ASSESSED, STUDENT-LED DIALOGIC INTERACTION:

A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF A CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE

HISTORY SEMINARS.

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Assessed, student-led dialogic interaction:

A Bakhtinian analysis of a case study of undergraduate history seminars.

Abstract

A Bakhtinian theoretical framework throws fresh light on higher education assessment, dialogue and classroom dynamics, demonstrating that assessed, student-led seminars can have a powerfully positive effect on student learning.

The case study comprised of a well-established programme of seminars in a university history department. These seminars, which are regarded as innovative, have three distinctive features: they are assessed; they contain dialogic interaction; and they are student-led. This qualitative study investigating the effects of the seminars on student learning employed interviews with tutors and students, and observations of seminars. A holistic picture has been created which takes account of the socio-ideological context of the seminars, the socio-linguistic structures which constituted the actual interaction and the participants' perspectives.

A Bakhtinian analysis was applied to empirical data and revealed that it is when three conditions are in place that the potential for dialogic learning is enhanced. Firstly, assessment directs students' activity amplifying their learning experience. Secondly, the use of different types of dialogue enables students to assimilate new ideas. Thirdly, through peer facilitation

and leadership of the seminars, along with other structuring devices, the power dynamics of the classes remain open and fluid and the tutor is prevented from unwittingly suppressing active student involvement.

In these conditions, it is argued, students are able to engage actively with the material in-hand resulting in a richer learning experience.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction: a dialogue

In choosing my topic, I drew upon many years of personal interest in three specific aspects of university pedagogy: assessment, discussion skills and peer teaching, in what was then my own university college English department. This led me to choose a research project that combines all three: a consideration of an extensive and well-established programme of assessed, student-led seminars in a university history department. This thesis is, I believe, the first full-length empirical case study to focus on assessed, student-led seminars and the first to use Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas to discuss, in some depth, dialogic[1] learning in the context of the university seminar. In doing this it addresses three significant characteristics of this programme of seminars. Firstly, it considers the fact that the seminars are assessed, a relatively unusual phenomenon in higher education[2]. Secondly, it evaluates the effect of incorporating a range of different types of dialogue within them, rather than focusing predominantly on presentation. Thirdly, it considers the influence of them being student-led, which potentially changes the power dynamics of the seminars. The intention of the study is to deepen our understanding of student learning and indirectly improve pedagogic practice.

My own higher education teaching experience is almost entirely in an English department within a small university college (see Appendix 1).

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[1]The ideas of Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary theorist, are discussed in detail in chapter two.
[2] Presentations and contributions/attendance are relatively frequently assessed, though full seminars are still the rarity, as discussed in chapter six.

Throughout the last fifteen years as a lecturer, head of department and now dean, I have raised awareness among tutors and students of the benefits of discussion as an approach to teaching, learning and assessment. I have piloted and 'rolled out' an integrated system of assessed, student-led, seminar discussions across the department and supported others across the institution in embedding assessed discussion in their programmes. Intuitively, I became increasingly convinced that the cocktail of assessment, discussion and student facilitation was a powerful one for my students and so, out of curiosity and a wish to refine my practice to ensure it was as effective as possible, I undertook some limited practitioner research[3] which, I realise now, was predicated on a rather instrumentalist model where cause and effect were seen in a relatively direct relationship. While this research informed my understanding of some of the surface features of assessed seminar discussion and was helpful in ensuring we had effective quality systems in place to ensure the rigour and reliability of the assessment process, I quickly realised that I was only scratching the surface of the complex, socio-linguistic experience that I was encouraging. As a consequence, I came to the decision to undertake some in-depth research on seminar discussion as the focus of my doctoral studies.

I decided against studying my own department's practices, as I had been so closely involved in their development and review, that objectivity and the ability to see afresh were likely to be significant challenges. Instead,

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[3] I use the phrase 'practitioner research' here as an inclusive term for research and scholarship undertaken by any professional educational practitioner attempting to understand and improve their own practice and that of others.

I identified a department where practice in this area had been refined and developed over a similarly long period of time, where student-led seminars were also assessed and where discussion was seen as a central part of the seminar. Looking at such well-established practice provided the opportunity to look beyond the issues that beset innovative activity in its early years. I will also argue that, across the last two decades, the programme of seminars has had the chance to be in dialogue with the wider higher education environment, shaping and being shaped by contemporary policy and practice.

The case study is of an extensive programme of assessed, student-led seminars in a university history department. The seminars occur in around half the modules at levels two and three and these were the focus of the study, though it also embraced the associated introductory level one module, 'Learning History', and a selection of unassessed tutor and student-led seminars to provide a context (see Appendix 2). The department is part of a research-intensive, well-respected university in a large city. It attracts a high proportion of very well-qualified, young entrants from overwhelmingly British, white, middle-class backgrounds (see Appendix 1), a factor which is discussed in chapter three, as this could potentially limit the usefulness of the study's findings. The university and the department perform well in both research and teaching indicators in the league tables and surveys (see Appendix 1).

The assessed seminars under study have been influenced by current ideas on effective teaching and learning, as chapters four and five discuss. Indeed, the assessed seminars were introduced and developed during what might be described as a paradigm shift in policies on higher education following the enlargement of the university sector, the commitment to mass higher education and Dearing's (1997) report. The sector was encouraged to move away from a focus on teaching to one on learning with a concomitant emphasis on 'learning outcomes' which identified not only the knowledge to be acquired, but also what range of employability and lifelong learning skills would be developed (Dochy, Segers, Gijbels and Struyven 2007: 87; Gray, Griffin and Nasta 2000: 32). Parallel to this was a move to diversify assessment practices and include those which in themselves developed as well as tested graduate skills (Boud 1995: 36; Dochy *et al.* 2007: 87).

The emerging seminar programme was part of this change. The seminars have gradually evolved since 1988, when two tutors came to the University having begun to experiment with ways of involving students in seminars at their previous institution (Robin; Lesley[4]). Robin, in particular, led their development responding to opportunities as they occurred across the decades. The move to assess the seminars was a significant moment in this development, enabled because of the shift to modularisation in the mid

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[4] Pseudonyms are used throughout and gender disguised. Where a student is cited, their year of study is given in brackets after their pseudonym. Where a tutor is cited, as here, only their pseudonym is given. Initially, I used a code to help identify where a given reference might be found in interview transcripts and field-notes, but I quickly realised that the 'search' and 'find' functions of current document-management and word-processing software worked more quickly and efficiently, rendering the code unnecessary and meaning that the thesis itself became more readable.

1990s. The move to assessment was initially resisted by many tutors and external examiners, but during the last decade the seminars have come to be judged, by both internal and external commentators, to be a highly successful and valuable part of the department's undergraduate experience. Having been internally reviewed on several occasions, the programme of seminars that is now offered involves almost all tutors, all students and embraces the students' induction into the study of the discipline at this level, as well as providing them with the necessary study skills.

The programme of seminars has several times been the focus of small-scale practitioner research (Allen and Lloyd-Jones 1998; Booth and Hyland 2000; Doran, Durston, Fletcher and Longmore 2000[5]), though previous projects have not used the concept of dialogics as a conceptual framework and no in-depth studies have been undertaken. This thesis seeks neither to endorse nor criticise the practice in the case study. Instead, like Dillon's (1988: 3) research project on questioning and discussion in the classroom, it seeks to 'enhance understanding and practice'. To do this, it explores the relationship between the seminars and student learning, focusing on the influence of assessment, the use of dialogic modes of communication and the effect of making learning student-led, as explored in each of the analytic chapters: six, seven and eight.

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[5] In addition, it was the subject of unpublished research by one of the participants and doctoral research by another student with a different research focus. This is not referenced to preserve anonymity.

There have been many advocates of the use of dialogue in educational contexts (Bridges 1979; Burbules 1993; Dewey 1916; Dillon 1988 and 1994; Lasker 1949; Palmer 2001) and these typically share a view that dialogue can serve the purposes of a liberal democracy. Dialogue of this kind is, according to Burbules (1993: 8),

> guided by a spirit of discovery, so that the typical tone of a dialogue is exploratory and interrogative. It involves a commitment to the process of communicative interchange itself, a willingness 'to see things through' to some meaningful understandings or agreements among the participants. Furthermore, it manifests an attitude of reciprocity among the participants: an interest, respect and concern that they share for one another, even in the face of disagreements.

This acts as a useful description of the type of dialogue that I myself was intuitively trying to foster in my own higher education classroom. Years of teaching English in both the school and university sectors, coupled with some small-scale action research (Bentley 2003 and 2005) prompted me to undertake this more in-depth qualitative study. Using the lens of Bakhtin's theory of dialogics, which I had come to appreciate through my literary studies, I wanted to try and understand why dialogue appeared to be such an effective way of learning and what structures could be established in the classroom to maximise its effect. In my own practice I had started to use assessment and peer-leadership as structuring devices. I believed that these encouraged students to participate more actively and fully in Burbules's (1993) ideal form of discussion and that, together, assessment and peer-leadership could enable dialogic learning to become a reality in any university classroom.

My studies have, however, made me aware of the educational possibilities of different types of dialogue, beyond this open and inclusive form of 'democratic' dialogue, as discussed in chapter seven, and I will make the case that all forms of dialogue help to create a dialogic learning environment. The dialogic classroom is summed up by Dewey (1916: 163):

> The important thing is that thinking is the method of an educative experience. The essentials of method are therefore identical with the essentials of reflection. They are first that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience – that there be a continuous activity in which he is interested for its own sake; secondly, that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; third, that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; fourth, that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; fifth, that he have the opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application, to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity.

My doctoral studies have directed me to conclude that my own practice, and the history seminars I study here, broadly provide this kind of situated-learning opportunity, an experience which is realised through dialogue in the context of the seminar.

Seminars vary in form and structure according to their discipline and chapter three considers the way in which studying a programme of seminars in a specific discipline might affect the generalisations that can be made. For me, the difference between an English and history seminar is not great, but I did find the history benchmark statement's description of an ideal seminar to be helpful:

> [S]tudents should be expected to participate in group discussion, give presentations and jointly explore themes and arguments. These group discussions should be aimed at improving students' understanding rather than at the acquisition of knowledge *per se* and should be structured in such a way as to maximise effective student

participation. They will normally be preceded by a prescribed programme of reading. Such work should be seen as both deepening students' understanding of a theme or subject and developing oral communication skills. It encourages a critical, as well as self-critical but tolerant, approach to historical discussion and builds students' self-confidence. It improves their abilities to marshal historical evidence and to summarise historical arguments, as well as to think quickly on their feet, to communicate articulately and persuasively with others and to recognise the value of working closely with others. (QAA 2000b: 9)

The seminars studied here are predominantly assessed and student-led, but otherwise they are very close in form and intention to this description. They are described in more detail in chapter four.

However, I think it would be fair to say that tutors and students in general rarely experience the kind of dialogic learning that Dewey, Burbules and the benchmark statement describe. One of the *History 2000* (HEA 2000) FDTL[6] projects, for example, describes a picture of history seminars where presentations are far more common than discussion (Doran *et al.* 2000: 195).

Swift, Gooding and Swift (1988: 201) conclude that typically teachers dominate classroom discussion, talking 75%-85% of the time. More recently, Wragg (2004: 3) endorsed this view suggesting that teachers are not always aware of how much they dominate classroom dialogue. These are both points which this study and my own observations of other practice endorse. Given the apparently beneficial effects of learning through dialogue and the quiet consensus among tutors and students in this study and in the research literature that good discussion is relatively rare (Wilen 1988: 314), it seems

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[6] Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning – discussed further in chapter four.

that there is a real need to improve our understanding of what factors

support effective dialogue in the classroom.

In attempting this, I have chosen a study that builds on existing

knowledge and seeks to make a contribution to our understanding of

pedagogical practice. There have been many books and studies over the

twentieth century that have extolled the benefits of discussion in informal or

formal learning contexts. There is a tradition of scholars who extol the use of

discussion which develops a democratic disposition and the ideas in this thesis

reveal more about the linguistic structures that make discussion inclusive and

undermining of hegemony. Dewey's (1916) ideas shaped American

education in the mid-twentieth century. Advocates of discussion as a

medium for educating a free society have continued to the present day

(Apple and Weis 1983; Bridges 1979; Freire 1996[7]; Giroux 1997; Giroux,

Lankshear, McLaren and Peters 1996; Kincheloe 2008; Lasker 1949).

Influenced not so much by liberal, political theory, as by group

analytic psychotherapy, Jane Abercrombie[8] undertook the first[9], empirical

study of discussion in the higher education classroom. She used 'free

discussion' with her medical students to further develop their skills of

perception and reasoning. 'Free discussion'[10], she argues, improves

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[7] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1970.
[8] Although known as Jane, her first name was Minnie.
[9] First published in 1960.
[10] From the 1960s onwards 'free discussion', originating in group analytic psychotherapy, was used quite commonly in higher education in the psychological and social science disciplines, as well as in the field of informal learning. 'Free discussion', is neither tutor nor student-led, though the tutor acts as a light-touch

perception and reasoning, because students are prompted to reflect on alternative positions and ideas and on how the ideas of others relate to 'their own store of information' (1989: 67) and way of perceiving the world or 'schemata' (1989: 27). Abercrombie (1970) developed this preliminary study to offer more general advice on group teaching.

