it very easy to approach the tutor either directly or via email to gain any information she needs.

Thus we can see that it is not merely the tutor role that is the issue, but also student expectations. There is not a simplistic model that 'fits' the student expectations of tutors and their role. Indeed, it is the diverse nature of students and their previous life experiences that are driving their expectations. Moving to blended learning, where students are expected to access materials outside the classroom, calls for a different role for the tutor, where the tutor needs to be available in both physical terms (that is in the classroom during office hours) but also needs a virtual presence to enable students to reconceptualise their perceptions of a tutor and a tutor's role. What is significant to the students is not the role as defined by the tutor but how the student experiences this.

Risk and Learning

Haggis (2004) suggests that academics assume students have the confidence and skills to engage with their studies as expected by the academy. She offers a different view of the learner, who may be a person who is experiencing difficulty with unexplained norms and values in higher education, and " he or

she may be exhausted from part-time work or parenting, distracted by family or financial problems, or lacking the fundamental confidence, self-esteem or health to engage in the ways that are assumed to be both desirable and possible" (Haggis op.cit, p.98).

A remarkable finding of the study has been the huge personal risk that all the students, with the exception of Charles, have taken to come to the University. Kwame has left his home and family behind to embark on a course of study he knows he is ill equipped to handle. Juanita has left home and come to study abroad to develop her longer-term employability skills. Joanne is returning to study as a single parent with small children to care for and very limited personal flexibility. Marco is juggling a full time job with study, and sacrificing sleep to keep up. Nyela is overcoming her language difficulties, cultural difficulties and feelings of isolation as a refugee to take up degree level study.

Joanne has difficulty in terms of the reconciliation her identity as a student, a mother and a potential graduate. She has the confidence to balance her college work and her family life, and will sacrifice marks in order to meet the needs of her children, for example when she realises that she will be unable to be part of a successful presentation group. She then works at home to maximise her individual mark, and does the minimum possible on the presentation.

In terms of what Haggis defines as students who 'struggle, face challenges and have difficulties' there is a spectrum of student experiences. Kwame and Nyela face the most difficulties, with issues facing both in terms of access to resources. Kwame has the technology but not the skills; Nyela has the skills but no access, initially, to the technology. Both lack confidence, struggling with authority in that they are unable to talk to the tutor about their learning support needs. Juanita and Joanne do have some issues to address. Juanita is reluctant to take part in face-to-face class discussions, and finds it hard to be an assertive team player when things are not going well. Joanne is at the

mercy of a very centralised, structured university system and finds that this is not flexible enough to give her what she needs in terms of studying and looking after a family. By way of contrast, Marco and Charles have very few issues in accessing the University or the curriculum, and manage to create flexible spaces for learning. Charles in effect buys his way out of the mundane need to attend classes, whereas Marco makes use of technology to enable him to retain his flexibility.

Kwame was passionate about working hard, but his experiences were markedly different to those of Charles in particular. Kwame narrates his experiences of education as a story of exclusion, alienation and difficulty. He has bridged the traditional divide (access), as he is studying at University, and has access to the various online resources. However, the frustration of having the theoretical knowledge of how to use a computer, but finding in practice that he is unable to transfer this knowledge and skills, is evident. It takes time for Kwame to find his feet at the University, and a higher education system where teaching lasts for eleven weeks is not sufficient for him.

The implications of the risk factor articulated by the students (with the exception of Charles) relate to the assumptions staff make about students and their lives. Universities, especially the post-1992 ones, are tied up with huge bureaucratic processes that are geared up to meet the needs of an audit culture, not a student-centred approach. What is needed is a change of policy to student-centred learning - personalised programmes that enable students, but not as the e-learning strategy of 2005 suggests, with a deficit model of students as needy, in deficit and atomised (Burns, Holley & Sinfield, 2006). A non-judgemental model of predicting student learning needs would be useful, and is suggested in the conclusions section below.

Technology

The literature makes a set of claims about technology and pedagogic design, and the possible impact this has on a diverse set of students. However, given

the complexity of students' lives, as outlined in the student narratives, how much do teachers really know about how to design contexts for learning?

The narrations from the two student groups divided for the first time when the students were talking about technology. The first year students (case study two) Marco, Nyela and Joanne all put a high value on learning, and are prepared to make sacrifices to access higher education. Their narratives are rather more explicit about the role of technology, and this can in part be explained because this is an aspect of their lives they have not yet mastered. The technology issues were present in the third year interviews, but embedded within the individual narratives. Charles and Juanita in particular were very confident in the use of technology. By way of a contrast, Kwame talks about his frustrations about not being able to participate in the course. His actual narration is about isolation and struggle, and he seems unaware that he is unfairly blaming himself instead of a system that is arguably unresponsive to his needs (Burns, Holley & Sinfield ibid.).

A crucial issue for use of technology is finance. Charles has his laptop and all the accessories paid for by his work. Juanita has all her IT equipment paid for by her parents. Marco has a full-time job and already had IT equipment before he attended the University. Joanne has older equipment and sometimes has to use the more reliable University equipment. Both Nyela and Kwame make sacrifices to acquire their equipment, Kwame by paying for this and staying on with his friends in Milton Keynes, Nyela by undertaking extra work shifts. The University does make available equipment to students on the premises, but this is during office hours only. As the case studies show, students prefer to work within the home environment. This has implications for course design, as currently best practice at London Metropolitan University is to support blended e-learning, as long as materials are available to students via the internal computing systems. Student preferences have not been a factor in developing or modifying either modules or whole courses.

Social networks

The literature suggests that online social networks are a significant component of group e-learning experiences (cf Salmon, 1997, 2000; Laurillard, 2002; Jones; 2002). This thesis is focussing on the individual experience of e-learning; however, it is interesting that in this study there is a gender difference in terms of online collaboration.

In terms of online collaboration with others, Joanne uses technology for social purposes as well as more formal learning purposes. This is a way for her to stay engaged with her friends and her studies when she is unable to be in her preferred learning environment of the University. Juanita makes use of technology for formal learning with colleagues, and also for informal learning, for example, setting up an online study group. She does not, however, see this as socialising with 'friends' in the same way that Joanne perceives the collaborative space. Juanita selects to use the social opportunities online as a way of forging links with fellow students that are unavailable in large lectures and seminars. Nyela wants to engage, and would be pleased to take part in meetings online or in person, but finds her lack of social skills a barrier to communication in both environments. She does not have the confidence to reach out and negotiate her own learning needs with the staff or other students. Instead, she falls back on the support of her family as she develops ways in which she can engage with an overwhelming set of experiences - her family are her replacement for her desired social network. Thus the female students either use already, or express a desire to use, the social side of the web as part of their studies.

The male students have a more functional view of social networks. Kwame is frustrated when he sees there are opportunities to engage in online threaded discussion forums, and as he says, 'I knew the answer but not how to communicate it, it was a difficult problem.' Charles and Marco, by way of contrast, both view online collaboration very functionally, in terms of a necessary way of working that releases their time to participate fully in the

workplace. Charles quickly achieves what Kwame struggles to accomplish throughout the narrative: a connection between established social practices and this new context (the taught course). It was not until Kwame established friendships that he could draw upon to help him take control of his use of technology that the divide between the two began to close. This is not to say that Kwame has feminised his approach to study by utilising 'softer' management skills; he is, in fact, using his friend to enable him to access the functionality of the technology.

Use of IT outside the classroom

Outside the classroom, all the students want to be able to maximise their use of the blended learning technology offers. There is an assumption by tutors that students will all know how to use the University Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Practice once again shows the students making their own decisions about engaging with technology. Marco manages time successfully and is prepared to forgo sleep in order to keep up-to-date with his studies. Highly individualistic, he shares some of the characteristics of Charles, in that he negotiates and manages his life in his own way. However, it was not until Marco could make competent use of this resource that he could create his own independent study space away from the University, in the comfort of his own flat. The technology is an additional enabling feature that this confident man utilises to the full.

Charles is a confident technology user, but this is so much part of how he operates that he does not talk much about technology in his interview; he studies for the whole module outside the classroom. Juanita maximises the use of blended learning by attending lectures and seminars, and the weakness for her in the formal offering is the difficulty of making her voice heard amongst so many others. She confidently uses technology to address this aspect of her learning, and regularly meets the tutor to ensure her coursework assessment is up to the standard she is aiming for - the A grade. Kwame struggles outside the classroom, and his voice is silenced because he is

not confident in the classroom. As he says, "I had to force myself into the programme." He observes how others behave in the classroom and online, but because of his late start, is unable to catch up and maximise his learning, despite his passionate desire to do well in this alien environment. Nyela uses the technology outside the classroom as a way of working that enables her to stay in her comfort zone, that is in her own family home. By way of contrast, Joanne uses technology as second best in the home - for her study; she would like to be with her friends, physically in the classroom.