Since then, some scholars have attempted to classify and describe different types of oral interaction (Burbules 1993; Dillon 1994a; Roby 1988). Others have offered general advice on the development of oral skills starting with Rudduck who produced a useful, short book on *Learning through Small Group Discussion* (1978), which directly addressed, albeit briefly, many of the issues covered here: participation, assessment, the influence of the tutor, 'leaderless' groups and practical matters. More recently, individuals (such as Barker, McLean and Roseman 2000; and Gibbs 1992b) and project teams (such as Speak-Write 2001*;* Wisker 2004) have shared advice on developing oral skills. There have been some small-scale empirical studies of seminar presentations. Some have featured peer-leadership (Bentley 2003; Berry and Sharp 1999) and assessed student-led seminars, notably in the form of presentations (Allen and Lloyd-Jones 1998; Doran *et al*.: 2000; Walker and Warhurst 2000). These latter two were part of the *History 2000* project, which offered advice based on existing practice in the humanities. Martin and Campbell (1999: 327-28) developed a 'microtraining approach to the communication skill development of students', arguing oral skills were

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facilitator. Students are encouraged to talk to each other in a peer 'network' pattern of communication, rather than relying on the leadership of a tutor from the front (Abercrombie 1989: 67-68).

generic. Joughin (2003) completed a thesis on oral assessment, focusing in particular on the students' experience of *viva voce* examinations. He was interested in creating a model that allowed oral assessment, which takes many forms, to be described and this model is used in chapter four to describe the case studied here. Brookfield and Preskill's (1999) book drew together lessons learned from theory and practice and shared advice on improving dialogue in the university classroom, while Exley and Dennick's (2004) study had more of an emphasis on practical advice for the management of tutorials and seminars. Creme's (1995) short empirical study on her own media studies' seminars, though small-scale, has most in common with both my own practice and that studied here in that the seminars are student-led, assessed and discursive. Creme (1995: 138) makes a strong case for the benefits of the seminars arguing their effect on student learning was 'far reaching' and inclusive.

This brief overview of publications on the educational benefits of discussion offers a flavour of the different types of approach that have been taken across the last few decades and chapter seven explores this further. This thesis is distinct from these writers by offering neither practical advice, nor a specific pedagogic model that allows this form of discussion to be replicated in other classrooms. Instead, its findings stress the complexity[11] and holistic nature of the dialogic learning experience, something that

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[11] This study uses the distinction that Genelot, in his consideration of deliberative discussion, makes between 'complicated' and 'complex' systems and structures. Although it would take time and effort to understand something 'complicated', it could be ultimately achieved. 'Complexity, on the other hand, can never be completely understood' (Genelot 1994: 81).

cannot be replicated in any mechanistic way (Wegerif 2006: 59). However, it does share with all of the above scholars a wish to see practice improved. General principles emerge from my findings, which will enable tutors to reflect on some of the key features of dialogic learning environments. This study builds on the existing body of work by offering, I believe, the first full-length, empirical case study of the relationship between dialogue and learning since Abercrombie (1989), the first full-length case study on assessed seminars and the first in-depth study to use Bakhtinian theory in the context of higher education pedagogy. It uses Bakhtin's theory of dialogics to shed new light on how dialogue can support learning. In addition, Bakhtin's (1981: 342) concepts of 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourse explain why assessment can be helpful, despite appearing to be a restrictive, coercive force that is quite the opposite of free, open-ended discussion. It also offers an account of why peer-leadership removes some of the barriers to learning that can exist with tutor-led discussion (Wilen 1988: 314).

Bakhtin's theory of dialogics is used as a conceptual, overarching framework focusing the thesis on the socio-linguistic nature of the interaction and the particular effect this has on student learning. Indeed, Bakhtin provides a theoretical approach which underpins all areas of the thesis including the early chapters which describe me as the researcher, my methodology, the case and its context. Although ostensibly a literary historian and critic, Bakhtin was engaged in 'an astonishingly broad enterprise' (Booth 1984: *xxvii*). According to Holquist (1986: *xiv*), Bakhtin 'thought of himself less as a literary critic than as a "philosophical

anthropologist" '. Bakhtin and Vološinov, a Russian linguist contemporary to

Bakhtin, saw dialogic structures as crucial to the understanding of human

interaction and the development of individual identity. Vološinov (1986: 95)

notes that

> Dialogue, in the narrow sense of the word, is, of course, only one of
> the forms – a very important form, to be sure – of verbal interaction.
> But dialogue can also be understood in a broader sense, meaning not
> only direct, face-to-face, vocalized verbal communication between
> persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever.

This study takes a similar approach, seeing discussion as an important

dimension of the seminars, but also using the concept of dialogue as a

theme, a method and an analytical tool.

This thesis is in dialogue with its readers, at once trying to persuade

them to accept its own perspective, while simultaneously taking into account

the possible counter-arguments and views that might be made.

Methodologically speaking its approach is dialogic, since it takes a qualitative

approach which places the researcher in dialogue with the researched by

exploring the nuances and interaction of social activity. As with Bakhtinian

dialogics, its approach is based on a belief that individuals draw on a range

of different discourses to articulate their experiences and engage with their

listeners. The data has been gathered dialogically through interview and

field observation and has then been analysed using discourse analysis, an

approach designed to identify the dialogic texture of the complexities of

speech. Because the study is focused on seminar interaction, rather than, for

example, on the rigour of the assessment process, it lends itself readily to a

Bakhtinian approach.

The chapters are arranged thus. Chapter two introduces Bakhtinian dialogics as a helpful approach, arguing that it lays bare the socio-linguistic structures of the seminars. Bakhtin's theories are introduced holistically in this chapter and then drawn on throughout the rest of the thesis to shed a fresh light on the issues.

Chapter three introduces myself as the researcher and explains the rationale behind the chosen research methodology. I argue that this research project is inevitably in dialogue with my own higher education experiences, because I believe that there is no such thing as a passive observer and commentator in empirical research (Bakhtin 1986: 125-26; Hammersley 1992: 164). All researchers are, to a greater or lesser extent, participants in that which they observe and study. Thus my experiences as an English scholar, a higher education student, teacher, manager and leader have shaped my approach to this study. My experiences have led me to try and capture a holistic view of seminar learning, which values multiple perspectives and articulates the multi-voiced or 'heteroglot' (Bakhtin 1981: 291) nature of the dialogic classroom. Therefore, the chapter makes a case for Bakhtinian-oriented, discourse analysis as the principal approach because this can articulate the discursive flux that constitutes the student learning experience.

Chapter four introduces the chosen case locating it in the higher education policy context. It argues that the seminars have been influenced by, and played their part in shaping, the last twenty years of government initiatives during which there has been a major shift in higher education

policy that has challenged the traditional concept of the 'University' (Readings 1996: 5). The chapter also shows how, when judged against a range of indicators, the seminars have proved to be successful.

Chapter five locates the study in relation to existing theories of higher education pedagogy. It makes a case that current theories about effective 'approaches to learning'[12] (Entwistle 1988 and 1997a; Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle 1984; Marton and Säljö 1976 and 1984; Ramsden 1988) and academic literacies (Chiseri-Strater 1991; Jones, Turner and Street 1999; Lea and Street 1998; Zamel and Spack 1998) do not examine or explain the central role that oral interaction plays in the learning experience. It responds to the criticism that 'approaches to learning' theories have a tendency to over-simplify and decontextualize the students' experience of learning (Haggis 2003 and 2008; Malcolm and Zukas 2001; Mann 2001; Webb 1997) and to Haggis's (2008: 3) call for more empirical studies which attempt 'to document different types of dynamic interaction and process through time in relation to "learning" situations in HE'.

The next three chapters, six, seven and eight, contain the analysis of the empirical data and this forms the substantive part of the thesis. Chapter six focuses on the effect of assessing the seminars. It acknowledges as its

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[12] There are two broad approaches to learning. 'Surface' learning is where students are driven by the task in hand. It is associated with extrinsic motivation and sees students reacting to a fear of failure. 'Deep' learning is driven by the desire to seek meaning. It is associated with intrinsic motivation and sees students relating new ideas to existing knowledge.

starting point the participants'[13] views that assessment supports learning and seeks to understand how the use of the coercive force of assessment, often associated with 'surface' learning (Marton and Säljö 1976), can achieve this espoused beneficial effect (see footnote 12). Using Bakhtin's (1981: 342) ideas of 'authoritative' (1981: 342) and 'internally persuasive' (1981: 347) discourse, I argue that assessment can focus student effort and support students in their move towards the more independent learning required in higher education.

Chapter seven considers the different types of discursive interaction that occur in the seminars and the benefits these have over presentational modes of communication. It identifies the dialogic 'light flash' that can occur when the conditions are right (Bakhtin 1986: 162) and suggests that it is this 'dialogic feeling for the world' that seems to be at the heart of the seminar programme's success (Bakhtin 1984a: 265).

Chapter eight considers the impact of having students rather than tutors lead the seminars by exploring how this substantially alters the power dynamic, so that students become more fully engaged in an active learning process. Using Bakhtin's theory of linguistic 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces (1981: 272), coupled with his ideas on double-voiced discourse and carnival, it considers some of the potentially destabilising discourses present in the classroom and how they are affected by making the seminars student-led.

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[13] When I use the word 'participants' in the study, I am referring to the students and tutors who were interviewed, unless indicated otherwise.

Chapter nine brings the themes of the three previous chapters, on assessment, dialogue and student-led learning, together to consider how each relates to the other to produce the rich learning environment that the participants say they experience. It concludes that Bakhtin's ideas explain how, when combined, these three elements create the conditions for 'dialogic learning' to occur.

Finally, chapter ten considers the implications of these findings for both practice and policy. It identifies the ways in which the thesis contributes to the body of knowledge in the areas of student learning, assessment, seminar interaction and peer-teaching. It identifies the inevitable limitations of a single-case study, as well as the ways in which the Bakhtinian theoretical approach enable certain more general conclusions to be drawn. Finally, it concludes that the programme of seminars creates a learning environment that enables students to develop an 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) which is at the heart of an effective learning experience.

Chapter 2 – Bakhtin: 'a dialogic encounter' with the university seminar

2.1   Introduction

The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and literary theorist (1895-1975), underpin and permeate this thesis. Bakhtin's theories, according to Holquist (1986: *xiv*), are 'about the nature of human consciousness under particular cultural and historical conditions'. Bakhtin's view of the dialogic nature and form of the socio-linguistic world not only offers this study a helpful way of understanding the socio-linguistic dynamics of the seminar, but also informs every aspect of the thesis. His theory of dialogism sheds light on my own development as a researcher and the methodology chosen for the study. It provides fresh insights into the development of the assessed seminars and the unfolding of the higher education environment within which they developed.

The concept of dialogue links the consideration of the various learning theories studied. Bakhtin's ideas enable an in-depth consideration of authority, discussion and power which are the three areas of particular focus for this thesis. In short, Bakhtin's theories are used to provide the reader with a 'dialogic encounter' (Bakhtin 1986: 7) with the university seminar. As a result, to borrow Biggs' (1999: 31) phrase, one might say that

this thesis is 'constructively aligned'[14]. The case is about the assessment of a discursive form of classroom interaction. The theoretical orientation is Bakhtinian and the methodology is dialogic, in that tutor and student views, my observations and the wider context, are all brought together and placed in dialogue with each other. The content, theory and methodology are designed to come together to express and account for the students' experience of learning in the seminars from a socio-linguistic perspective.

This dialogic, socio-linguistic perspective, as I will show, is distinct from other accounts of higher education pedagogy. Bakhtin's ideas are in keeping with the growing belief, charted in chapter five, that learning should be student-centred and can be enhanced when dialogic and exploratory pedagogic approaches are used (Chiseri-Strater 1991: 149). The study uses Bakhtin's ideas to articulate why such approaches are effective from a socio-linguistic perspective. In order to support this study's exploration of dialogic learning, this chapter offers a general overview of the Bakhtinian School's context and ideas before moving on to describe some of the key concepts of Bakhtin's theory of dialogics.

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[14] Biggs (1999: 25-31) argues that aligning the intended learning outcomes to the teaching methodology, the content and the method of assessment within a student-centred, constructivist approach is likely to create powerful learning opportunities.

2.2   The Bakhtinian School and this thesis

Bakhtin was educated in the tradition of Russian formalist scholarship[15] and emerged into adulthood when Russia was in great turmoil, as it endured violent revolution, civil war and the impact of the power struggles between Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, during whose long 'rule' Bakhtin was forced to live in exile. It was during the 1920s and 1930s that Bakhtin gathered around him a circle of similarly minded thinkers and produced what proved to be seminal works[16] (Bakthin 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986 and 1990; Vološinov 1986; Medvedev 1978), though they struggled to find their way to a wide readership until the latter decades of the twentieth century (Holquist 1981: *xxi-xxvi*). Bakhtin's ideas were initially described as a 'windy, repetitive, disorganized and clumsily- translated mass' (Miller 1969: 36 cited in Honeycutt 1994: Ch 2), but were gradually accepted and celebrated despite their idiosyncracies (Booth 1984; Holquist 1981 *xv*; Honeycutt 1994; Lodge 1990[17]).

My own discipline, English, offered me various ways to approach the interface between language and society which was then the main concern of my literary studies, as well as my emerging interest in higher education

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[15] Russian Formalists, during the early twentieth century, rejected traditional psychological and cultural-historical approaches to the study of literature and adopted a 'scientific' method which sought to identify the characteristics of poetic language.

[16] The bulk of the works were written in Russian in essay format between 1920 and 1950. They were then gradually brought together, translated into English and published between 1960 and 1990.

[17] See also *Dialogism, a*n international journal of Bakhtin studies, published from 1998 onwards.

pedagogy. At one end of the continuum was Saussurean linguistics and at the other Derridean deconstruction. The first could not articulate the ambiguities and unfinished quality of social interaction with its belief that all could ultimately be ordered and classified (Saussure 1983[18]). The second went to the opposite extreme presenting a view of language so complex and unstable that shared meaning was an apparent impossibility (Derrida 1976 and 1978). The Bakhtinian School of thought, on the other hand, standing as it does on the cusp of structuralism and post-structuralism, modernism and post-modernism, captures both the structural dimension of language and its multiplicity. Bakhtin moved beyond the formalist approach which described a notional ideal language. Instead, he considered language as it is used in real-life situations, which had hitherto 'remained outside its [linguistics'] field of vision' (Bakhtin 1981: 274).

Bakhtin has a different focus to the more recent pragmatic linguists who describe 'ordinary language' and its application (Austin 1962; Garfinkel 1967; Garfinkel and Sacks 1970; Goffman 1956; Grice 1957 and 1975; Jefferson 1978; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1978; Schegloff 1988; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Searle 1969; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; ten Have 1999). The focus of these linguists is on the description of the *structures* of everyday language, whereas Bakhtin's emphasis was more on the socio-cultural *effect* of language and takes account of the pervasive influence of ideologies and power.

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[18] *Course in General Linguistics* was first published in French in 1916.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogics works at every level of human interaction, micro, meso and macro. At a micro level, it offers an account of how each word or phrase comes to mean something to the speakers in a conversation. At a meso level, it explains how different 'speech genres' (Bakhtin 1986: 60) merge and hybridise in real-life conversation, as speakers use them to express and maintain their identity in complex social environments. At a macro level, it facilitates an understanding of how socio-ideological discourses permeate society and exert influence. It was for these reasons, that, after considering the many different theoretical approaches that were possible for a study of this kind, I selected Bahktin's theory of dialogics.

This thesis uses the words socio-linguistic, socio-ideological, ideology and discourse frequently. Bakhtin does not neatly define his use of them, but it is clear that he sees them as almost interchangeable. For Bakhtin (1981: 356), a 'social language'

> is a concrete socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within the boundaries of a language that is unitary only in the abstract.

This suggests that language is made up of many social languages which can be named and described separately, but which, in actual speech, are inextricably interconnected. I, for example, might weave literary, feminist, research and educational languages into a single conversation at work. Bakhtin (1986: 155) often speaks of a social language as a 'discourse', which is the term predominantly used in this study, but he uses his terminology fairly fluidly, as he himself admits. He argues that discourse belongs to both

individuals and groups. He describes it as both closed and open-ended (1981: 345-46), as well as synonymous with a 'concrete […] utterance' (1981: 276-7) or a language. He explains how discourses can be implicit and invisible, as well as 'completely materialized' (1981: 347).

While Bakhtin spends time exploring different types of discourse, Vološinov reflects at length on the connection between language and ideology. He argues, for example, that 'Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present too' (1986: 10) and that humans only gain consciousness when they are 'filled with ideological (semiotic) content' (1986: 11). Vološinov (1986:14) believes that ideology is pervasive and 'cannot be pinned down to any one ideological sphere' because it invades all conversational language. This study takes a similar pervasive view of ideology, rather than focusing on publicly advocated macro-ideologies, such as those associated with politics and the state.

Bakhtin's concern with discourse linked his interest in literature and language and gave them a social and political orientation, which ultimately led to his being exiled by the communist government of his day (Holquist 1981: *xxiv*). Power concerned Bakhtin a great deal. In particular, he was interested in how it was expressed through linguistic interaction. Bakhtin chose dialogue as the metaphorical model for all socio-linguistic interaction and his theory of dialogics continues to spread like ripples on a pond, reaching the world of pedagogic research relatively recently (for example, in higher education – Lillis 2003; Savin-Baden 2008; Readings 1996; in school

education - Alexander 2008; Galin and Latchaw 1998; van der Linden and Renshaw 2004; Wegerif 2006, 2007a and 2007b; Wells 1999a and 1999b; White 2007; in informal education - Freedman and Ball 2009).

Many of Bakhtin's texts engage in the study of socio-linguistics through their study of literature, but it is possible to tease out of them themes that are helpful to the task in hand here. His account of the relationship between the '*official* monologism' (Bakhtin 1984a: 110; his italics) of the state and the multi-voiced, heteroglot nature of everyday speech has the potential to inform the discussion of the relationship between policy and practice in higher education, between academe and the wider social world of the tutors and students, and between the strictures of assessment and the more open concept of learning. His theory of dialogism aids the exploration of the nature of tutor-student and student-student relationships, how the case relates to its educational environment and how the account of learning offered here relates to existing views.

2.3   The 'heteroglossic' culture of the classroom

Bakhtin's view that modern culture is 'heteroglossic' (1981: 272) underpins his theory of dialogism. In 'Discourse in the Novel', an essay within *the Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin offers a literary history of the novel. He goes back in time to articulate what happened to literary development when an ancient and hitherto isolated culture came into contact with new

and different cultures. According to Bakhtin, the ancient classical societies

had a notional single literary language, because they largely operated in

isolation from each other within closed cultures. There are very few of these

left in today's world. These single, relatively pure discourses are the product

of what Bakhtin (1981: 12) calls 'monoglossic', single-voiced cultures. He

(1981: 12) argues that, as the world opened up, cultures came into linguistic

(or more broadly semiotic) contact with each other and began to shape and

influence each other – 'polyglossia' emerged.

Gradually language stratified into linguistic dialects and also socio-

ideological languages, 'languages of social groups, "professional" and

"generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth' (Bakhtin 1981:

272). These socio-ideological languages or 'discourses' are the jigsaw pieces

of dialogue. Each expresses 'a concrete socio-linguistic belief system'

(Bakhtin 1981: 356), which can be recognised, defined and described.

However, discourses are 'unitary only in the abstract' (Bakhtin 1981: 356),

because in reality there is a 'Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages' (Bakhtin

1981: 278) where many discourses become interwoven in a complex and

open-ended manner. When language has developed into this multiple and

complex state, Bakhtin describes it as 'heteroglossic' (1981: 272). The

language of the classroom will be made up of many socio-ideological

languages, including: those related to the higher education context, such as

disciplinary or more general academic discourse; those linked to the students'

personal background, such as local dialects and those emerging from social

activities; and cross-cutting ideological discourses, such as those related to

age, gender, ethnicity or class. Each becomes interwoven with the others to form Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' (1981: 272), which is, therefore, a useful concept for studying the interviews and seminars in this case study.

Bakhtin argues that 'Stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing' (1981: 272) because of the 'centrifugal' (1981: 272) forces that are at work in language. The 'centrifugal' impulse within a social language flings it into contact with all other languages around it causing languages to mix and hybridise. These forces are brought to bear whenever different discourses meet in open dialogue and each discourse is influenced and shaped by the ones it encounters[19]. For Bakhtin, this diversity and open-endedness is a positive characteristic because it counters the controlling discourse of those in power.

The movement to fragment and stratify language is not the only force affecting language. There is an equally powerful 'centripetal' (Bakhtin 1981: 272) drive to reduce language to the unitary discourse of specific social groups all of whom are expressing their identity and striving to be heard above all other groups, each of which has its own language. These can be discourses that are attached to any kind of social group, though the more power the group holds, the more influential the discourse.   Those in power wield official discourse and seek to reduce the ideas of other groups to those which are officially approved and supportive of their agenda. They are seeking to create a culture of '*official* monologism' (Bakhtin 1984a: 110; his

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[19] Dialogos = reason (logos) through and across (dia) difference.

italics). Key discourses play a major part in 'accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher socio-ideological levels' (Bakhtin 1981: 273).

Bakhtin's ideas are helpful in exploring the relationship between government policy and the practice studied here, and chapter four rehearses some of the official initiatives and policy advice that articulate the 'centripetal' impulse of the government. One particularly powerful 'centripetal' discourse relevant to this study is that of assessment which chapter six explores in more detail. Assessment requires diverse thoughts and ideas to be contained and expressed within a given structure. There are significant penalties in the form of barriers and expulsion that force students to comply or leave. The impact of assessment on student learning is, therefore, something that will be considered as part of the analysis of the data.

In the modern world single-voiced cultures are rare and, according to Bakhtin (1981: 272), every speech contains both the 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' impulse:

> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity.

This is 'dialogized heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1981: 272), where the many social languages that are present in any interaction, mix and interweave with each other to form a complex flux of animated discourse.

Expressing this complexity is difficult because any socially realised speech (or utterance, as Bakhtin calls it) will be 'shot through' (Bakhtin 1986: 93) with more discourses than it is possible to articulate. It will be shaped by generic socio-ideological discourses on themes such as gender, sexual-orientation, class, age, ethnicity, nationality and disability. It will be influenced by politics, personal religious belief systems, as well as the language of occupations, disciplines and organisations. Even leisure activities, whether sport, hobbies, voluntary work, or the entertainment sector, will each have its own socio-ideological language. Family and friendship groups each develop their own discourse. In any given verbal exchange individuals may be consciously or unconsciously trying to speak within the discourse they believe to be appropriate to that situation, whether that is someone adopting a 'telephone voice' by putting on an accent and grammar not normally their own, or a student trying to take on the mantle of the academic in a higher education seminar. However, their discourse will be 'shot through' (Bakhtin 1986: 93) with echoes of some of the many other discourses that their socio-linguistic experiences have taught them, as well as those that are reverberating more subtly through their immediate context. It is because of this that Bakhtin (1981: 291) is able to conclude that

> language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and past, […] between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth.

In the university classroom there will be a wide array of social languages. Each participant will come with their own experiences and discursive practices and they will encounter new ones, not only in the language used by their tutors, but also in the language of their fellow students, as those studying academic literacies have noted (Jones *et al.* 1999; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 2003; Zamel and Spack 1998).

When students are new to higher education, they will not be familiar with the language of academe in general, nor of their discipline in particular. They will experience the unifying pull of the academic socio-linguistic environment around them, not immediately understanding what they hear, as with any new language. However, through explanation, reflection, active engagement and general participation they will, in theory, gradually develop an increasing understanding of the language. By the time they graduate, they are becoming fluent speakers, though in practice there are many barriers that have to be overcome.

The analogy of learning a language, however, tends to over-stress the instrumentalist dimension of the process, because learning 'academe' is very difficult in a language laboratory, as many students undertaking distance learning have discovered from experience. A broader metaphor is needed to explain the more situated process involved in learning to understand and use the language of academe as a native speaker. Chapter five considers the ideas of some theorists who have developed accounts of the process of acculturisation generally (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and in the

education sector in particular (Applebee 1996; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 2003), but Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is also helpful in understanding the process. Any group of students, however socially cohesive, will bring into the classroom some of the many different socio-ideological languages that Bakhtin describes. When the cohort is made up of an increasingly diverse range of students from different social and cultural backgrounds, the linguistic diversity will be even greater creating a potentially richer but also, at least initially, cacophonous learning environment.

Appreciating this complexity indicates why any idealised form of dialogue, which is proposed as the panacea for egalitarian interaction, is difficult to achieve in practice. Open and equal dialogue will always be troubled by the centralising drives in language. Individual discourses will repeatedly and inevitably assert themselves, whether they belong to the tutor or the students, or to wider external agencies and government bodies. When a speaker expresses her or himself, s/he is not asking to be changed or silenced. Indeed, the contrary is the case. The speaker wishes to persuade the listening audience to accept his/her view and use the same discourse as him/herself. However, listeners are not passive. They too come from a discursive position and wish to express and persuade others to accept their discourse.

When a word is spoken, both speaker and listener, addresser and addressee, have to orient what they say towards the other in order to engage their addressee. Bakhtin (1981: 280) says every utterance 'is directed towards

an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates' (Bakhtin's italics). By taking account of the addressee's anticipated response, the speaker can shape his/her utterance in a way that means it will be accepted by the listener. If the speaker does orient what s/he says towards the listener, the utterance has much more chance of being understood and assimilated by the listener. Bakhtin (1986: 7) suggests that, in order to engage the addressee effectively in this way, each utterance functions as a question which requires the listener's response. The question reveals that the speaker has engaged with the culture of the listener, as well as demanding that the listener responds in a like minded-way by engaging with the culture of the speaker. Classroom interaction is just such a continuous asking of questions and counter-questions, not necessarily with the grammatical structure of an explicit question, but in the sense that it always invites a response.

As a result, every utterance is not a simple expression of someone's views, but is, as Vološinov (1986: 86) notes, '*the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*' (Vološinov's italics)*.* This does not mean, necessarily, an equal and balanced exchange. One of the speakers can be more or less dominant or persuasive. However, each utterance is oriented towards the other and is an expression of 'the "one" in relation to the "other" ' to the extent that Vološinov (1986: 86) argues 'I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong'. This

is what Bakhtin calls dialogic communication, where every utterance is always a response to its socio-linguistic context.

Dialogic communication is, however, neither a process of mediation, nor of averaging. A 'dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched' (Bakhtin 1986: 7; his italics). In addition, the addressee is neither necessarily a single individual, nor someone who is physically present:

> This addressee can be an immediate participant-interlocutor in an everyday dialogue, a differentiated collective of specialists in some particular area of cultural communication, a more or less differentiated public, ethnic group, contemporaries, like-minded people, opponents and enemies, a subordinate, a superior, someone who is lower, higher, familiar, foreign and so forth. (Bakhtin 1986: 95)

In a university classroom the addressees will be many and various and will include the tutor, officialdom, assessment, different types of student, other tutors whose advice they are seeking to follow, the voice of the module booklet and study guides, their own family, friends and former interlocutors whose influence seems relevant to the current situation. Every policy and centrally driven initiative is addressed variously to university managers, lecturers, researchers and students. As a result, 'Accounting for the addressee and anticipating his responsive reaction' involves 'multifaceted processes that introduce unique internal dramatism' into the utterance (Bakhtin 1986: 96).

Bakhtin (1986: 126) also acknowledges the presence of one particular kind of addressee, which he calls the 'superaddressee':

> Each dialogue takes place as if against the background of the responsive understanding of an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue.

This 'third party' in any dialogue can be thought of as a god-like figure, but it can also be a value system which permeates either explicitly or implicitly the speech situation and which shapes the way the speaker talks. Speakers who believe in the 'superaddressee' are influenced by it and shape their speech accordingly, as if in the presence of that higher authority and trying to seek its approval. In the higher education classroom, the voice and presence of academe can be seen as a 'superaddressee'. As with any higher authority, some may fear, some respect and some seek to emulate and respond to the authority's values and practices, but it is a pervasive influence. Gradually across time, under the influence of the higher authority, and with greater or lesser degrees of success and ease according to their background, most speakers learn how to speak and behave according to the value system.