The students, no matter what their starting point in the use of technology, all see a value in mastering it as quickly as possible. They all have a desire to succeed on their courses, and technology use outside the classroom is viewed as a potential contribution to their success.

Resistance to innovation

The literature suggests that it would be reasonable to expect resistance from students when faced with a blended learning module so far from their expected learning experiences. Akerlind & Trevitt (1999, p.104) argue that the resistance will be greatest when students experience a high degree of conflict with their past educational learning experiences. In this study, however, students do not resist even when experiencing extreme difficulty. The only area of resistance is when there is a suggestion that the tutor will infringe the student's personal space - for example the comments from Marco and Nyela about receiving text messages from the tutor.

Akerlind & Trevitt suggest educational innovation involves a process of change, not just acquisition of additional skills. However, Charles and Marco benefit most from the blended learning offerings because of their existing skill base. In the case of Charles, access to resources is easy as his work is funding his study. Marco is at a different end of the economic scale, but values the freedom blended learning offers him to manage his life in his own way. Joanne views innovations as a support function when she is unable to

attend university. Nyela has to grapple with managing the online space as well as overcoming the physical barriers to full participation in her learning. Juanita sees the technological support as an enabling set of tools. But it is remarkable in Kwame's narration that there is no resistance to the technology, despite his clearly stated frustration and pain with arriving in a new country and tackling a new set of subjects taught in a pedagogically different way. He works hard to develop the skills to complement his theoretical model of a successful business student.

Differences are significant, and offer an insight into these students' perceptions of what is distinctive about learning online. The use of the computer appears to be different from other teaching tools introduced into classrooms. Interactive whiteboards, video and PowerPoint have been very effective in transforming the environment within the classroom. However, access to IT outside the usual time and space in the classroom is changing the use of the learning tools described in this study, and arguably moving access to learning into the more personal contexts - which can be home based, or also involve work settings and other spaces.

The use of the computer can be conceptualised in more than one set of ideas - participants do not merely see it as a tool amongst a range of others and as such simply a part of teaching or learning. The computer and its tools are not politically neutral (Jones, 2001) and the student narrations draw in the contexts of other debates, such as power and authority, access to scarce resources, the role of the tutor, and also socially situated learning - where the computer is viewed as a tool of social engagement in a variety of contexts.

Space

New Space for students

Space is not a topic widely discussed in the literature. The literature review explored related fields such as mobile learning, informal learning, social spaces, creative spaces and physical spaces, but none of these studies really addressed how the student views and creates their own learning space.

Space constraints are not necessarily eroded across the variety of contexts for the participants, as the study set out to explore. However, there is emerging evidence to suggest that control over one space seems to permit flexibility elsewhere. With the exception of Joanne, colonisation of their home environment seems to have an impact on their approach to study and this is explored in more detail below. Control of space is a common theme in the case studies, and I will explore this by first asking what is significant about home space for the students.

Concepts of home space and colonisation

The case study narratives suggest that home is an important component in the individual's ability to cope with the demands of University study. There are a variety of needs articulated around issues of personal support and the comfort of studying in the student's individual home learning space. Joanne and Kwame both place a high value on the support of friends in enabling successful study, and Kwame accesses his friend via telephone while he is online in his room in Milton Keynes. Joanne prefers to meet her friends face-to-face, but also communicates with them online when she is unable to be there physically. Juanita has her online peers and also the tutor meeting her study needs, both online and in a physical space. Charles, for all his independence, comments that having the tutor available when needed was a contributory factor in his confidence in succeeding in his studies. Nyela relies on her family, despite articulating her desire to make friends at University. It is Marco who is the most independent from student group, and he moves

easily between his work and use of the Internet for study there, his classes at the university and his flat for more in depth study.

The students in the case studies colonise their home space for study; that is, they create their own learning space to suits their individual circumstances. This colonisation process is not an identical experience for each student. Charles is used to working from home, and being a confident businessman, this confidence extends into the online environment. Charles has his own physical space made possible by negotiating full access to virtual space. He is in a position of power within his home environment, as he has as much physical space as he needs: "I sit there with my lap top in front of me and there's paper as far as you can see, in every direction."

Nyela is a contrast to Charles. Nyela also wants to manage her learning more effectively, and for her, the comfort of having the technology in the comfort of her own home is the key. At home she can relax surrounded by the support of her family as she starts to grapple with creating learning space on different fronts. She enjoys the scaffolding approach the first year module offers, indeed "it was really good". There seems to be a security for her with this particular course design, but before she can really access materials comfortably, she has to undertake extra paid work to acquire technology for her use, under her control: that is, in her bedroom. Her online strategies reflect the way in which the other students have created their own space to learn. Nyela divides her time and the work up into smaller sections, and this approach is similar in some ways to that of Joanne, who splits her time into small sections at university and at home.

In terms of the use of technology, Joanne wants the comfort to study as well, but because of the demands on her time at home, she would prefer this to be at the university. This is because it is easier for her to control her learning space within the university. At home she has to wait, and, "when I get back home I feel tired but I still have to give them something to eat. After that sometimes I will sit down and do their homework with them and after a while

I will start my own." She wants the security of her friends around her, and so in this she is not dissimilar to Nyela. Joanne's narration is significant for tutors and course designers, as it clearly illustrates that no matter how accessible online resources can be, students may still have issues with power and authority, and not maximise their chances of success because they are held back by fear. "I don't really like asking people...they say they don't know what you are talking about." Joanne is using technology to create virtual space to study when the physical space she prefers is not available. She finds it difficult to talk to people she views as in authority, and will struggle until she can find a friend who knows the answer.

Juanita extends her university working practice online, and works at home to concentrate. Here she can control her learning environment in a more meaningful way, which is not possible when she is at University. She is confident with the level of her IT skills, and can easily access the social network she so values online from her home. Kwame is in a different position. Despite having studied IT in his home country, he is frustrated by how difficult he finds the University VLE communication tools. He expects to be empowered by having the technology in his room at the family friend's house, but instead is unable to communicate online, and in the classroom he doesn't have the confidence to contribute, or to ask the tutor for assistance. Kwame is unique in that his early struggles with technology are totally reversed by the end of his narration; his friend has worked with him to develop the skills, and hence he builds the confidence he needs to participate fully in the online environment. However, he remains uncomfortable with the large formal teaching of lectures and seminars.

Marco is comfortable in the peace and quiet of his own home. Because of his time constraints he uses a similar strategy to that utilised by Joanne and Nyela, in that he divides his work up into smaller chunks. When he has finished his shift and can use the Internet at work, he carries out the small weekly tasks online. The home space is used for more extended writing and

study, as this environment is easier for him to control for more sustained periods of time.

Once the students have colonised their home space, what they have in common is they then get on with their studies. The significance of this is that the space is adapted by the individual, on his or her own terms, and not facilitated by the tutor. This has a resonance with the earlier literature on the power of the tutor, in that no matter how well meaning or well intentioned a tutor is he/she cannot empower a student (Rowland, 1993). However, in these negotiated learning spaces, the students are controlling and managing them independently.

Access to IT

In the literature, access to IT is dismissed as a relatively simplistic idea that can be categorised in terms of the have/have nots. The findings from the empirical work suggest it is rather more complicated, however.

The case studies show that access to technology is a crucial element in how the students are able to manage their learning and create their own individual learning spaces. Charles, Juanita, Joanne and Marco already have home access to technology that enables the process of space creation to happen. Kwame and Nyela both realise quickly how essential access is to enable them to maximise their time outside the classroom, and both go to tremendous efforts to acquire not only the technology, but the skills to enable its full use. It is interesting that the narratives point to having home access to IT (from within their house/flat/room) as significant. Access elsewhere is clearly not as attractive to the students, although they are opportunistic in that when Internet access/printing facilities are offered elsewhere for free, they are quick to accept this. Nevertheless, the preferred location is the home. This is because there is comfort, physical space and virtual space located at this point, and our students have the opportunity to take control and design allocations of space in a way best suited to their lifestyles and resources.

To summarise, in terms of colonisation of home space, confident students like Charles and Juanita from wealthier backgrounds find it easy to extend their existing advantages with the opportunities of blended learning. Juanita extends her social skills onto the online environment. Marco blends his time with his cocktails at work. Those less able to maximise their advantages in life bring these issues into their study. Thus Nyela has to find her own way to manage overwhelming spaces; Kwame is frustrated by his lack of IT skills; Joanne by her inability to create a space specifically for study.

There are three main implications of the re-conceptualisation of students colonising their own space. The first is in terms of student autonomy. The second is in terms of course design, or more importantly co-course design that students can have an influence over. The final implication can best be described as a practioner's framework for practice. These implications are considered further in the framework for analysis below.