While acknowledging that the speaker does not have to believe in a 'superaddressee' to learn and develop, this concept does begin to explain why some students appear to readily adopt the language and stance of an 'apprentice' academic, in the sense used by Lave and Wenger (1991[20]), and why some, who are not believers in this sense, do not. Just as with a religious belief, it cannot be taught and is not the product of a collection of instrumental practices. The concept of the 'superaddressee' takes Lave and

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[20] Jean Lave, a social anthropologist, and Etienne Wenger, a social learning theorist, developed a theory of situated learning based on the idea that experienced members of a 'community of practice', whether in the workplace or the classroom, used an apprenticeship approach to the development of new 'journeymen' through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998).

Wenger's concept of becoming a member of a 'community of practice' one step further. Participants need to behave like members of a community in order to be part of it, but there is something more intangible. Students can feel part of the community of academe in the sense that they have the necessary skills and can talk the right language, but if they believe in it as a higher authority, something worth pursuing for the good of humanity, they are more likely to commit themselves fully to the aims of the academic community.

Dialogic interaction occurs when speakers are open and respond to the addressees they perceive to be present. However, the type of discourse used can either prohibit or aid the formation of a productive dialogic relationship, as the next section on 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourse describes (Bakhtin 1981: 342).

2.4   Dialogics: the development of the individual student

There is one ideological discourse which is not open-ended and which speakers must respond to, whether they like it or not, if they fall within its sphere of direct influence. 'Authoritative' discourse is the voice that cannot be ignored (Bakhtin 1981: 342). It has a repressive quality which forces compliance. It comes with such a history and weight that it cannot be questioned or avoided by the listeners and must be accepted whole. However, 'It binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to

persuade us internally' (Bakhtin 1981: 342), so once out of its zone of influence, it has no lasting impact on the individual. This is unlike the 'superaddressee', who is ever present in the speaker's mind and always influencing what s/he says. 'Authoritative' discourse has power while the speaker is within its control, but no influence once outside that control.

In the higher education classroom, the 'superaddressee' (Bakhtin 1986: 126) might be conceived of as the influence of academe generally which, for the sake of the argument, can be taken as embodying Enlightenment values of truth and reason. Such a belief might pull the students on to greater things, encouraging them to strive towards an ideal. 'Authoritative' discourse, on the other hand, is pushing students to behave in certain ways with threats of punishment and expulsion. Chapter six makes a case that assessment is one such 'authoritative' discourse which demands that students respond to it. The consequence of ignoring assessment is that students are expelled from the academy. In this respect, managers and tutors in the wider university environment speak with an authority that is almost impossible for students to challenge, because, within their academic work, assessment outcomes govern their right to progress or be excluded. The wider authority of the university is inscribed in codes of practices, policies and procedures, in quality assurance systems, panels and boards. Codes of practice for complaints circumscribe the limited ways in which students can speak back to the authority of the university and students' activities are ring-fenced by disciplinary policies for academic misconduct and unacceptable behaviour.

We can add to this the whole body of disciplinary research which tutors can wield for their own ends and which naïve students see as an 'authoritative' discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 342). Tutors also have at their disposal the discourse of academe, interwoven with their disciplinary language. It is extremely difficult for students to challenge the language of academe. They have to accept and adopt it to become participants in the culture and have to use it in assignments to ensure that they are not expelled from the academy.

However, 'authoritative' discourse is rarely present in isolation from other more 'internally persuasive' discourses, which Bakhtin (1981: 345) argues, are 'of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness'. It is these discourses that persuade the listener to engage with the speaker and accept, to some extent, the speaker's viewpoint. The 'superaddressee' (Bakhtin 1986: 126) expresses just one of many 'internally persuasive' discourses of different kinds. Dialogic communication is characterised by the presence of these discourses. Booth (1984: *xxi*) summarises Bakhtin's view of how the individual is gradually shaped through their interface with these different kinds of discourse:

> From the beginning, we are "polyglot," already in process of mastering a variety of social dialects derived from parents, clan, class, religion, country. We grow in consciousness by taking in more voices as "authoritatively persuasive" and then by learning which to accept as "internally persuasive". Finally, we achieve, if we are lucky, a kind of individuality, but it is never a private or autonomous individuality in the western sense. […] Polyphony, the miracle of our "dialogical" lives together, is thus both a fact of life and, in its higher reaches, a value to be pursued endlessly.

Students encounter 'authoritatively persuasive' discourses in the form of the university's systems and rules and the power and authority of academe, but with experience they are likely to come to accept some as 'internally persuasive'. Assessment may always be seen as 'authoritative', but, as they become acculturated, a process which will vary according to their individual backgrounds, students might come to understand and believe in the complex and sometimes contradictory values of academe. As they do this they develop their own sense of individuality and are able to locate their own position among the myriad of discourses that surround them, something that might be considered to be one of the aims of a university education.

During 'internally persuasive' discourse, speakers anticipate the socio-ideological discourses that shape and concern their addressees (Bakhtin 1986: 96). They aim to meet the listener as near to half way as necessary to ensure that the listener hears and accepts what they themselves have to say. When both parties are taking this approach the gap between the different perspectives is narrowed and a sharing of views and values becomes possible, as each takes on board the other's perspective (Bakhtin 1981: 345-46). Internally, the interlocutors are persuaded of the worth of the other's view and they take something of this away with them from the interaction. This kind of influence is longer lasting than anything that 'authoritative' discourse can achieve and is part of the individual's personal development and identity formation (Bakhtin 1981: 342).

'Internally persuasive' discourse not only has the potential to influence listeners at the time, but can be taken by them into new situations: 'It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions' (Bakhtin 1981: 345). When this happens in the higher education classroom, the student has overcome the limitations of his/her own experience and naïveté and has become an independent thinker who is able to draw on the views of others without being controlled by them. Vološinov (1986: 90) argues that these socio-linguistic experiences shape the identity of the individual: 'Thus the personality of the speaker, taken from within, so to speak, turns out to be wholly a product of social interrelations'. Collectively, this indicates that the socio-linguistic interactions that students have during their classes determine how far they will progress on their journey both towards becoming part of the community of scholars and towards being independent thinkers and learners.

This is not to say that the process of dialogic interaction is necessarily collaborative in the sense that both parties are eager to find the middle or common ground and move forward in consensus. As Wegerif (2006: 59) notes in his discussion of dialogic learning, even 'internally persuasive' discourses can be more or less 'open to the other'. The different viewpoints can be quite competitive and discourses can jostle for position with the intention of silencing the voices of others. A debate makes a useful metaphor of this linguistic struggle for dominance, as well as being a real example of the activities studied in this case study. In a polemic debate, speakers are deliberately trying to persuade the audience that their

perspective is the right one and that the other position is wrong. However, they still have to engage with the arguments of the other side to achieve this. They need to weave skilfully the other side's ideas into their own case so that they nullify or trump the other viewpoints. This is not consensual, but it is dialogic. It is not forcing the audience to accept their view, but persuading them that they have a valid and superior argument. If dialogic interaction can be collaborative or competitive, it may seem that simply by taking part in dialogue students will become engaged in the issues and while this may be the case to some extent, Bakhtin identifies various factors which particularly support or mitigate against dialogic interaction.

2.5   Distinctive features of dialogue: interaction for learning

Bakhtin's ideas about the structures of literary language can usefully be applied to the seminar environment. At the simplest level there is the 'chronotopic' dimension of dialogic interaction, that is the 'spatial and temporal' aspects of the speech event (Bakhtin 1986: 134). Every speech act is an expression of its diachronic and synchronic contexts. It is shaped by the previous and anticipated experiences of the interlocutors (the diachronic dimension) and the immediate context of the speech event (the synchronic dimension) (Bakhtin 1984a: 177-78). Bakhtin focuses his discussion of the 'chronotope', which literally means 'time space' (1981: 84), on matters of literary form and genre, arguing that they are the 'temporal-spatial expression' of meaning (1981: 258). The same is true in the classroom, in that

the students' experience of learning is shaped by temporal and spatial factors.

Creating a time and place where dialogue can be facilitated is important. When a student comes to speak in a seminar, s/he is, for example, heavily influenced by previous experiences of public speaking outside the context of higher education, as well as by where the seminar sits within the linear context of the course. However, the horizontal or synchronic context is equally important, such as the behaviour of the tutor and other students, the materials, the physical space and other environmental factors extending into the further reaches of the present such as the health and wellbeing of the student, their financial or housing status and their wider interpersonal relationships and general feeling of confidence and security in the world. It is possible to use this knowledge that the temporal-spatial dimension of the seminars affects the students' response when planning the learning environment.

A second factor that aids dialogic communication is the effective use of a wide and appropriate range of 'speech genres'. Language is a series of utterances that have

> thematic content, style, and compositional structure. […] Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres.* (Bakhtin 1986: 60; his italics).

Speech genres can be seen as 'typical models for constructing a speech whole' (Bakhtin 1986: 127) and though there is an 'extreme heterogeneity of speech

genres' (Bakhtin 1986: 61), Bakhtin is keen to get his readers to realise that an understanding of 'the nature of the utterance and of speech genres is of fundamental importance for overcoming […] simplistic notions about speech life' (1986: 67). Every situation demands the use of a range of 'speech genres'. These take many forms and each reflects the 'specific conditions and goals' of each utterance 'through their content (thematic) and linguistic style' (Bakhtin 1986: 60). The 'wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless' and each 'sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex' (Bakhtin 1986: 60). One such sphere is the higher education seminar, where there will be genres associated with social relationship building, as well as a wide variety linked to the teaching and learning environment such as the content and semantic patterns of gobbet exercises, holding a debate, plenaries and so forth. Bakhtin (1986: 80) argues that 'The better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them (where this is possible and necessary)'. Chapter eight considers the effect of the students' command of 'speech genres' on their ability to learn.

A third characteristic of dialogic interaction that Bakhtin identifies is the presence of 'double-voiced' discourse. Single-voiced discourse has 'one intention' and 'one voice'; it is a 'direct, intentional utterance'(Bakhtin 1981: 360). 'Double-voiced' discourse, on the other hand, contains 'two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents' (Bakhtin 1981: 360). The 'two points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically' (Bakhtin

1981: 360). Irony, parody and sarcasm are all examples of this, though

'double-voiced' discourse need not clash with nor be so directly undermining

of the original intention. When 'double-voiced' discourse occurs in the

classroom, the speaker is revealing that they have done more than emulate

the discipline's way of speaking, but have made it their own. Chapter eight

considers examples of how this can aid the students' engagement with the

material and support the development of their understanding.

Sometimes the overlaying of a 'second voice' becomes highly

developed and full role-play occurs where the speaker does far more than

echo the discourse of others in their speech and actually takes on the full

identity and mantle of another. Bakhtin (1984a: 123) uses the 'chronotope'

of 'carnival' to exemplify how and why this kind of 'double-voicedness' is

used in both society and literature. During 'carnival' time participants are

allowed to engage in activities which are normally prohibited. Traditionally,

'carnival' time offered those without power, such as slaves, the opportunity

to temporarily take on the mantle of their masters, to dress up as kings and

queens, to engage in excessive activities normally forbidden and to push the

body beyond the limits of normality into the world of the grotesque where

base bodily functions were flaunted rather than hidden.

Some of these 'carnivalesque' elements have relevance to the kind of

interactive seminars studied here, because the students sometimes take on

alien roles and perform as people from different times and places. In some

'carnival' performance the 'double-voicedness' has become so strong that the

original intention is almost silenced by the ironic intention of the speaker in the new context. As well as being fun, this is disruptive of authority and creates a 'shift of world orders' (Bakhtin 1984a: 127) within carefully controlled temporal and spatial boundaries, as chapter eight explores.

The empirical chapters consider the impact of these concepts on the seminars studied here, reflecting on the influence of 'chronotopic' elements such as classroom layout, the ability to draw on a wide variety of 'speech genres' and use them appropriately, and what happens when students engage in 'carnival'-style performances and use 'double-voiced' discourse in role-play activities.

2.6   Conclusion

The theories developed by Bakhtin and his peers offer insights into classroom dialogue. Bakhtin describes the key structures and processes of dialogue and argues that dialogic communication occurs when participants are engaged with the ideas and concerns of others in a way that creates lasting change in their own and others' socio-linguistic identity. This is distinctly different from single-voiced, 'authoritative' discourse which demands the listener's obedience rather than engagement. 'Authoritative' discourse works in so far as listeners are compelled to accept it while they are in its jurisdiction, but 'internally persuasive', dialogic discourse links the speaker and listener. Vološinov (1986: 86) describes dialogue as follows:

> A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addressor and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor.

These ideas echo some of the concerns of the great educators, where listening and taking account of the other is a goal of certain kinds of dialogue (Abercrombie 1989: 67; Burbules 1993: 8; Dewey 1916: 9; Freire 1996: 74). For the Bakhtinian School, almost all interaction achieves this dialogic quality to a greater or lesser extent and certainly '*Any true understanding is dialogic in nature*' (Vološinov 1986: 102; his italics).

Whichever 'speech genre' is being used, whichever learning outcomes and teaching methodologies are pursued, students are, to a greater or lesser extent, engaging in dialogic interaction. According to Bakhtin, when a student is in dialogue with others, they are potentially open to the word of others, whether of their peers or their tutors or to the higher authorities of government discourse and requirements. The dialogic, socio-ideological impulse means that students need to make themselves understood by these audiences to make a meaningful linguistic connection with them. Through this process, speakers and listeners learn about each other and slowly adjust their view of the world as a result. Similarly, tutors and authorities are seeking to make connections and influence the students, but to do this they have to make themselves understood and have to persuade their audiences that their discourse should be incorporated into the students' emerging identity. This dialogic relationship can, however, be very weak. If students do not find the discourses of the learning environment to be 'internally

persuasive' (Bakhtin 1981: 342), they will assert, even if quietly and passively, their own identity and resist what they are hearing. Tutors and curriculum designers have the opportunity to structure sessions, modules and whole programmes that facilitate dialogic interaction and each encounter with a student can be handled in a way that sees the tutor reaching out to the student to construct that 'bridge' of understanding that Vološinov (1986: 86) describes. This 'Bakhtinian' view of 'dialogic' learning is, as Honeycutt (1994: Ch1) argues, broadly aligned to a constructivist view of both education and dialogue. In such a view, classroom dialogue is not seen as a transparent medium for conveying information, but as an active constituent in the construction of meaning (Bakhtin 1981: 282; Vološinov 1986: 90).