A framework for analysis

This thesis has been structured by the key themes of space, learning and technology. The framework for analysis thus consists of three diagrams, each of which represents the students' experiences using a combination of the key themes. Each theme is portrayed by an axis, and the student experience plotted by a coloured cell, labelled by the first two letters of their name. The students' past learning experiences were used to place him/her on a particular point on the 'expectations of education' axis. Their preferred use of technology in their home learning space is mapped onto the space axis. Finally the plotting of the students' technological experience is represented on the axis line, 'control of technology'. Each student is plotted in ordinal data type, which is their position in relation to the other students, and then mapped across the axes.

The three axes are:

Expectation of education

The literature indicates that previous educational experience is important to students, but for our students, it is their expectancy of the forthcoming educational experience that enables them to be 'matched' or 'mismatched' in terms of their blended learning experience. The students were mapped according to their articulation of surprise, confusion or difficulty with the module studied, for example Juanita is surprised how difficult it was to work on a team presentation. She had work experience and knew how to prepare a fantastic PowerPoint slide show, yet her peers were reluctant to allow her to do this. Charles, however, is ruthless in attaining his goals of passing the course well, to the extent that he effectively isolates a student allocated to his team. He has worked out the 'rules of the game' and how to manipulate these to suit him. Thus his expectations of educational 'match' mapped exactly, because, in reality, he negotiated these for himself.

Control of technology for learning

This axis represents the amount of control students have over the technology they use for learning. There are three aspects of this drawn from the individual case analysis, namely skills, time and space. The first aspect is the skill set that the students possess (that is, can they use technology?); secondly when they can use the skills in the home (time); finally, where they can access and use IT in the home (space). The combination of factors are drawn from the case analyses, and taken together say something about how much personal control they have over access to Information Technology in their home. Thus the axis was labelled with 'high' and 'low' to reflect a sliding scale.

Space

This axis is defined by how the students like to use their home space and the online study tasks they undertake from this location. 'Private' indicates a preference for utilisation of home space for private study; 'social' indicates a preference for replicating more social aspects of learning. The students located in the middle of the axis could be classified at greater risk of having

problems with study, as they lack an awareness of the potential of how their personal space could be colonised for learning.

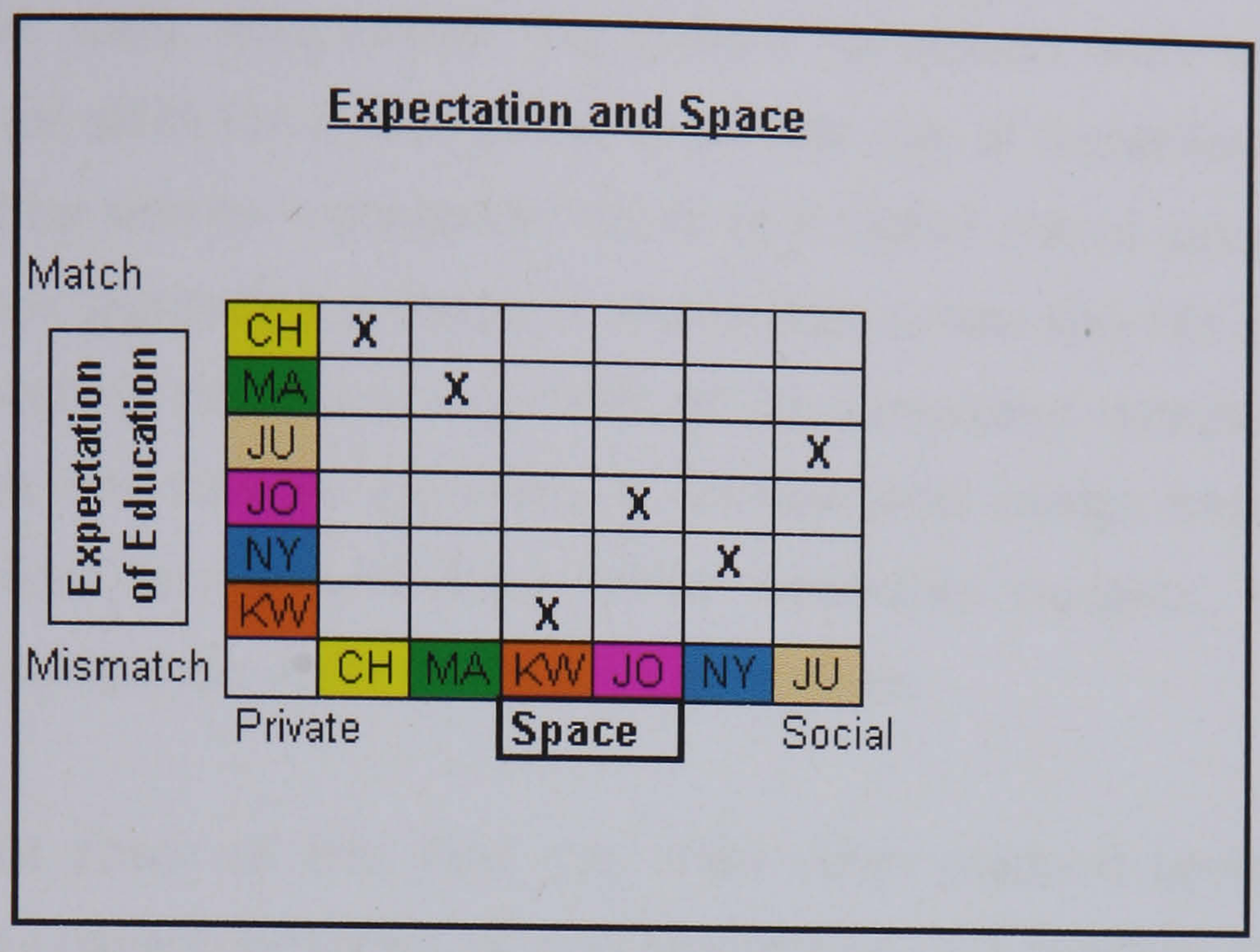

Figure 9.1: Expectation of Educational Experience mapped against Home Space

In Figure 9.1 (above) it can be seen that students Charles, Marco and Juanita have successfully 'matched' their previous educational experiences against the blended learning course design, and the students who have struggled rather more with their learning are ranked towards the lower half of the diagram. The individual students preferred home space use; whether this was for private study or for recreating the social networks of the classroom does not alter their ranking in the diagram. It is the effective use of the home learning space that makes the difference, not the desire to make use of home as a learning space. Kwame gives us an illustration of this point: he wants to work in the comfort of the house he shares away from the university, but is unable to do this due to his lack of IT skills. The extremes of position for Charles and Marco compared with Juanita reflect the two men's desires for using their learning space for private study, whereas Juanita prefers to try to replicate the classroom by using online social networks. Joanne, located in the middle of the two axes could represent an 'average' widening participation student, as her expectations of University life are combined with poor IT skills.

The students in the middle of the diagram towards the bottom have a mismatch of their educational experience combined with no expressed preference (or skill) for either social or private use of technology, and these factor could be said to 'categorise' them at a higher risk of struggling with a course. This is significant because it shows that a 'one size fits all' approach for tutors setting classroom activities to be completed outside the formal teaching will not suit all students. A conventional design based around a lecture/seminar format will leave some vulnerable students, typically the widening participation students, at a disadvantage.

What student cases of this kind can offer when mapped against the axes above is the conceptualisation of one component of a complex set of factors influencing student expectations of their higher education experiences. Students bring their own life experiences to academic study, and in this case I am arguing that those better prepared by work and previous positive educational advantage will more easily 'match' the learning needs of a module offering some elements of blended learning. The converse is also the case: those poorly equipped in terms of previous life skills and educational experiences are most likely to experience a mismatch with the course. For example here we have Kwame, who really wants to perform well, but finds barriers to his learning extremely difficult to overcome. The selection of the Internet tools for private, individual study or social networking is not the issue.

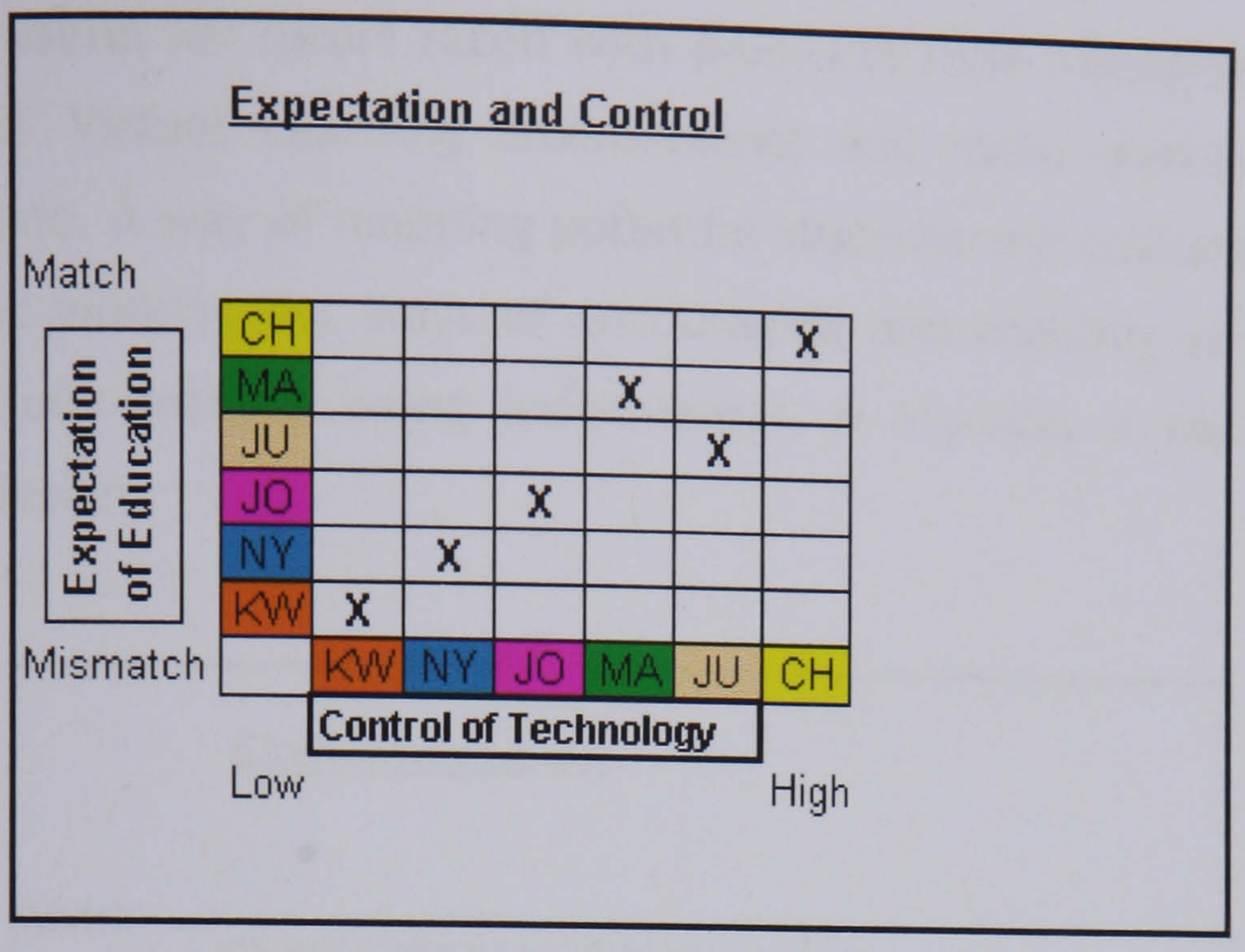

Figure 9.2: Expectation of Educational Experience mapped against Control of Technology

Figure 9.2 represents very clearly the disadvantage Kwame is put under by not having access to technology, nor the skills to use it. Charles, Marco and Juanita all rank highly in their control of technology within the home in comparison to Nyela and Joanne. Joanne is ranked slightly higher than Nyela Joanne because of her competence in a wide range of learning technologies. Joanne is able to burns CDS, undertake Internet searches and use social tools online such as Facebook; however, the work in this thesis is focussing on student learning for academic purposes.

It is interesting that the cells occupied by the students under 'control of technology' replicate exactly the student marks on the modules they studied. Charles, Marco and Juanita all did very well, attaining grades of A/B, whereas Nyela and Joanne attained borderline D/C. Kwame had to resit some aspects of the module but did indeed pass at a later date. Thus it could be argued that students represented in the top half of this diagram are those that face the least risk of failing their course.

Figure 9.2 would be extremely useful as a tool for plotting students 'at risk' of not being able to engage with a blended learning course. This would be

particularly useful for tutors faced with pressures from management to take advantage of Virtual Learning Environments and move elements of their teaching online. A way of mapping potential students and customising module learning, and working out ways of encouraging and enabling all students to participate fully without being judgemental, is arguably a valuable aid to curriculum design.

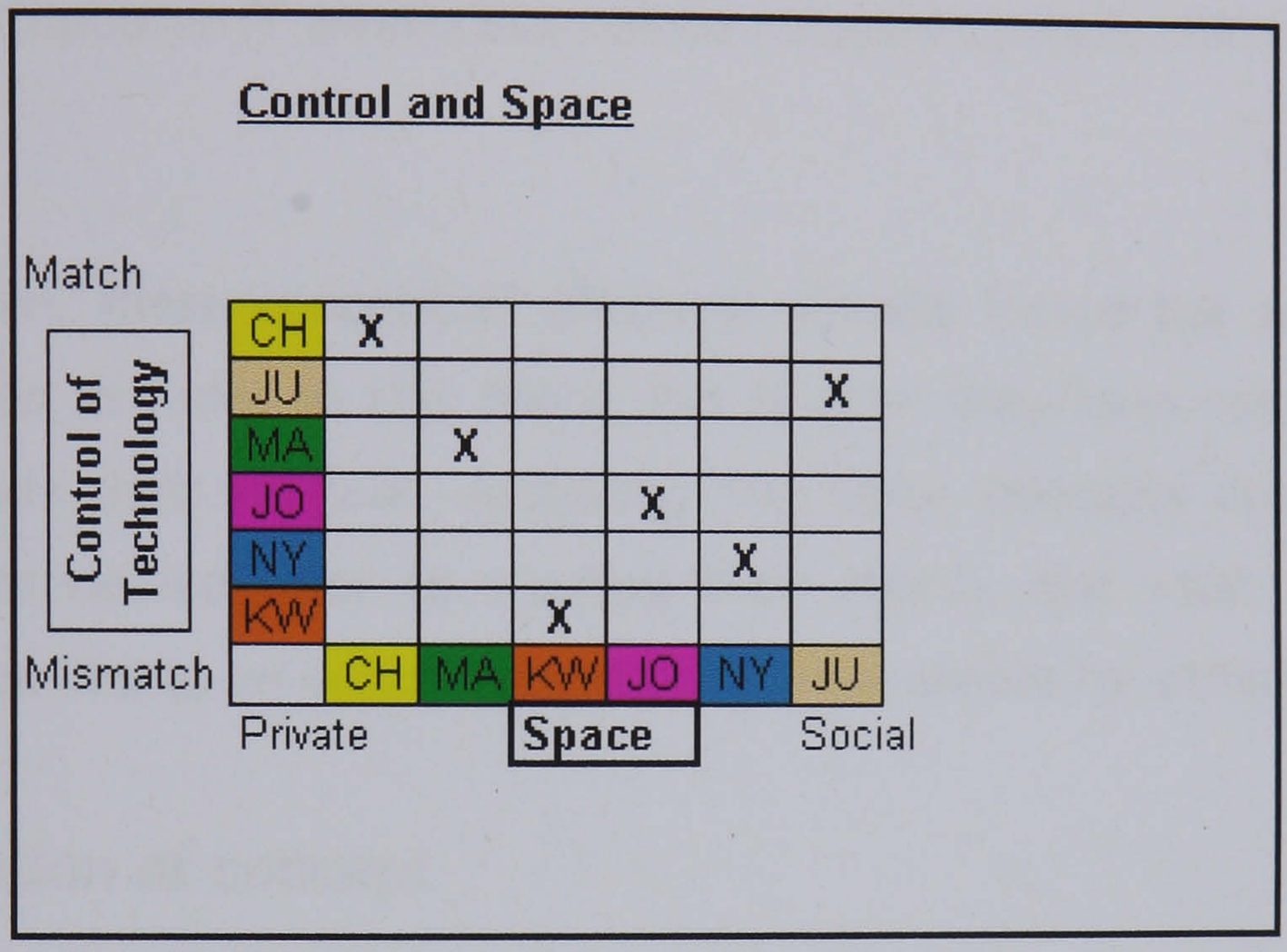

Figure 9.3: Expectations of Educational Experience mapped against Space

The advantages of Charles, Marco and Juanita with their high skill levels and up-to-date technology available in the home provide a striking contrast to the disadvantages faced by Kwame in the bottom (and higher risk of failing) quadrant in Figure 9.3. The grid is slightly deceptive as when laying out a diagram an even spacing is implied; in 'real life' Charles, Marco and Juanita had more similar educational experiences, and so could be clustered towards the top of the diagram, and thus the gap between these students and Kwame and Nyela was more marked than appears in the diagram.

This polarisation of the student experience is potentially a useful representation for mapping students who could benefit most from discretionary bursaries to purchase/lease IT equipment and be provided with

fast track coaching to enable them to maximise their chances of success on a degree course.

As in the previous figure, the ranking distribution for the use of home space expresses a student's personal preference for using their home space and internet use for learning between private and individual work only, moving along the axis to an expressed preference for social uses of learning space. Students with poorer IT awareness can be mapped towards the middle of the axis.

To summarise, these conceptual diagrams visually locate the students at a given position in time; in this thesis this is after they have completed (and passed/failed) their module. Arguably, the same concepts could apply to students interviewed prior to starting their course. But what would these diagrams look like as an empty template made available for others to use?