Dialogue is inevitably an active mode of learning. It creates an 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) of the issues under discussion. Dialogue cannot help but create a response in students by its inter*active* nature. Different types of dialogue might offer different perspectives and might be 'internally persuasive' (Bakhtin 1981: 342) to a greater or lesser extent, but all are grist to the mill of the development of the participants, students and tutors alike. The one discourse which has a very different effect is 'authoritative' discourse and, given that assessment can be seen as 'authoritative' (Bakhtin 1981: 342) and the case study is of assessed seminars, this will need careful exploration because it might be that assessing seminars has the effect of smothering the naturally dialogic quality of classroom discussion.

Bakhtin's theories certainly indicate that dialogue in its various forms has the potential to have a significant and lasting effect on the student learning experience and dialogue is central to the case study seminars. The next chapter will outline how the research methodology has been chosen to enable Bakhtin's ideas to be helpfully applied to the case study to deepen our understanding of student learning in the seminar environment.

Chapter 3 – The researcher and her methodology

3.1   Introduction

Bakhtin (1986: 125-26), whose ideas weave and dialogise with those of my own, describes the researcher thus:

> The person who understands (including the researcher himself) becomes a participant in the dialogue, although on a special level (depending on the area of understanding or research). The analogy [is] of including the experimenter in the experimental system (as a part of it) or the observer in the observed world in microphysics (quantum theory). The observer has no position *outside* the observed world, and his observation enters as a constituent part into the observed object. (Bakhtin's italics)

Without delving deeply into participant-researcher issues, it is important to acknowledge that I, the person who is attempting to 'understand', am a 'constituent part' of the practice I am studying. This chapter begins, therefore, with a brief account of my life, not just as a way of providing a context for the thesis, but because it is an integral part of the research itself. It then moves on to explain why I chose my methodology and how the field-work, which comprised fifteen seminar observations, fifteen interviews with tutors and students and a consideration of associated course documentation, was conducted in the light of these decisions.

I came to this research project having separately undertaken literary and pedagogic research and I saw them as operating within two different paradigms. However, I came to realise that, in actual fact, the two could be usefully joined to reveal a deeper understanding of pedagogic practice. The

catalyst and 'scaffold' (Bruner 1978) for this transformation of my approach came in the form of Bakhtinian theory, which acts as a bridge between my literary and pedagogic studies.

3.2   The influence of my practitioner research

As a mature entrant to teaching in higher education, I had a background in secondary school English teaching and a positive experience of higher education through an MA in modern literature, which introduced me to Bakhtinian theory. During the last fifteen years of working in different roles, including as Head of English and now as Dean of School, I experimented with different ways of supporting discussion in the higher education classroom, to ensure that my students had a deeper and more complex understanding of literature.

The discipline of English is, arguably, defined by its dialogic approach to learning. However, like the tutors in Berry and Sharp's (1999: 39) study, I struggled to avoid 'the silence that often followed [… tutors'] questions'. I also wanted to understand how to avoid dominating the discussion because I wanted the students to critically engage with the material, an issue that has challenged many practitioner researchers (Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Burbules 1993; Chiseri-Strater 1991; Dillon 1994a; Francis 1988; Freire 1996; Poland and Pederson 1998; Wardhaugh 1985). I tried out techniques for improving the quality and quantity of student participation suggested by a range of practitioner researchers (Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Dillon 1994a;

Gibbs 1992b; Roby 1988), but though they did get everyone to speak, they had the effect of moving the dialogue towards the presentational end of the spectrum with a great deal of summarising and reporting back and relatively little extended critical dialogue. So, I turned my attention to other ways of encouraging 'free-flowing discussion' (Davies, Conneely, Davies and Lynch 2000: 122) and settled on the use of student-led, assessed discussions. Taking myself entirely out of the picture and having students lead the seminars avoided me dominating the discussion, as well as enabling students to develop the art of facilitation, a skill that they would need later in life, but for which university seldom prepared them. It also gave me time to focus on assessing the discussion, something that appeared to have the effect of motivating the students to prepare well and participate more actively in the discussion of the topic in hand.

From small-scale practice, the discussions were gradually extended across my department and now, in different ways, across the institution. This process was helped through the award of funding from the then LTSN[21]: English Subject Centre (Bentley 2003) and the Teacher Training Agency[22] (Bentley 2005). Both were action research projects. The first project focused on developing criteria and processes for the rigorous assessment of the discussions. It took account of tutor and student concerns and asked whether or not assessed discussion was fit for purpose, reliable and practical. It concluded that it was a suitable form of assessment for English, but that there were a range of issues that needed addressing to ensure its reliability

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[21] Learning and Teaching Support Network; the award was for £5000.
[22] Now the Teacher Development Agency; the award was for £10,000.

and practicality for which it offered recommendations. The second project focused on the impact of the assessed discussions on six teacher-training students' performance in schools. It concluded that students attributed their own confidence and ability to lead and facilitate discussion in the classroom to memorable assessment experiences they had had on their course.

Around this time, I became a College Teaching Fellow, was twice put forward to the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and began to play a part in the strategic development of teaching and learning at the institution. During this period, I decided I would benefit from proper pedagogic research training, which in many ways is quite different from literary study, if I was to pursue my reflective and research interests further and I looked around for a topic for doctoral research. My own pedagogic practice at the University College had been much studied and debated. There were also participant-observer issues, as Merriam (1998: 103) notes, which would have been hard to resolve, as I had been so involved over the entire period of its development. So, I turned to another well-developed example of oral assessment, which is the case studied here and which has been a useful counterpoint for reflecting on my own teaching and curriculum development.

Thus began the journey from amateur observer and reflective practitioner who perhaps believed too much in the importance of the rigour and reliability of the assessment systems and took a rather instrumental view of teaching and learning to someone who at the least has a much fuller understanding of the complexities and holistic nature of what happens in the

classroom and its relationship to the external environment of all the participants.

3.3   The influence of my literary studies

Wolcott (2001: 36) argues that 'we have all been socialized into the subtle norms of various disciplines' and I brought to this new phase of pedagogic research, my experience as a literary scholar. My discipline of English had taught me to see the significance of language and, its daughter, culture. Any literary analysis I had done was heavily influenced by post-structural theory. My literary paradigm was one where there was no direct link between language and reality. Instead language embodied the tension between self and other, structure and individual agency, form and individual expression and competing discourses. When this literary view of culture met the empirical social world, it guided me towards the general shape of the research. I found parallels between my long-standing background in literary studies and the new and somewhat alien discipline of empirical research.

I began by formally reflecting on the apparent similarities and differences between my approach to literary and pedagogic research to understand the tensions and underlying assumptions (Bentley 2006). I concluded that there were similarities between the way I studied a novel[23],

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[23] Here is not the place to open up an extended literary debate, but suffice to say that arguments and fashions relating to literary study have varied over the years from formalist decontextualised approaches to those which are currently more in vogue which focus heavily on contextual matters (see Leitch 2001). It is this latter tradition in which I had been acculturated.

and the way I might usefully approach empirical research. I chose to study novels holistically and in-depth in their own right and to use this analysis to inform reflections on wider issues such as those related to themes, the author's other work, genre related matters, socio-cultural ideologies and so forth. The equivalent in empirical research is the qualitative case study, which, although quite narrow in scope, acts as a vehicle which allows the in-depth study of complex issues. Just as with the study of a novel, even a thesis-length work on a single, ostensibly 'small' case cannot articulate anywhere near all the issues that potentially lie within it, though both can articulate and illuminate the case/text in question so that it resonates with the readers beyond the boundaries of that particular narrative.

Literary and cultural studies also suggested a way in to the complex world of dialogue. I was to discover rapidly that there are many different kinds of dialogue or discussion, such as those which were either open-ended or problem-solving in their structure, as will be discussed in chapter seven. If one accepts that dialogue is enacted by individuals whose identity is itself discursively constituted and performative in nature, the situation becomes even more complex. As discussed in chapter two, English had introduced me variously to Saussurean linguistics, Bakhtinian dialogics and Derridean deconstruction. Out of these different approaches, Bakhtin's ideas captured both the structural dimension of language and its multiplicity. His theory of dialogics was originally applied to literature, but it is much more widely applicable to any aspect of socio-linguistics and I was able to take his ideas

and apply them in the socio-linguistic context of education, where they have revealed to me insights that my earlier studies had missed.

3.4 Choosing the research method and methodology

Research design is shaped not only by the researcher's theoretical orientation, but also by the purpose of the study and the nature of the sample (Merriam 1998: 70) and it has a direct impact on the kind of conclusion that can be drawn (Sawchuk 2003: 292). Although excessive pre-occupation with methodology can distract the researcher and their readers from the focus of the research project (Seale 1999: *ix*), an explanation of why the design has been chosen is needed, at least in part to convince readers to accept those conclusions (Silverman 1997: 25). For me, it was very important that the design ensured that all the elements of the research were theoretically aligned and tailored to the task of understanding learning through oral interaction, but there is no denying that the account tidies up what has been an untidy, iterative and developmental process, something that Law (2004) calls the 'messiness' of research.

Describing and analysing the social world is not a simple matter. This is primarily because social interaction takes place through language, which, as Bakhtin argues, is made up of many different discourses that continually jostle for position and pre-eminence. Human beings are aware of many of these, but others are either beyond their experience or part of their unconscious relationship with the world. Quantitative methods cannot test

the complex and fluid inter-connectedness of discursive interaction in classroom settings that was the focus of my interest and so I settled on a qualitative approach[24].

I selected the case study as my 'main method' (Gillham 2000: 13) which is, according to Bassey (1999: 47), the study 'of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings'. In particular, I undertook an 'educational case-study' (Bassey 1999: 20) which, according to Bassey (1999: 57) and Merriam (1998: 41), have 'proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy', all of which are relevant in this case. Bassey (1999: 40) defines three types of educational case study, 'theoretical', 'evaluative' and 'action research', and this study has a predominantly 'theoretical' focus because it seeks to 'understand' rather than evaluate or change practice. However, as Bassey (1999: 41) notes is normal, it does embrace aspects of evaluation and action research. This emphasis on theory helps address some of the criticisms levied at case study approaches that they can 'lack rigor' (Yin 1994: 10), provide 'little basis for scientific generalizations' (Yin 1994: 10) and are theoretically and methodologically weak (Atkinson and Delamont 1985: 37).

I was always mindful that I was studying a particular case at a moment in time in a single institution with a specific group of participants, and took these limitations into account particularly when considering matters relating

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[24] As Gorard (2003: 9) recommends, I did consider supplementing my qualitative approach with some limited quantitative analysis of marks and student surveys, but these were not made available to me on ethical grounds.

to generalisations and validity (see section 3.6). However, the benefits of the case study approach are that it is 'anchored in real-life situations […] and] results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon' (Merriam 1998: 41), while allowing a specific-discipline 'orientation' and 'intent' (1998: 34-40). In terms of discipline 'orientation', this study makes sustained use of socio-linguistics, while its 'intent' is descriptive/analytical (Merriam 1998: 38-39), because the focus is not so much on evaluating the strengths, or otherwise, of these seminars, but on understanding the influence the seminars have on student learning. The case is looked at 'in depth, its contexts scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps us pursue the external interest' (Stake 2005: 445) and improve practice.

3.5   Selecting the case

The case I ultimately selected was chosen because it met certain criteria (Lunsford and Lunsford 1995). Firstly, it enabled me to focus on the issues that seemed to me to be influential on the students' seminar-based learning experience. I did not approach the research with a series of specific research questions, as I wanted to take my focus from the case study itself. However, this commitment to inductive analysis rather than hypothesis testing cannot, according to Hammersley (1992: 168), be easily maintained and the researcher cannot and should not approach the field of study with

an empty mind. Malinowski[25] (1922: 9) explains the tightrope that needs to be walked:

> Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies.

Such theoretical studies can be used as 'a tool to guide investigation' (Morse 1994: 32) offering "theoretical sensitivity" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 46-47). Blumer (1954: 7) suggests that ideas developed during this stage can be thought of as '*sensitizing concepts*' (Blumer's italics) that provide a set of general signposts for the study. My own experience of teaching and pre-field-work study directed my attention to a particular form of university seminar, one which was assessed, drew heavily on dialogic modes of interaction and was peer-led. I needed, therefore, to select a case study that had this form, so that I could explore each of these in depth.

I also realised that I wanted to consider well-developed and fully embedded practice, rather than recent, one-off examples of innovative practice. This would avoid the particular issues that beset new practice which can include problems such as initial difficulties with operational or quality management. Equally, they can be related to an initial over-enthusiasm for a project which then wears off, perhaps because of the time-consuming nature of the activity or because attention or funding has moved elsewhere[26]. Recent innovative practice is also different, because it has not yet benefitted

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[25] A seminal Polish anthropologist and ethnographer (1884-1942).
[26] 'The Hawthorne Effect', as this is sometimes called, is the claim that productivity increases when workers know managers are paying them attention. (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939)

from improvements, which years of reflection, feedback from the participants and review can bring about, and it can also reflect contemporary fashions in teaching and learning, rather than the kind of approaches that are most suited to the situation. It has also not had a chance to permeate the culture of a department or become embedded across all levels and modules as might ultimately prove to be appropriate. My own use of assessed, student-led seminars had been running for several years by the time I began the project and I could appreciate how reviewing them each year had enhanced the experience of both the tutors and students.

Thirdly, I had to take account of practical considerations. Preliminary investigation revealed that, apart from the practice at my own institution, there were three other cases which potentially met my general criteria of an example of well-developed practice in the area of assessed, student-led oral interaction in higher education. In the first two cases the distance from where I lived and worked made matters more difficult. In addition, in the first case, the department's innovative assessment practices had been recently curtailed by new institutional regulations. In the second case, the discussions were part of a pure problem-based-learning module making them much more dispersed and difficult to observe. The discussions themselves were also unassessed with the only assessed outcome being a presentation and portfolio at the end. Therefore, I decided against these settings, although I did interview the key contacts to provide further contextual information.