Generalisation of concept

To apply the concepts discussed above to a new set of students, the students could be located on the axes by ordinal data type again. It is, however, likely that any tutor would be either designing a course without knowing their students, or interviewing a large group of students. The problem with replicating my studies is that detailed knowledge of the student is needed and it is unlikely that a tutor designing a new course or offering places on a course would have the time and resources to carry out biographic narrative interviews. But some specific questions around the axes would be possible, and then students could be plotted along them. This could be useful for plotting subsequent case studies, or for clustering groups of students for analysis. Applying a simple grid to the model offers nine possible options, and can identify students that are at low/high risk of success or failure on the course. So a blank template could be devised and prospective students clustered within the appropriate cells on grid. The advantage of the grid is

that high student numbers can be catered for, and broad categories apply, rather than very specific categories drawn from a set of rich case analyses.

It could be useful to label the grid squares as low, medium and high risk, and in the diagrams below I have indicated what this could look like. So for students in the 'low risk of failure' squares, they would have a propensity to show characteristics of a good match between their expectation of education and the courses they select, especially if any have a blended learning component. Similarly they would typically have a high degree of control over their home environment, or the confidence to negotiate successfully with those they share the home with. They would also show a high degree of control over their use of technology, and this could be expressed as a preference towards using technology for private study in isolation, or for using technology to replicate some of the social networks usually found in the classroom.

The students placed in the high-risk squares would struggle to use technology effectively and be more likely to claim that their expectations of the course and the course offering were not met. Thus the tutor could, hypothetically, start to develop a framework where students are supported to enable them to achieve the optimum learning for a particular module, or even to locate the course on the grid and seek to adapt the course design to the different needs of the student body

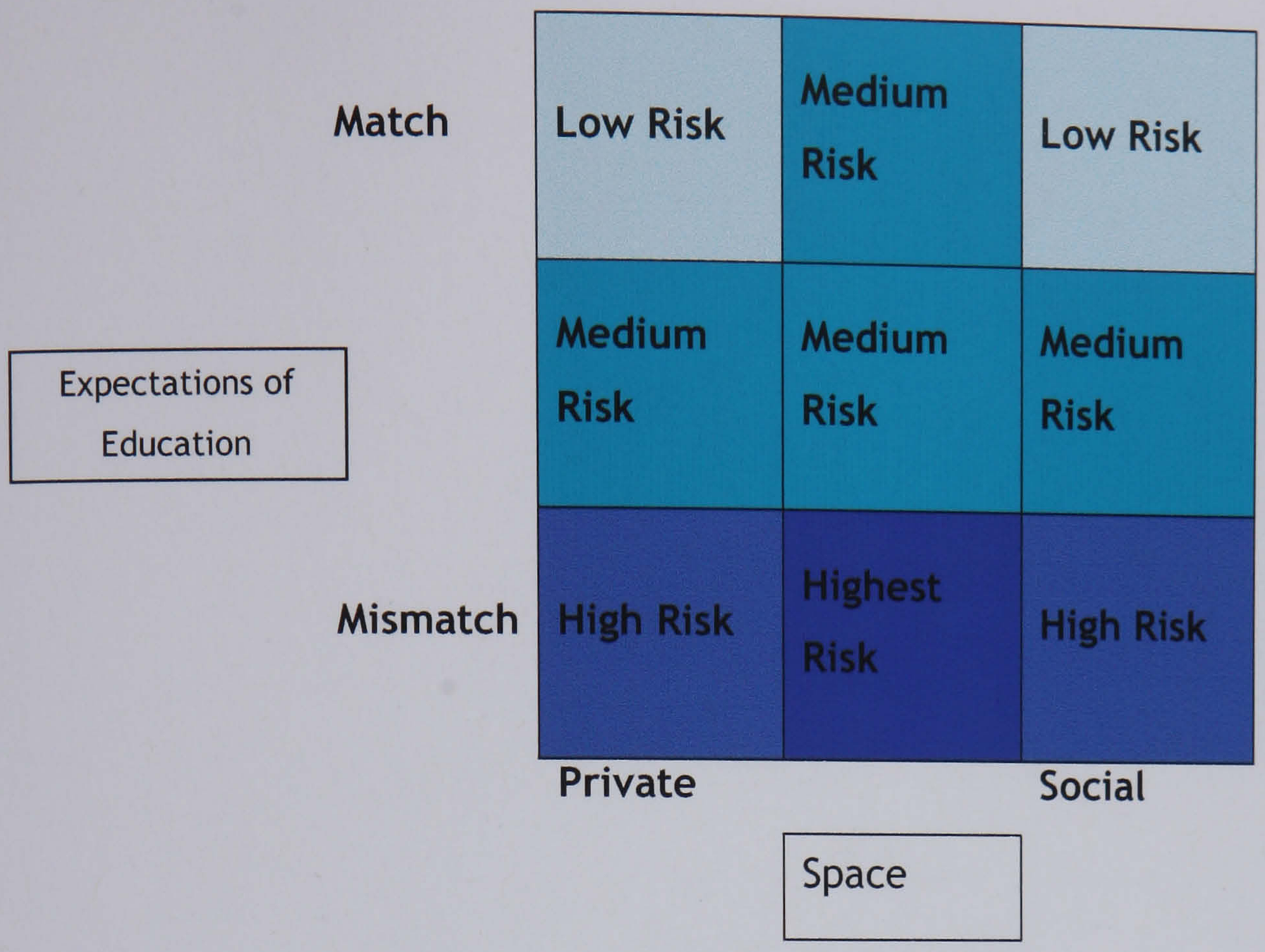

Figure 9.4 Expectation and Space

Students that are not confident in their use of technology for social or private study could thus be identified. The further up the middle column they are placed the higher their chances of success. Students falling within the bottom-middle square would therefore be at the highest risk of having difficulties with their course/module as they are unable to colonise their homespace for successful study, and are mismatched in terms of educational expectation.

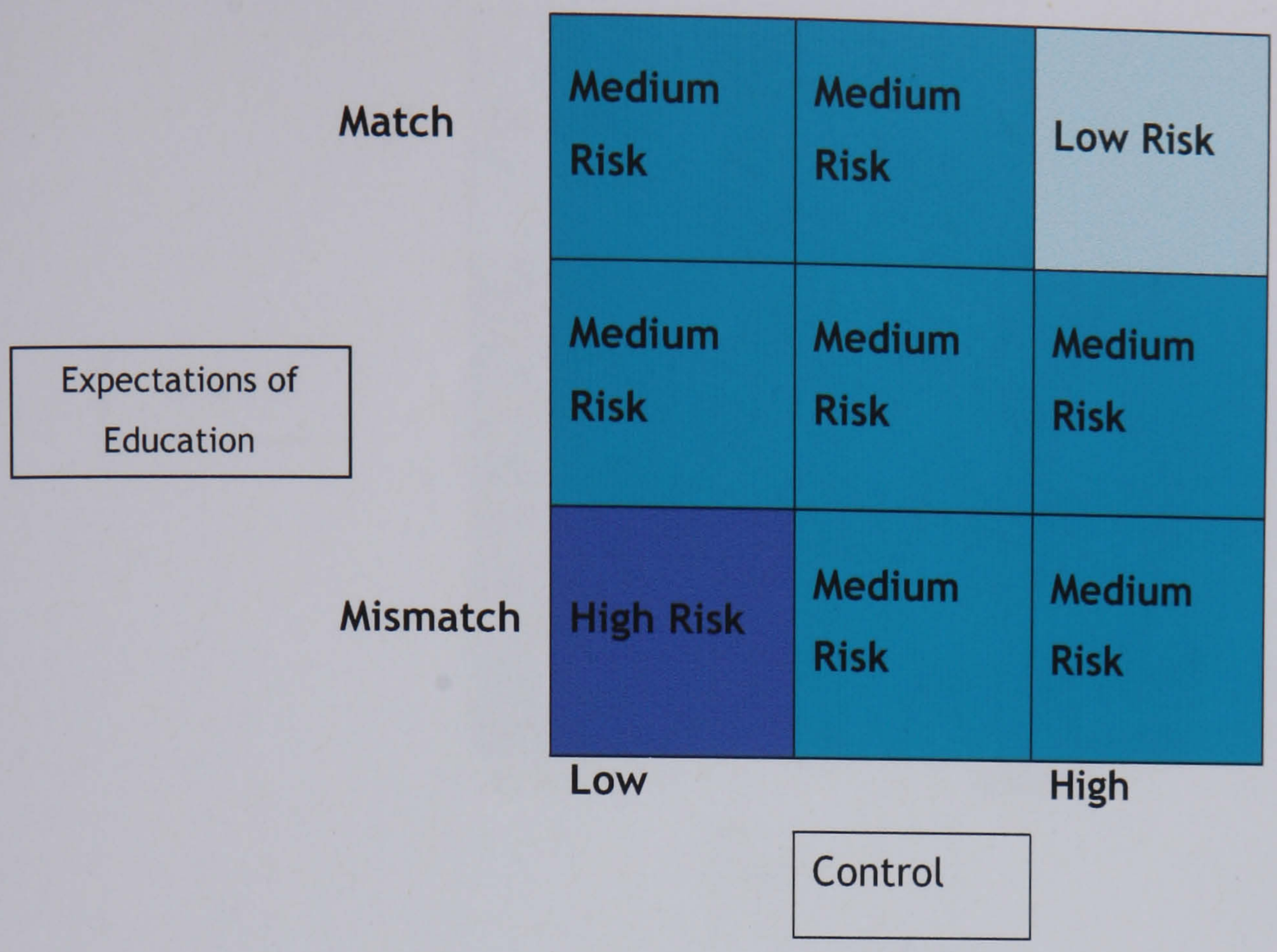

Figure 9.5 Expectation and Control

Students placed at diagonal opposites on the grid would represent the most/least likely to pass/fail the course. Those with less confidence in independent learning outside the classroom and a mismatch with their expectations of university life would be placed in the bottom left cell. Those with confidence and a match of experience of education would be represented in the top right cell.

The implications of this would be that some thought may need to be given towards meeting the learning needs of students portrayed in the bottom left corner. This could involve offering pre-course IT support, including an optional (or compulsory) session on 'How to Use IT' for the particular module, and tutors may consider how to stretch the most able students portrayed in the top right hand box.

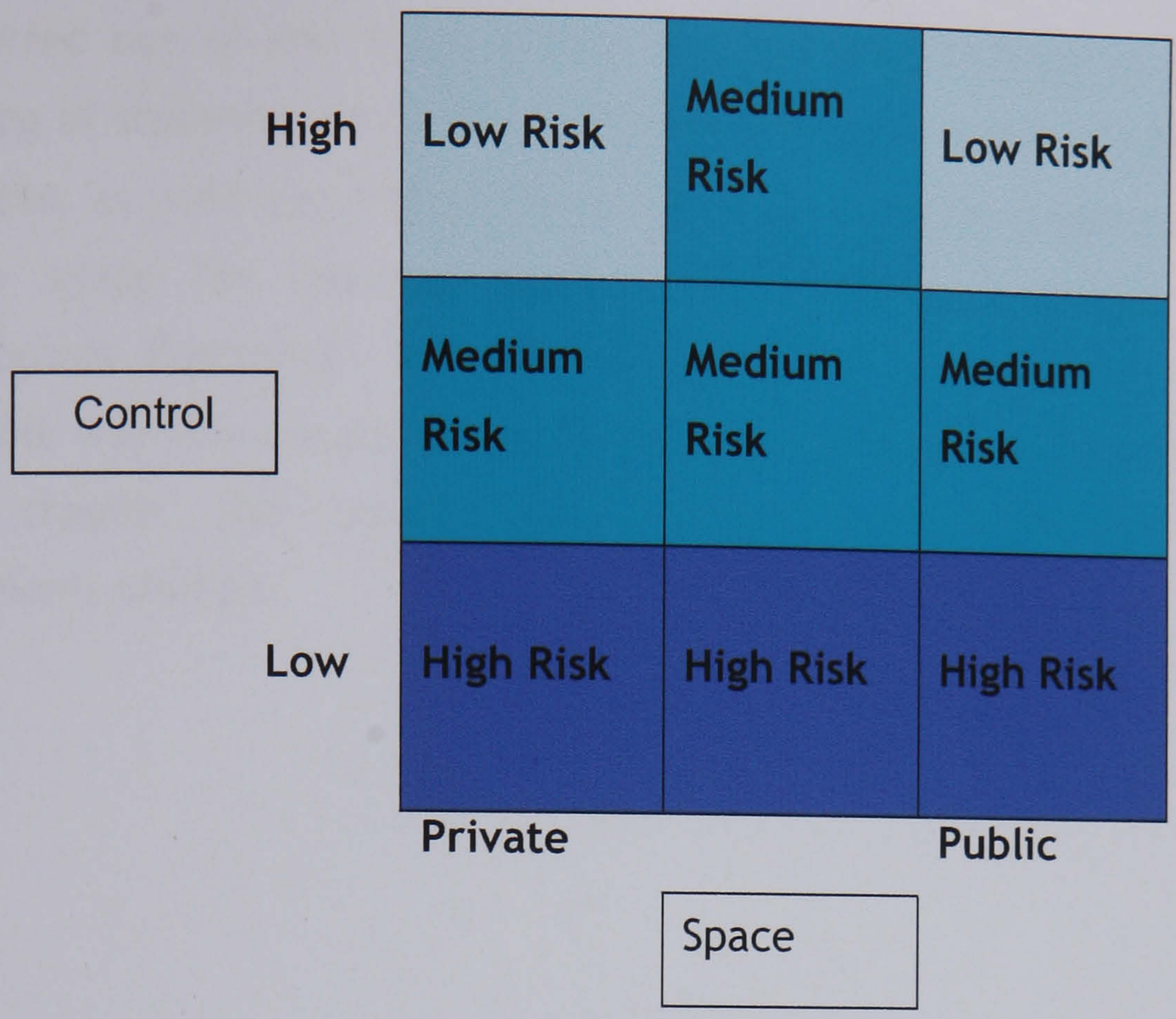

Figure 9.6 Control and Space

Students in the two cells labeled 'low risk' at the top left and right would be most likely to have the necessary control of technology for their studies, and be confident in their expressed preference for private or social online learning.

The implications of this, as in the previous figure, would be some consideration as to how the curriculum could be developed to meet the different needs of students with very different abilities in terms of control over their technology.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to compare the findings from the studies with the literature review. An explicit conceptual framework was devised that placed the students from the studies in diagrammatic form. This explored the relationships between the three themes of students' expected experiences of learning, the control the students have over their technology, and their

preferred use of the space within which the technology is operated. The placing of students within this conceptual framework has not previously been possible, as little was known about the ways in which students colonise their home space for learning outside the classroom. Finally, the specific conceptual framework has been discussed in more general terms, and a possible way forward for others to reuse the work has been suggested. In the next chapter, the research aims will be revisited and some concluding comments offered.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

In this chapter the contribution of this thesis will be discussed with reference to the three original research aims. The limitations of the thesis will be covered before considering the implications of the work and suggested future developments. The chapter will close with some concluding comments.

This thesis has explored how individuals perceive their own space outside of the classroom, areas I have called their 'learning space'. This is private space where students choose to study, and the findings indicate that they draw upon their life experiences outside the University to 'colonise' this individual space. This colonisation influences their approach to study outside the classroom. This work starts from the student home environment and works back through to the formal learning environment, unlike many contemporary authors who explore how online spaces and places can be explored in hyperspace, starting from the classroom. This is a little-researched area, and more traditional research methods did not offer the tools necessary to obtain personal and individual accounts of behaviour. The social policy research method, 'Biographic-Narrative-Interpretative-Method (BNIM)', drawing on the work of Wengraf (2001) was applied to an educational setting for the first time, and its use with the student interviewees has offered a richer understanding as to how students manage their learning time outside the classroom, and how they have to negotiate with others to free their time and space for study.

Research Aim One:

To provide a framework for conceptualising student learning spaces.

At the start of the thesis, the literature review revealed that work on space was limited, and much of what had been written covered the design of

learning spaces, rather than exploring exactly how the students would operate in these spaces. Much physical design work also makes the implicit assumption that study will be based at University premises. The empirical work of this thesis set out to further our understanding as to how individual students moved within their individual learning space, and the factors that influence this. The two studies explore this theme with students at the start of their university life, and with students studying a specialist third year module. The discussion chapter explored how the colonisation of home space was significant for all the students, and identified ways in which blended learning offered flexibility of study space for the individual to adapt.

The contribution this thesis can make to further our understanding of student use of their home learning space is the framework for analysis. This framework was developed from the student cases, and applied across the three themes that emerged from the empirical work, namely students' expectations of their educational experience, their control of technology and their expressed preference for mode of online working. The model developed from the specific student cases has been adapted to suggest ways in which others could use the model with a different set of students. Thus the thesis concludes with a fully analysed model that can be used to predict students that may be at a higher risk of struggling with their studies. It can be used to consider module design for specific groups of students, in that the blended learning 'mix' can be considered along with the three themes used as the axes for the framework. Finally, some suggestions are made as to the factors that may influence where individual students are located within the analytical framework.

The usefulness of the analytical framework does come with a proviso, which is that although modules offering blended learning may enable students to create more flexible study spaces, on their own they will not make any difference to societal inequalities of access to the university.

Research Aim Two

To find an appropriate methodology that will enable a more intimate, revealing glimpse into student classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences.