The third case, which was a serious candidate for selection, was my own department of English, described above. Access would have been easy and I would have been able to draw on both current and historic material (full marksheets, feedback sheets, module questionnaires and videos of practice), all of which were likely to be denied me in another setting. However, given my involvement with the development of these assessed discussions, there were significant participant-observer issues to overcome. Merriam (1998: 103) notes that being a participant-observer 'is a marginal position and [one that] is personally difficult to sustain'. The research would most likely have been developed either into a piece of auto-ethnography (Denzin and Lincoln 2002: *xii*) or into a piece of action research involving colleagues and students, as well as myself. I had already researched this practice twice with my colleagues and I felt a case study in another discipline and type of institution would bring fresh insights which I could, and did, bring back and apply to my own practice[27].

The case I ultimately selected was not one with which I was personally or professionally familiar. It was 'information-rich' (Patton 1990: 169), being a well-developed and embedded example of this type of seminar, and it was accessible to me. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 38) offer the reminder that 'The role of pragmatic considerations must not be under-estimated in the choice of a setting' and this case offered somewhat easier access, both in

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[27] I have indeed done this and assessed, student-led seminars modelled on the practice studied here have been successfully running for five years initially started and run by myself and now continued under the auspices of a new Head of English and module leader. This new practice is distinct from and in addition to the original assessed, student-led discussions which have been on-going in the department since the late 1990s, well before I began my research here.

terms of permissions and geography. In terms of geography, being in the

region, it was practical to visit. In terms of permissions, matters were

facilitated because my doctoral supervisor had a contact in the case study

department. This key contact, Robin, was also the founder of the seminar

programme and an advocate of reflective and research-informed practice

meaning that s/he was willing and able to 'open-doors' in terms of access.

I decided, therefore to begin my research in this university's

Department of History where, ultimately, I was to conduct the majority of my

research. Initially, I was uncertain whether to study a single or multiple cases.

As I gathered the preliminary data and refined my research questions, I was

to settle on a single case as a matter of principle, rather than pragmatism.

Multiple-cases would have led me towards a comparative study and the

narrower focus of evaluating the effectiveness of practice at the chosen

institutions. It would have, in all likelihood, led to a judgement about the

'best' way to assess oral interaction. It would also have sent me down the

road of collecting and describing different types of assessed oral interaction,

to produce either an inventory of the different kinds of current practice (see

for example, Joughin and Collom 2003: 1; Hounsell, McCulloch and Scott[28]

1996) or a description of the different 'genres' of oral interaction (see for

example, Banta, Lund, Black and Oblander 1995; Brown and Knight 1994;

Burbules 1993; Joughin 2003; Nightingale, Te Wiata, Toohey, Ryan, Hughes

and Magin 1996).

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[28] Assessment Strategies in Scottish Higher Education project.

3.5.1 Selecting the sample within the case[29]

I then began to consider the selection of the sample within the case. Since I wanted to consider a range of different perspectives, it was logical to listen to the accounts of a broad cross-section of the participants in the seminars. There were two clear categories of people to involve: academic tutors (some with specific roles and responsibilities) and students. Selecting the interviewees could have been done either because they formed part of a representative sample or because they were likely to have 'the knowledge desired' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 137). In this case, I selected them, because, collectively, they were well-placed, given their first-hand experience of the subject that I was studying, to give me a diverse range of perspectives. I was also able to observe all the students and all, bar three, of the tutors in seminars.

Pragmatics meant that the sample choice was limited to some extent by those who could be persuaded to participate, but I did have a choice about whom I approached. I attempted to achieve as near 'maximum variation sampling' as I could manage, in order to capture and describe 'the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation' (Patton 1990: 172). Because I was not attempting to draw conclusions about the differences between the participants, it was only necessary to ensure that, over the entire field-work stage, a balance of participant types was broadly maintained. It was not

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[29] General issues are discussed in this section and specific details of the sample are discussed in sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.2.

necessary to use 'face-sheet' demographics, as large-scale quantitative statistical analysis was not part of the research design and this level of control over my sample was not relevant to my study (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 50). This broad and balanced approach allowed the individuals within the sample to be chosen for other serendipitous reasons, related to access, timing and their personal interest and willingness to participate.

3.5.2 Demographics

By the end of the study, I had interviewed at least one student from almost all of the fifteen seminar classes that I had observed and I had a good sample of both the tutor and student demographic at the institution. The institution and the department in question predominantly attract high-achieving students from middle-class, well-educated families whose parents are likely to have been to university (according to the description of all the tutors, information on their website and official statistics – see Appendix 1). The vast majority were full-time students (according to the tutors). The majority of the students were studying single-honours programmes (400-500), but some were on joint-honours, subsidary and Erasmus courses (300-400)[30] and only joined the history programme for part of the time[31]. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the visible demographics of the students that I observed in the fifteen seminars that formed my sample (184 students in all). In addition to information on gender, ethnicity, disability and age, I recorded

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[30] Precise figures withheld to aid anonymity.
[31] Table 3.1 for the percentage of Erasmus students in the seminars I observed.

the percentage of students who were absent from class on the days I was

observing.

Table 3.1 Demographic data on the students observed in seminars

Total number[32]	Males	Females	BME[33]	Disabled[34]	Mature	Absent[35]	Erasmus
184	50%	50%	5%	2%	7%	16%	3%

Tutors indicated that this demographic and attendance record was

typical of the department and general consideration of HESA data indicate

that it might also be considered typical of a history department in an 'elite'

(Palfreyman and Tapper 2009) university. It is arguable that this particular

kind of student demographic with its high-proportion of 'traditional'

university students could potentially limit the applicability of the study's

findings making it difficult to apply them to other types of institution and

this topic is considered in the next section.

3.6   Validity and Generalisation

Having decided to study a single programme of seminars in a

university with a particular kind of student demographic, I had to pay

particular attention to matters related to the validity of all aspects of the case

study. Issues relating to the selection of the case and the sample are

discussed in section 3.5 above, while matters relating to the observations and

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[32] Class was more difficult to determine, but see comment above on the perception of the tutors.

[33] BME = black or minority ethnic students.

[34] This figure refers only to students with visible disabilities, with the *caveat* that the majority of disabilities do not have any obvious outward sign.

[35] Noted as absent from the class on that day by the tutor.

interviews undertaken are considered in section 3.7 below. This section

focuses on the results and the ways in which it was and was not possible to

make generalisations from the findings. In this case the process of

ascertaining validity is seen as emerging from a dialogue with the

participants and the wider academic community or what Kvale (1995 29-31)

calls 'communicative validity'. The issues were discussed with the participants

and then the findings and tentative conclusions with Robin (my initial

contact), my supervisors and my peers. This approach is in keeping with

Bakhtinian dialogics, which sees dialogue as the medium through which all

meaning is made.

Those who were in dialogue with me before the thesis was finished

have shaped the final version read here, but those reading it now, will be in

dialogue with the written text and the 'fuzzy generalizations' (Bassey 1999:

52) that it makes. As Bakhtin argued, being in dialogue involves both giving

and taking, asserting one's own perspective and taking on board the

perspectives of others. I, as author, have taken account of prospective

readers' potential views and have tried to shape an argument that is

convincing to them. You, as readers, bring your own experiences to the text

and, if what you read is 'internally persuasive' (Bakhtin 1981: 342), you will

take some of the ideas away with you. This is something slightly different to

'reader or user generalizability' (Merriam 1998: 211), because it

acknowledges the persuasive nature of the text.

The relatively narrow demographic of the student body, identified in the section above, coupled with the elite nature of the university and the single discipline focus of the study, are factors that need careful consideration when drawing any generalisations from the study.   However, there is a growing body of evidence that, in themselves, these factors do not prohibit the possibility of the conclusions being applicable in other types of university, in alternative discipline settings and with other student demographics. Wilen (1988: 314) concluded a multidisciplinary study of questioning and discussion in the classroom by saying that 'classroom interaction patterns are generally similar across grade levels, subject areas, and cultures'. More recently Jones, McLean, Amigoni and Kinsman (2005) noted that in their comparison of two English seminars, one in an 'old' 'research-intensive' university and another in a post-1992, 'teaching-intensive' university, that there was little difference in the students' engagement with the language and issues of their discipline and in the quality of the pedagogic encounters in the classes they observed (Jones *et al.* 2005: 260).

The largest study to consider these issues was the SOMUL[36] project, reporting in 2007, which compared how students learned in different types of institution, with different curricula and across three discipline areas, none of which were history. It concluded that there are

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[36] The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning Project (2004-07) was part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme. It was undertaken jointly by a research team from the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University and the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning at the University of Stirling (SOMUL 2008).

> many commonalities to the experiences and outcomes of university study, almost irrespective of where and what one studies. And where differences exist they do not automatically match reputational hierarchies. (SOMUL 2008)

This is endorsed by action-research that I have undertaken in my own small university college which has a high proportion of 'non-traditional' entrants to higher education and many students with relatively low entry qualifications (see Appendix 1). I found that assessed, seminar discussion in the discipline of English had a clearly beneficial effect on learning (Bentley 2003 and 2004)[37]. These research projects indicate that, even though this thesis's findings emerge from a study of one type of institution, a particular kind of student demographic and a specific discipline, they will not necessarily be limited in their applicability only to those contexts.   Indeed, I will argue that Bakhtin's theory of dialogics explains why effective seminar interaction is possible in a wide range of educational settings.

However, there is no intention that the practice studied here should be taken and transported as a complete package into new settings. Nor should its findings be seen as universally transferable. Marshall and Case (2005: 265) suggest that 'all research findings should be considered as heuristics or "thinking tools", rather than as representing any sort of absolute truth'. Thus readers will make connections with their own realities and take specific aspects of the study or 'concrete universals' (Erickson 1986; 130) into their own settings.

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[37] In school education, Alexander's (2008: 46) empirical study of primary children also found that less able and 'quiet, compliant children "in the middle" ' benefitted from dialogic teaching, which led to a more inclusive educational experience.

The tension between the desire to describe in a non-judgemental manner and to offer an interpretation is one which Bakhtin recognises as being at the heart of all forms of authorship. For Bakhtin (1990: 135), the author/researcher

> gains an excess of seeing only by being situated outside the soul that is being formed. This architectronic privilege is the same as where my experience ends and my seeing the other's spirit or the outer body of her soul begins.

The language here is somewhat romantic, as is sometimes the case with Bakhtin when he tries to make a complex concept comprehensible to his readers (in true dialogic manner), but his idea is interesting because it presents his view on the nature of the author/researcher's understanding and interpretation of the observed. Being on the 'outside', the researcher gains an 'excess of seeing', but from this vantage point s/he can engage with the voices of the various participants/addressees. This gives the author/researcher, what Bakhtin (1981: 282) elsewhere calls an 'active understanding' of the situation. The author/researcher is then able to use the 'architectronic privilege' to depict a slice of the 'heteroglossic' society for a given purpose, something that might be described as the purpose of a case study.

3.7   The use of multiple data sources

Just as I am in dialogue with myself and my readers, I have also been in dialogue with the study itself and I have, therefore, used multiple 'sub-methods' (Gillman 2000: 13) to find my way through the research 'maze'

(Hammersley 1992:183-84). A number of researchers focus on the importance of the need for 'inter-connected' (Patton 1990: 40), 'mutually reinforcing' (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 39) 'qualitative techniques' (Patton 1990: 40), which 'triangulate' (Wolcott 2001: 30). Each of Yin's (2003: 34) 'design tests' speak of the use of either multiple sources, pattern matching or replication logic in order to demonstrate different types of validity. This study uses multiple data sources to increase the validity of the findings, but because it explores 'multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations' (Hodder 1994: 395) in a particular case. Further 'triangulation' was not necessary.

The use of multiple perspectives and sources of data is in keeping with the Bakhtinian framework of the thesis. White adopts a similar approach in her own Bakhtinian study of assessment in Australian early years education. She argues that drawing on the voices of teachers and, in her case, pupils, as well as her own field-notes, she is able 'to present the hermeneutic whilst avoiding, as much as possible, the consummation, or monologising of the child, or the teacher' (White 2007: 5). By using different types of data and valuing the 'voices' or 'narratives' of each, this ensures 'that no one voice takes priority over the other' (White 2007: 5).

The study, therefore, draws on both human and material culture using whichever medium can provide access to a range of discursive perspectives. It uses observation, interviews and, largely for contextual purposes, documentation. Interviews are cited more explicitly and extensively than the

observations, though the observations were vital in enabling the interviews to be effective, because they allowed me to understand, to triangulate informally the comments of the participants with the actuality of the classroom and then to ask questions that elicited a deeper exploration of the issues. Chapter six draws predominantly on interviews, while chapters seven and eight make more use of observations alongside the analysis of interview data.

3.7.1 Observations

Observation was one of two main forms of data collection. Sawchuk (2003: 303) argues in favour of observation rather than interview because 'the participants' own self-conscious notions of "learning" are not as relevant as what they actually do'. The observations also reflect the study's acceptance of the situated nature of learning, a perspective which,

> demands that distinctive features of the content and interaction be included, that is, people are always learning something somewhere rather than simply learning. (Sawchuk 2003: 303)

This study took account of both people and context. When considering the context, I reflected on how much to take account of disciplinarity in the study. Disciplinary issues are recognised as significant to those studying student learning (Bruce, Jones and McLean 2007; Jones *at al* 2005; Webb 1997: 208-09*)* and academic literacy (Lea and Stierer 2000b: 6), but, while recognising it was a discursive presence and influence on the seminars, I decided not to focus closely on the discipline-specific elements of the seminars. This was partly pragmatic, because I am not an expert in the

discipline of history. However, I also made this decision as a matter of principle, because the focus of the study was not on how effectively *history* had been taught, but was on more general matters relating to assessment, dialogue and peer teaching. My dialogic theoretical orientation also guided me to focus on interaction and the function of speech, rather than the content.