Recognising that there is a digital divide is more complicated than a simple division between those who have access to technology and those who do not. This situation calls for different kinds of research, which will illuminate individuals' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Researchers in the field of ICT and education have taken differing methodological approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, to explore their particular research questions. To gain insights into the student experience, phenomenological methods were most suited to my area, but existing methods did not suggest a way forward for such an intimate study. Thus I broadened my search into the social policy arena, where narrative and interpretation are more common research methods.

Adapting the biographic narrative research method from the social sciences has enabled a more meaningful exploration of issues that affect students and their studies. The main benefit of this approach has been the production of a clear theoretical framework within which to situate the interpretation of the students' narratives. The narratives have given insights into hitherto hidden aspects of the study lives of the students interviewed. The concept of epoch, which means that these interviews and their characteristics are taken as part of a particular set of circumstances at a specific point in time, allows for interpretation of the student learning experiences as experienced by them in the 'here and now'.

This application of an existing method to a new area in this thesis is a contribution to research in this area (Wengraf, personal communication, April 2007; see also Holley, 2007). Thus there is now a tried and tested approach that other researchers working on related problems can follow.

Research Aim Three

To explore how students are creating new and innovative ways to negotiate their own learning experiences.

Negotiation plays a significant part in how students are able to create their own learning space. All our students express a preference for working in the comfort of their own home, with the exception of Joanna. Joanna expresses the desire for this to happen, but finds the demands as a single parent overwhelm her at home, and instead she wants the comfort of home designed into the university learning spaces. This does not happen, and so she divides her time between home and university, and neither meets her needs.

There is, not surprisingly, a theme around income and negotiation. From the case narratives, we can see that those who have higher incomes (Charles, Marco and Juanita) have few issues to negotiate with family members, perhaps because they have 'bought' the means to acquire the space they need. By way of a contrast, Nyela has to negotiate hard at home to get her own bedroom, and this is at the expense of her mother and sister who then have to share a room to enable her to achieve the space she needs. Nyela has to work and study to enable her to acquire the technology that will enable her to work at home. Kwame has to compromise to achieve his preferred outcome, in that to acquire his computer, he relies on the support of family friends who offer him accommodation, and this is a long way from the University. (At the time of his interview, the average journey time from Milton Keynes to London was three hours.) He is, in effect, trading a home near the University that would enable him to participate more fully, for the technology that will make the biggest difference to his life. Thus negotiation is a key aspect of enabling students to take control of their learning outside the classroom.

Negotiation within the formal learning environment was minimal, and it is only Charles, with his confidence and skill in this area that tries to negotiate a different educational offering. As we found in his case analysis, he wanted to study on an entirely distance learning basis, and did so. The remaining students take on board the need to study using blended learning materials, despite their issues with control of technology. They make no representation to have materials, or indeed, the tutor, available on a different basis. The theme of student resistance to e-learning was identified in the literature review, and was expected, yet did not occur. It is possible that power relations within the interview caused this topic not to be articulated, but it seems surprising that it is not there in any of the student narratives. All the students work out their own strategies to cope, and 'get on with it'. Whether this stays the status quo with the introduction of tuition fees and a more consumer-orientated student body remains a question for the future.

Limitations of thesis

This work does have its limitations. Three main areas have been identified, namely the case study approach, the student sampling framework and some outstanding methodological issues. Each will be addressed in turn.

Case study

The bounded case study approach is an issue, given that this study explored two different sets of students' experiences of their module at a particular time. Would other students taking the same module have experienced a similar (or different) set of circumstances? Would students at a different institution taking a similar module make similar types of comments? I am unable to make an assumption that the answer would be yes on either question. I can only offer Wengraf's comments on undertaking research work of this kind - that the interview reflects an individual's view of the situation at the time and date of the interview, and thus a particular point in time (Wengraf 2001). The same questions on a different day could well evoke a

different response. Setting the case study within the phenomenological tradition, however, asks of the researcher that by the end of the process, the reader should come away with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne 1989, cited in Cresswell 1998, p.55). So all that this work can claim is an explanation to the reader about how an individual student felt about their educational experiences on a particular module when asked on a particular day at London Metropolitan University.

Sampling framework

Given that I set out to explore the learning experiences of students that could be categorised as 'disengaged' in the classroom, actually getting students who have been labelled as a 'failure' by the system to come and talk about their experiences was extremely difficult. Some students invited to be interviewed for the first case study did not reply, and it is difficult to make any assumptions about those who declined to be interviewed. A range of explanations are possible, ranging from a student not wishing to see a tutor who had 'failed' their work to the fact that third year students are not usually around after classes finish in May, and I was keen to interview after results were available. Possibly I worried too much about the ethics of interviewing students when they were 'in the classroom'. However, it is only possible to make assumptions about those who did want to be interviewed, and were interviewed, a common problem with research. But this is a one-off problem for a PhD thesis. In subsequent work within the London Metropolitan Reusable Learning Object Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (RLO-CETL), the BNIM approach has been successfully used. Here, the tutor was part of the interpretation team and arranged the interviews, but did not actually carry out the interview with the student, which enabled a side-stepping of some of the power issues raised in this thesis.

Methodological issues

The 'complete' BNIM approach would ideally have encompassed a 'panel' for working on the interpretation of interviews, when the blind coding was carried out. This was not possible as no team funding was available for an untried methodological approach. Thus I did the work on my own, with some input from the supervisor and colleagues.

Implications of the research

Policy

Policy issues can be discussed at two levels, national and local. It is at this very time of widening participation, with older and perhaps more worldly-wise (if not necessarily academically inducted) students entering HE, that the HE experience is becoming even more of a struggle for students. The government e-learning strategy, for example, exposes the continued silencing of student as stakeholder, where there is no effort made to represent the student experience. The voices that are not repressed in the document are those with economic and institutional power (Burns, Sinfield & Holley 2006). Noble (2001) takes the view that HE is becoming increasingly centrally controlled, and in doing so, becomes watered down by a plethora of quality targets and initiatives, resulting in a loss of space for respect and mutual trust. Examples of the struggle to participate at local level are Kwame, Nyela and Joanna, all of who have clearly articulated wants and needs for engagement with new technologies and e-learning initiatives, and yet University Modular Schemes and Compulsory Core modules take no cognisance of the needs of the students. Studies that endeavour to listen to the student voice can articulate the silenced stakeholders' perspectives, and encourage opportunities for policymakers to sit down with their final customers, the students.

Curriculum design

In terms of curriculum design, the framework for analysis could make a useful contribution to those planning a blended learning curriculum. Following experiences from the reusable learning object centre of excellence for teaching and learning in design of learning activities (www.rlo-cetl.ac.uk. Accessed 2/04/05), students will co-design an accessible curriculum.

Contribution to knowledge

Revisiting the three key themes for analysis - learning, space and technology this thesis can make contributions to knowledge at a national level, institutional level and classroom level.

At national level, as well as dictating the numbers of students entering the higher education (HE) classroom, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding and monitoring processes have had a significant impact on the pedagogies employed with those students. This literature is discussed in Chapter Two, where it is suggested that these changes have impacted most on the widening participation student, where the current policy of transferring funding for university study from the state to individuals and their families, "risks reinforcing and exacerbating inequalities" (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p.23). The issues arising from the literature suggested that Government policy in general, and new managerialism in particular, has had unexpected consequences in the management of HE. Performance management indicators have tended to lead to a culture of 'what gets measured gets done', which has resulted in the neglect aspects of the student experience. Specifically, students were often treated as an homogeneous group, ignoring the way in which their individual experiences differed. Thus whilst the empirical work in the thesis needed to acknowledge the policy context, the methodology selected reflected a method of enquiry that articulated the experience of the individual. The empirical work of the thesis

sheds light onto the exact nature of these inequalities, and hence moves our knowledge forward in this area.

At institutional level, policy impacts on the classroom experiences of both tutors and students, and the literature in Chapter Three suggests that when technology is introduced, the role of both student and tutor is expected to change. However, this change is not always positive. A gap in a mainstream model of online tutoring has been identified, where issues around 'drowner students' remain unresolved. In order to fill this gap, our knowledge of the 'drowner students' and their experiences is conceptualised by analysing the findings of the BNIM methodological approach. A more intimate, revealing glimpse into student learning experiences, both in and out of the classroom, explores how students are creating new and innovative ways to negotiate their own learning experiences.

Chapter three suggested three issues to be addressed in the empirical work:

a) **Following the work of Sharpe (p50), there is a need to consider the use students are making of their own technology.**

The Biographic Narrative Research Method offered a space for individual students to comment on their usage and non usage of both technology that is visible, and technology that is currently invisible to the tutor - for example mobile phone calls or SMS text messages, use of social networking sites such as facebook and myspace, and other web 2 technologies. We found Kwame using his mobile phone and his PC simultaneously to make sense of his learning, we found Juanita appreciating social spaces, and Marco using various technologies but drawing very clear distinctions between his private and public spaces. What this has revealed are individuals starting to use their own choice of technologies from 'outside' the academy. They then select the appropriate tool to engage with the academy; and thus by offering a blended learning curriculum the learning context is offering students choices far wider than a different time and space to study.

b) **The work of Akerlind & Trevitt and Talbot (p53) suggests there may be resistance to change from the students.**

Although resistance to change was anticipated in the literature it was not found in the empirical work. There was no apparent resistance by students to the introduction of blended learning in the classroom. All the students report that blended learning has offered them flexibility and the space within which to personalise their own learning contexts, specific to their very different circumstances. Even Kwame, with his huge struggles, sees positive aspects in accessing a blended learning curriculum.