Thus when taking field-notes, my chosen form of recording[38], I would note down matters relating to form and structure rather than content (see Appendices 5 and 6). If, for example, there was a discussion about a particular historical figure which led one student to ask for clarification, I would note the way the clarification had been sought, for example with a 'how' or 'why' question, and what pattern of dialogue followed on from this trigger, rather than noting a statement describing the particular historical issues on which the discussion was focused. Nonetheless, I was always mindful of the historical content and took sufficient notes to provide an appropriate context. I also took the field-notes in a manner which noted the function of the linguistic exchanges in order to identify patterns and sequences, such as: the Initiation, Response and Follow-up (IRF) sequence (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975); face-work and turn-taking issues (Maybin 1996: 8-12); the function of silences (Poland and Pederson 1998); and questioning (Burbules 1993: 97-99); all to show *How Conversation* [of this kind] *Works* (Wardhaugh 1985).

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[38] I did discuss using audio-visual recording with the tutors, but none of them were comfortable with this as it was seen as overly invasive and likely to affect the seminars themselves.

I observed fifteen seminars in total (see Appendix 2). Seven of these were in the second or third year and were the assessed, student-led two-hour seminars that were the main focus of the study. To contextualise these, I also watched a selection of first year modules, seven in all. Of these, four were from the skills-based introductory modules 'Learning History' I and II, where students were taught the competencies needed to run the later more holistic level two and three assessed seminars and three were tutor-led, non-assessed, first-year seminars, since there were no student-led, assessed seminars and I wanted to understand the students' base-line commitment and competency. I also observed the third-year, unassessed seminar of a tutor who actively chose not to assess seminars and whom I later interviewed.

When making this selection, I tried to observe seminars at different times of the day, in different rooms, at different points in the semester, across both semesters (five of the fifteen were from semester one and ten from semester two) and with different structures. Some tutors structured the assessed seminars in a block, some interwove them with tutor-led seminars, some front-loaded the module with their own input, some used students to lead almost all the sessions and some only had a few sessions student-led. Although a range of practice was sought in this regard, the research was not focused on arriving at any 'hard' conclusions about which pattern of delivery and deployment was 'best'. I was able to interview students whom I had seen lead five assessed, student-led seminars. Altogether, this formed a pleasing mix of tutors and students.

Observation as a method of data collection is often associated with Weber's idea of *verstehen*, which is 'the human capacity to know and understand others through empathetic introspection and reflection based on direct observation of and interaction with people' (Patton 1990: 56). The verb to 'in dwell' is often used to capture the ethnographer's impulse to be 'at one with the persons under investigation' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 25) and know the whole rather than the constituent parts (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 32). This kind of naturalistic approach is not embraced here, because of its romantic and essentialist ideological underpinning which sees personality as something innate and where intuitions and instincts are nurtured through first-hand experience to shape identity. Instead, observation is seen as a way of seeing and hearing the process of social-identity formation and meaning making. It allowed me to see the outcome of Bakhtin's dialogised 'heteroglossia' in this situation, that is the confluence and interweaving of all the different voices that come together to form the seminars. Other forms of data collection, which were undertaken parallel to the observations, informed my understanding of what I was seeing and hearing.

As a result, there was no need to observe the same group repeatedly so that the tutor and students really got to know me, as each observation was seen as a discursive rather than a humanist encounter. Each class, as many of the participants themselves noted, had a different dynamic and in-depth knowledge of one group could actually have led to a falsely reductive account of the programme of assessed seminars, because I might have been

led to assume that the particular format followed was typical of wider practice and indicative of general learning behaviour. What was of interest was the shape of the socio-linguistic learning experience and the different responses to the same ostensible academic catalysts.

One of the dangers of not observing one group repeatedly is that the observer is always an incoming stranger increasing the 'danger of reactivity' (Hammersley 1992: 164). No method is without its challenges. The immersed participant may have problems with objectivity and keeping an intellectual distance, but the distant observer may fail to be familiar enough with the observed event to understand what they are seeing and hearing. In this case, I was located as an 'observer-as-participant' (Junker 1960: 36), who, because of my own work and study experience, had the necessary familiarity with this kind of setting and these types of activity.

Yet, Bakhtin (1986: 136) is quick to point out the influence of the researcher-observer and I was a human and therefore a discursive presence in the room. My presence had been accounted for verbally or by email and permissions sought. Sometimes at the start or end of the classes, I would become involved in spontaneous conversations with tutors or students. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 129) suggest that unsolicited comments are neither more nor less valid than those which are elicited. The difficulty lies in recording them and I could only make a note about their content as soon as I left the field of study. These unsolicited comments were sometimes usefully 'lateral' in their approach, though some were responses to particular

situations that I had just observed and needed to be treated as 'social phenomena occurring in, and shaped by, particular contexts' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 156). Different participants saw my role in different ways, as was evident from some of the comments in the interviews. As Rubin and Rubin (2005: 84) note is common, my role as a 'researcher' was not fully understood by the students. One seminar group could variously see me as a figure to lobby for change, a fellow student, an 'inspector' or a member of the academic staff wanting to improve my own practice with students. The information sheet (Appendix 13), coupled with a more informal verbal explanation of my role helped to clarify matters for them. Awareness of my effect on the situation was built into the way I phrased questions in the interview and informed the way I undertook the analysis.

3.7.2   Interviews

The second method of data collection that I used was interview which Rubin and Rubin (2005: 5) argue is a way of describing 'processes' and 'eliciting *understandings*', both of which are relevant to this study. I interviewed eight students (two first years, four second years and two third years – see Appendix 3) and seven tutors (see Appendix 4). The students I interviewed were self-selecting in that I observed a seminar and, at the end, I asked if anyone would be willing to talk to me about the assessed seminars in general. If no one volunteered, I would approach small-groups or individuals during the post-class *mêlée* and ask them more directly, though without any pressure. About half of the original volunteers followed through reliably and

were actually interviewed. Some did not respond to email or telephone messages and some arranged on one or two occasions to attend an interview, but failed to arrive at the agreed time and place.

As the interviewing began to take place and volunteers came forward, I put particular effort into persuading a mix of students to come forward. Initially, I had all males and mature students, so I explicitly invited females and younger students to ensure I had a rough cross-section of the student body. This totalled eight students in all and each had an individual half-hour interview. Across the students interviewed, there was a pleasing mix of years, backgrounds, gender and age, though only one was from an ethnic minority and none had a visible or self-declared disability. Two were on joint-honours programmes. I interviewed the students as soon after I had observed their classes as possible to maximise their likelihood of remaining committed to taking part in the research and so that I could remember their performance in class. I interviewed the tutors after I had completed my observations.

To identify the tutors I asked my initial contact, Robin, for recommendations and then I asked these people whom they would recommend, and so on, until I had spoken to all the people whose names were given me. This is a process known as snowballing or chain referral (Lunsford and Lunsford 1995) and is a useful way of identifying people in an unknown situation. In all, I interviewed seven tutors for between an hour and an hour and a half, six of whom enthusiastically used this teaching and

assessment methodology. I was not comparing assessed with unassessed

seminars in any direct way and so interviewing tutors who did not use

assessed seminars was not necessary. However, all these six interviewees

advised me to talk to one specific tutor who had a clear, student-centred

learning and teaching rationale for not using them and this I did.

The tutors came from a range of ages and genders, though none were

from ethnic minorities nor had any apparent disabilities (see Appendix 4).

Four were experienced lecturers who had previously taught at one or more

other institutions, while two had experience teaching in only this institution.

Four were male and three female. Across the sample, I observed all but two

of the tutors teaching (these two were on sabbatical and returned in time to

be interviewed, but without a relevant teaching load). I also interviewed

tutors from all the classes that I observed. This selection of tutors was typical

of the demography of the thirty full-time and twenty part-time tutors in the

department, as ascertained through a study of the staff profiles on the

website.

Interviews with tutors and students were adapted accordingly. To

achieve this I made the interviews more conversational, in order to reduce

any perceived status differences between the tutors, students and me. Kvale

(1996: 125-26) argues that there is a delicate balance to be achieved between

seeing the interview as 'a conversation between two partners' and

recognising that there is an asymmetry of power. I adopted Rubin and

Rubin's (2005: 102) approach to this, handling the conversation as a

'partnership' and ensuring participants knew they were under no obligation to participate. Establishing trust and rapport with the participants is important if they are to talk freely in such a situation (Kvale 1996: 125; Rubin and Rubin 2005: 92). I addressed the potential difficulties of a power imbalance by 'active listening' (Kvale 1996: 135), occasionally echoing back comments in order to check their meaning and generally being respectful, non-judgemental and non-threatening. Meanwhile, in my mind I was 'listening to the multiple horizons of meaning involved in the interviewee's statements' (Kvale 1996: 135), working hard to avoid either of us becoming too trapped in certain themes and stances.

Although observation and interviewing are thought to be two different methods of data capture, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 141) argue that 'The differences between participant observation and interviewing are not as great as is sometimes suggested'. Interviews within the kind of theoretical framework adopted here are social events in which the interviewer and the interviewee are 'viewed as competent observer-analysts of the interaction they are involved in' (Baker 2004: 163). Knowledge gained through interview

> is a co-production […] dependent upon the combined efforts of interviewer and interviewee in conjuring up the relevant contexts from which they think, talk, act and interpret. (Mason 2002b: 227)

They are a process of knowledge construction rather than a process of knowledge 'excavation' (Mason 2002b: 226).

In the first couple of interviews, however, I did not achieve this aim. I started out working on the assumption that interviews are an important way of accessing experiences from the participant's past (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 123), experiences that I could not discern from a seminar observation. As a result, I began with a clear list of questions which, in one way or another, I wanted to cover in the interview (see Appendix 7). I was also anxious to gather as much data as possible so that I would not have overlooked a topic that later proved to be relevant. As a result, hindsight suggests that I was initially 'mining' for information (Kvale 1996: 3), which, given my own pre-suppositions about the benefits of seminars of this kind, might have led to a self-fulfilling approach whereby I sought out specific information to support these beliefs.

Quite quickly, however, my confidence as an interviewer developed and I began to see the interviews more as an opportunity for dialogue. I began to see the stance that the interviewees were adopting. I learned to reconfigure my original questions in order 'to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic' (Merriam 1998: 74). An original question that was phrased as a hypothetical question could, for example, be re-phrased as a devil's advocate or ideal position question (Merriam 1998: 77-78). I became more open-ended in my questions, encouraging interviewees to elaborate further (Maykut and Morehouse 1994), ultimately becoming less directive by engaging participants in informal or conversational interviews (Merriam 1998: 73; Kvale 1996: 36). I no longer worked through the questions in the initially prepared

order and would weave the discussion so that it covered all the salient issues, encouraging long answers and being very aware if I was asking any leading questions.

A typical interview, whether with a tutor or student, would begin with introductions, formalities relating to the study and then a gentle, warm-up question that elicited the interviewee's background. I then moved on to construct an overview of their experiences on the course beginning with a discussion about the introductory module and other related support and study-skills matters. I tended to move on to procedural matters and asked them about specific elements of the seminars including self-assessment, peer-assessment, the continuous assessment of oral contributions and group work. I invited them to make comparisons with other experiences on this and other courses. Then I tackled the more complex and potentially difficult open-ended questions relating to what made for a good seminar, discussion or learning experience, embracing matters relating to progression and asking whether they had any observations to make about the power dynamics of the seminars. Finally, I created a sense of ending by inviting them to add anything they wished and reiterating further information about the study.

A confident knowledge of the field is useful in allowing the interviewer to ask meaningful questions which are easily understood by the interviewee. Given my familiarity with higher education practices, this was not a difficulty and I was able to listen consciously and carefully for points which were ripe for further 'probing' (Merriam 1998: 80). Despite these

strategies designed to create a friendly relaxed relationship, qualitative interviewing of this kind respects the autonomy of the individuals (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 339). It acknowledges that we can never have direct knowledge of another person's world (Maykut and Morehouse 1994) and that other viewpoints cannot be conveyed with transparency because there is always a 'plurality of interpretations' (Kvale 1996: 210). In this study these depth interviews (Lincoln and Guba 1985) were particularly important for revealing the varied ideological stances of the participants and how these shaped their response to the assessment situation.

3.7.3 Documentation as context

The third source of data that I used was documentation. Although documents are often overlooked (Atkinson and Coffey 2004: 56), Tight (2003: 24) suggest that in studies about higher education they are used most commonly for researching system policy, course design and institutional management, none of which are the focus of the study here, though they are tangentially related. The documents studied here have included national policy documents as well as departmental documentation. I studied the module booklets given to students for the modules I observed, the guides for tutors written by module leaders for the co-delivered 'Learning History' modules, the study guide which advises students on the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in the seminars, a selection of peer evaluations, self-evaluations and module feedback forms and session specific material such as agenda, visual aids and handouts. Documents were more

difficult to access than I had anticipated. Some were refused me on ethical grounds, including all marks, the majority of student module evaluation forms, feedback returned with marked work and some self-evaluation and peer assessment forms. Others were promised at a later date, but were not forthcoming, such as module booklets and external examiner reports. Some of these I endeavoured to chase with more or less success.

Overall, I felt satisfied with the level of documentation that I had gathered for the kind of study I was undertaking, as I was not assessing student achievement in any quantitative manner, nor was I evaluating the helpfulness of the documentation, nor the rigour of the marking process. Although occasionally cited explicitly, these documents have predominantly acted as contextual information though I did solicit the interviewee's views on the usefulness of the documents as this had the potential to reveal something about the interaction between people and formal documentation and to allow a reflection 'on the very activities of reading and writing in social settings' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 174).