(c) **The 'drowner' students, identified in the work of Salmon & Giles (p65), may suggest a group from which possible interview participants can be drawn.**

The literature on tutor role, although going some way toward unpacking the different modes of delivery, was argued to be too simplistic. It did not explain the difficulties of engaging students in an online environment. Of particular significance was the gap in knowledge with respect to student diversity. By interviewing a cross section of students from a widening participation background, it has been possible to discover much more about their complex lives: how their private life and student life intertwine and some of the tensions this raises. Thus the simplistic model of development of the 'e-moderator' suggested by Salmon has been shown to have some crucial deficiencies.

In terms of spaces and places for learning, Chapter Four attempts to locate the student within the existing bodies of literature about spaces for learning. It seems that little attention has been paid to student experiences of study in their individual learning spaces, except from some literature on mobile learning (Sharples 2005, Sharples et al 2005), which offers us insights into the changing importance of place, i.e. the place where the student selects to study. The empirical work in this thesis was designed to address some of these issues. What emerged from the case study examples is the complexity of the

individual student study experience, and how the home learning environment is poorly understood. The notion of place was a key aspect in understanding new ways of student learning within blended contexts. The case studies reveal much about the importance of a flexible set of places to the student, as well as the importance to them of being able to create an environment within the context of their own private study space.

The literature review together with the empirical work enables the placing of students within a conceptual framework that has not previously been possible, as little was known previously about the ways in which students colonise their home space for learning outside the classroom. The issues identified by the participants in the empirical studies enable us to understand their efforts to engage with blended learning, and add to the body of knowledge about student engagement in and outside the classroom. This is perhaps the most exciting finding from the research, as it offers scope for inclusion of the student voice, especially that of the widening participation student, which can be fed back through to the higher education arenas of design for education in the classroom, design for enabling policies at institutional level and design for policy at national level.

Future Work

Work can be done in future to use the BNIM approach in a range of educational settings, and indeed is underway exploring students' attitudes to mobile learning within the London Metropolitan RLO-CETL. There is funding for a research fellow and a team to assist with the interpretation, and a report for the funding council will be forthcoming. This work will start to address some of the methodological issues identified within this thesis. Scalability is an issue in taking limited research further. However, the BNIM already has a track record in the social sciences with large-scale research projects across Europe. For example, the SOSTRIS project (SOSTRIS 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 1999e & 1999f) has focused on the

experiences of six social groups: unemployed graduates, early retired people, unqualified youth, single parents, ex-traditional workers and ethnic minorities. These are all arguably under-privileged groups who have some commonality with the widening participation student.

Further work could involve the development of a diagnostic tool, to develop a model for students in terms of their private spaces and how these are colonised in a variety of contexts. The position of a student within the three diagrams may be an indicator of how 'at risk' a student is of failure, and a three-dimensional effect could then map in cultural background and student profile. Thus the resulting predictive model would be a much less judgemental way of encouraging students and staff to personalise the classroom and out-of-classroom experiences to maximise learning. It would not place students on a scale of 'engaged' or 'not engaged' as in the 'rainbow diagram' described in chapter 5.

Concluding comments

Close analysis of students' narratives about their learning experiences reflected many of the key themes from the literature. Power, the changing role of the tutor and the relationship between technology and flexibility all feature strongly in the accounts presented here. What was novel, however, was the importance of controlling spaces for learning. These accounts showed how easily Charles was able to colonise new spaces for study (at home and online) using principles from his work in industry. Further, Charles presented himself as a work-oriented character being competitive in his approach to group tasks with 'others'; we see him challenging the inclusive approach modelled by the lecturer. He is in no way apologetic about this; there is a confident honesty in this interview, and this leaves us feeling we know much more about how he perceives his world. Marco has echoes of Charles in his narrative; this confident man draws very clear distinctions between what he sees as university supported materials and undue interference, for example with tutor contact via his mobile phone. Kwame, by contrast, felt powerless

even to operate in the online environment, let alone to bypass it. It was not until a friend supported him in learning how to use this resource that he began to feel able to contribute his voice to the ongoing module discussions. Nyela offers us an understanding of the ways in which she can manage what she perceives as a hostile world: she manages overwhelming space by dividing her learning into bite-sized chunks, and negotiating with her family to access IT in her own bedroom, rather than the shared living space.

The irony here is that the online learning materials had been created to support the widening participation agenda, yet in these cases, it was the traditional 'good' student who thrived. Kwame, with his unconventional background, simply experienced this well-intended development as another set of barriers that delayed his participation in the course. Nyela found similar barriers to access. Joanna found barriers with the expectation of teamwork for student presentations, and was unable to reconcile the demands of the module with the demands of her family. She would have preferred to negotiate a different time for lectures and for meeting other students, and this proved to be impossible. It was only because Kwame established a friendship and explained his needs to this friend that his engagement with the module altered. Nyela found it difficult to make friends, and subsequently dropped out of university.

Despite government strategies encouraging recruitment of widening participation students and of utilising e-learning in creative ways, and despite extensive internal audit systems and paper trails, when students arrived (late) there were no practices in place to take account of them or their needs. Despite the fact that Kwame has a very clear, articulated motivation for engaging with new technology - for himself, for his wider community, for his country as a whole - the university was unprepared to take account of his specific wants and needs. His identity is lost within the institution, the course and online:

> "In the new hyperreal world, an individual is de-historicized and de-centred... deprived of all materiality and referent... the individual no longer exists" (Mraovic 2006, p.219).

Simply providing e-learning - no matter how well intentioned - is insufficient to address the problems that students are experiencing. Further studies are needed that can reveal more about how individuals experience and cope with their engagement in formal education. With such accounts, it will begin to be possible to develop new pedagogical approaches, and perhaps new policies, which respond to students' needs in a better-informed way, and hearing the student voice clearly is a starting point.

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Appendix 1

Letter to Participants

Dear

Date

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I would like your views about various teaching and learning activities. Please take a minute to read the information here, and then I will request you sign this note. At any time, you are free to ask for the interview to be terminated.

The interview will form part of a research project I am carrying out for my PhD. This will be, I hope in the fullness of time published as a PhD thesis and it may be possible to use some aspects of the study for conference presentations or journal articles.

In terms of data protection, I will hold information about you on my home PC only, and you will be referred to anonymously in my writing - usually this is as student X, Y or Z. At no time will you be identified personally. When the research is complete, I will destroy the tape of our conversation

Please can you sign below, to indicate you are happy with the above arrangement?

Many thanks

Debbie Holley

Interviewee signature

Appendix 2

E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online (Salmon, 2000 p.40)

5. knowledge sharing	4. facilitating	3. developmental	2. constructive	1. confident	Quality/ Characteristic
ıble to explore ideas, levelop arguments, ıromote valuable threads, lose off unproductive hreads, choose when to rchive, build a learning	;now when to control roups, when to let go, ow to bring in non-ıarticipants, know how to ıace discussion and use ime on line.	ıbility to develop & ınable others, act as atalyst, foster iscussion, summarize, estate, challenge, ıonitor understanding	Able to build online trust & purpose; to know who should be online and what they should be doing	:onfident in ıroviding a focus for ·-tivities, ıtervening, judging ıarticipants' interest, ·xperimenting with	Understanding of online process
Able to create links between e-tivities resources	Able to use special features of software to explore learner's use e.g. message history	Know how to use special features of software for e-moderators, e.g. controlling, archiving	ıble to appreciate he basic structures ·f online design, and he WWW , Internet's ıotential for learning	:onfident in ıperational ınderstanding of oftware in use as a ıser; reasonable	Technical skills
Able to value diversity with cultural sensitivity	Able to interact through e mail and conferencing and achieve interaction between others	Able to engage with people online (not the machine or the software)	concise, energizing, personable online messages	Confident in being courteous, polite, and respectful in online (written) communication	Online communication skills
Know about valuable resources (e.g. on the WWW) and refer participants to them	:arry authority by warding marks fairly to tudents for their online ıarticipation and ontributions	Able to trigger debates by posing intriguing questions	Able to encourage sound contributions from others	:onfident in having nowledge and ·xperience to share, nd willing and able o add own	Content expertise
Show a positive attitude, commitment and enthusiasm for online learning	Show sensitivity to online relationships and communication	Able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences & roles	Able to establish an online identity as e-moderator	Confident in being determined and motivated as an e-moderator	Personal characteristics