3.7.4 Data analysis

Those making language central to their study, as this research does, generally reject a surface view of language as a transparent, representative medium for content and use an analytic method that evaluates the way in which language makes meaning. Discourse analysis and its relative conversational analysis offer such an opportunity. Both discourse and

conversational analysis were developed in the 1960s. Conversational analysis

focuses on the form and structure of language, seeking out repeated

patterns and systematic properties in the sequential order of talk in order to

understand how meaning is made. Discourse analysis works on the

assumption that form and structure should not be separated from purpose

and therefore takes account of the context, adopting a more intuitive

approach.

Having considered these two analytic approaches, I rejected

conversation analysis, because it focused relatively narrowly on the structures

and sequential patterns of talk-in-interaction (Sacks *et al.* 1978; Schegloff

1988; Schegloff and Sacks 1973) and was too decontextualised for this project

which wanted to study situated learning and take account of the perspectives

of the participants. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, was more

applicable given its ability to focus on speech in its context. Discourse

analysis takes many forms[39] as researchers develop and hybridise different

disciplinary approaches to serve their needs (Potter 2004: 201; ten Have

2006). Van Dijk (1997) suggests that discourse analysis needs to address the

complexities of social interaction and not see it simply as the analysis of

speech in context. He recommends that any discussion should take account

of action, context, power and ideology (van Dijk 1997: 1-33). In order to do

this, a holistic form of applied social discourse analysis (van Dijk 1997: 21-22)

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[39] Including: discursive psychology - Potter and Wetherell 1987; critical discourse
analysis - Fairclough 2001; Foucauldian or continental discourse analysis - Parker
1992. See also Gee's (2005: 116-117) overview of discourse analysis from different
traditions.

is used here that addresses these issues through a focus on interaction, as

Vološinov (1986: 94) argues is important:

> *The actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances.* Thus, verbal interaction is the basic reality of language. (Vološinov's italics)

I adopt what I term a Bakhtinian form of discourse analysis[40], which focuses

on the interaction of discourses and examines their expression in the

utterance through the lens of Bakhtinian concepts (see chapter two). The

intention is not to study discourse for its own sake, but to use discourse

analysis to examine how speakers experience and express seminar-based

learning. Bakhtin directs his readers to consider the socio-ideological

expression of identity during interaction and offers an explanation of why

some discourses are more influential than others according to their type

('authoritative', 'internally persuasive', 1981: 342), structure ('monological',

'heteroglossic', 'double-voiced', 1984a: 185) and interlocutors (speaker,

addressee, 'superaddressee', 1986: 126). In chapters six, seven and eight

these ideas are applied to the empirical data in order to explore the influence

of assessment, dialogue and peer-leadership on seminar learning.

Before I was ready to apply Bakhtin's ideas to the data, I subjected it

to four broad processes in order to prepare, get to know and 'make sense'

(Coffey and Atkinson 1996) of the data. Firstly, I had to write up the field-

notes and transcribe the data (Stage 1). I typed up the field-notes recorded

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[40] Fairclough (1995: 2) notes that critical discourse analysis draws on Bakhtin's theory of genre, as well as Gramsci's theory of hegemony. However, this study is closer to social discourse analysis than critical discourse analysis, because I try to take a more general 'distanced and disinterested' approach (van Dijk 1997: 22).

during the seminars and completed additional post-observation notes, as Junker (1960: 14) advises, within twenty four hours of the observation and while they were still fresh in my mind. Even so, I was aware that any form of field-note is not an objective representation of what has been seen and heard, but an initial, interpretative judgement, as Seale stresses (1999: 150). I did not undertake a research journal, but the comments that I added at the end of the notes, carefully labelled as post-field-work, were helpful in serving a similarly reflective purpose. The field-notes were quite extensive, around eight typed pages (c3000 words) for a two hour seminar. For the interviews, I undertook a pilot transcription and analysis which enabled me to decide that, for my form of discourse analysis, I only needed a fairly straightforward approach to transcription, where only extended silences or laughter was recorded. I had the remaining transcriptions undertaken by a professional, checking the draft transcripts against the tapes in order to become familiar with the data and make necessary annotations and corrections while it was still relatively fresh in my mind.

The next process (Stage 2) marked the beginning of the more formal analytic stage which involved organising and re-working the data across several stages (Junker 1960: 14). Initially, I undertook a pilot analysis of one interview using computer-aided, qualitative, data-analysis software (CAQDAS) aware that this would only be likely to yield 'commonsense interpretations of the meaning of particular segments of text' (Silverman 2005: 197), but thinking a code-and-retrieve approach would provide a systematic way of collecting data under thematic headings and act as a

preliminary 'heuristic device' (Seidel and Kelle 1995: 58). However, I abandoned the idea of using CAQDAS after this pilot, because I was being drawn into a close reading of surface issues which went against my view that language is not transparent. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 52) note is a risk, the text was also becoming fragmented and decontextualised too precipitously, taking me away from the situated approach to learning that I believed was important.

Next (Stage 3), I identified extracts from the interviews and field-notes on themes that emerged as I studied the data (see Appendices 8, 9 and 10). Thanks to the search and find functions in Word, I was not restricted in the later analysis to these main themes, but was able to identify sub-themes and topics. I also looked at the data for passages where discourses were overtly jostling with each other and tensions were evident (Stage 4 – see Appendices 11 and 12). This is because, as Bakhtin notes (1981: 272), it is only

> possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance,
> once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity
> of two embattled tendencies in the life of language.

In these passages the speakers were juggling several discourses. Sometimes they could be observed to switch rapidly from one discourse to another or to blend and hybridise discourses to address several audiences at once. These passages proved to be particularly helpful later when trying to understand the multiple influences on the students' learning experience.

This brought me to the point where I had the data sorted into helpful categories and was familiar enough with it to do the final, holistic analysis

which illuminated some of the themes identified during stages three and four through the application of Bakhtinian concepts (Stage 5). I approached this stage of the analysis by focusing separately on each of the key topics, assessment, dialogue and peer-leadership, considering the themes that were relevant to each and reflecting on the full-range of Bakhtinian concepts that might helpfully illuminate them. I then brought the findings of the three foci together and looked holistically at the data once again in order to understand the relationship between them. I always took time to look again at the extract under scrutiny in its original context to avoid misinterpretation, but, as Seale (1999: 32) notes is typical of researchers who use discourse analysis, I both acknowledge and embrace the relativism that lies at the heart of this approach. However objective the researcher tries to be, all qualitative inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer and will inevitably be 'theory-laden' (Denzin and Lincoln 2002: *xiii*). Any conclusions have, therefore, to be clearly located in the study's moral and political intentions.

3.8   Ethical considerations[41]

Moral and political issues pervade all stages of the research. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 284) argue that researchers need to balance the

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[41] This section describes the principles that underlie the ethical consideration relating to the study, but examiners may also wish to know that I followed the procedure in place at the time for the development and approval of my statement of research ethics (approved 11.02.05). My ethical approach is fully aligned to the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA 2004).

contribution of their research against the chances and scale of any harm, […] the values of honesty and fairness, […] any infringement of privacy, [… and] any likely consequences for themselves and other researchers.

They acknowledge there will be 'conflicting indications' and that 'Ethical issues are not matters on which simple and consensual decisions can always be made' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 284). Using excellent interpersonal skills to form effective relationships with participants is one way to overcome these challenges.

Asking participants for informed consent is widely agreed to be appropriate (Mason 2002a: 81; Silverman 2001: 271), though each researcher must reach a judgement about the amount of detail that it is appropriate to reveal about the study. In terms of disclosing the nature and intentions of the research project, there was no need to keep things from the participants to avoid affecting the outcome (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz 1991: 38-39), but nor did I go into detail. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 265) note that the researcher often 'does not know the course the work will take' and participants can only know what the researcher knows. In recognition of this, participants were briefed according to the latest stage in the development of the research ideas with brief, written, information sheets that explained the research, my background and the contact details of me and my supervisor (see Appendix 13). These sheets were tailored to the different types of participant. Everyone was also given my research ethics statement and signed a simple consent form (see Appendix 14). For observations, students were emailed by their tutor and/or were addressed by

myself and/or their tutor at the start of the session, according to the judgement of their tutor. Students were, however, unlikely to be familiar with all the potential effects of the research and also it would have been socially very difficult for individuals to decline to take part in group situations (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 266). In practice, though, few difficulties presented themselves as I was able to establish a trusting relationship.

In order to ensure that no harm came to the reputation of the department or the qualification, care needed to be taken in terms of disclosing the results of the study, since many of the participants might be recognised either within or beyond the department and watertight confidentiality would be impossible (Christians 2005: 145), especially at the local level (Merriam 1998: 217). This was compounded in this case because the department was partly chosen because it was relatively unusual in its assessment practices and the 'change agent', Robin, was a well-known, national figure, making it even more recognisable. This has, therefore, been discussed with Robin, who has read a near-final draft of the thesis and advised on the level of anonymity that should be used. The principle of anonymity is important and readers who are unfamiliar with the department and the change agent will, in reality, be reading an anonymous study. Therefore, pseudonyms have been used throughout for the participants in the empirical research and names which do not reveal the gender, age, class or ethnicity of the participants have been chosen both to undermine any preconceptions about such matters and to preserve anonymity.

Decisions about the dissemination of the findings can cause potential harm to the participants (Merriam 1998: 216; Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 347), but in this case, the research is aimed at the community of academic staff in higher education who have a general understanding about the issues involved and the findings are unlikely, when presented in a balanced, evidence-based and anonymous format, to cause harm. Exploitation could become an issue in research with students (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 273-275), but I judged that thanks and a sense that they were contributing to an improved learning experience for future students was both practical and appropriate (Ely *et al.* 1991).

Checking the analysis of the interviews with all the participants is advocated by some researchers (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 228). However, because of the method of analysis and the study's intention to focus generally on thematic issues and to explore some of the students' tacit, unexamined motivations, it did not seem necessary in this case. Exceptions would have been if the participants requested this or if I had had issues which needed cross-checking. In the final event, I cross-checked some matters with two of the tutors (Robin; Jo). I also shared the whole thesis with my initial contact, but I was not seeking full 'respondent validation', because such an approach is problematic as participants in the study might have many different reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with its outcome (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 228).

3.9   Conclusion

As Bakhtin (1986: 125) argued, I am 'a participant in the dialogue' between my own experiences and the environment I am studying. Because of these experiences, I can become a 'person who understands' (Bakhtin 1986: 125). The research project itself has contributed to those experiences, which is something that Bakhtin (1981: 255) acknowledges is the case for any 'author-creator', who

> does his observing from his own unresolved and still evolving contemporaneity, in all its complexity and fullness, insofar as he himself is located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes.

As a consequence, all stages of the research have inevitably been iterative as I and the other participants have acted and reacted with the discursive world around us.

The research had been designed to maximise the interaction between myself and the case study so that I am sensitive to the 'whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates' (Vološinov 1986: 93). Just as I am in dialogue with the research environment, so too the case itself has been and continues to be in dialogue with the wider environment within which it rests. The next chapter describes the case in more detail articulating its dialogue with the policy environment.

Chapter 4 – The policy context, the change agent and the case

4.1   Introduction

The programme of seminars does not stand alone as a finished event presenting itself for study. It has evolved and continues to evolve through dialogue with the higher education context and because of dialogue between the tutors and students that, across the years, have experienced the seminars. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the three dimensions of change, the 'culture, people and processes' (JISC InfoNet 2008c[42]) that have shaped the seminars during the twenty years of their growth and development. Firstly, it describes the higher education policy environment since the early 1990s, suggesting that the seminars have been responsive to and in dialogue with national initiatives and emerging policy. It then moves on to look at the 'change agent', Robin, whose role, it is argued, has been crucial not only in establishing the programme of seminars, but also in facilitating the dialogue with the national context. Finally, it looks at the form and structure of the seminars in order to offer the reader a 'thin'[43] description which contextualises the later fine-grained analysis. This third section argues that the open and flexible structure of the seminars enables the tutors and students to engage in a dialogue with each other and the learning environment. It argues that the original discipline-based rationale for the seminars has been 'canonized' (Bakhtin 1981: 418) by government

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[42] JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) is a group which supports the innovative use of ICT to support education and research. Their InfoNet advisory service commissioned Northumbria University to prepare their web pages on change management.

[43] As opposed to Geertz's (1973) 'thick' ethnographic description.

discourse on personal development and transferable skills in a way that is not necessarily unhelpful.

4.2 The higher education policy context

During the last fifteen to twenty years across which the seminars have developed, the higher education sector has changed significantly[44] and the seminars have been shaped by these changes, as well as playing their part in shaping sector views on teaching and learning in the discipline of history. This section describes the rapidly developing policy context and its dialogue with the emerging programme of seminars. The '*official* monologism' (Bakhtin 1984a: 110; his italics) of the government has acted as a powerful 'centripetal' (Bakhtin 1981: 272) force driving through change in the sector at a rapid rate. The changing policy and economic environment of the 1980s were a catalyst for this change (Duke 1992; Lea and Stierer 2000b: 3) and a steady growth in student numbers began. Alongside the 'massification' (Scott 1995: 179) of higher education and the establishment of the post-1992 universities went a reduction in resources, a call for greater public accountability, rapid advances in information technology and a greater interest in transferable skills (Hounsell *et al.* 1996). As a result, Dearing was commissioned by the UK government to undertake a report (published in 1997) called 'Higher Education in the Learning Society' which gave voice to these changes. The report formally marked a new direction for the university sector.

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[44] Ross (2003a and 2003b) and Ashwin (2006a) provide a useful overview of the growth and development of higher education.

Dearing's report aimed to review the purposes, structure, size and funding of higher education and produced a wide variety of far-reaching recommendations that embraced teaching[45], research, funding and external partnerships. The report (Dearing 1997: 23) expressed a desire that students and academe in general should not only engage in research and study for its own sake, but also so that they could 'contribute effectively to society' for the 'benefit of the economy' and in order to 'play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society'. These transformative aims were later downplayed in the white paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES 2003), where the emphasis shifted to the economic benefits for the individual and society.

The 1997 report gave a further impetus to the 'skills agenda', which had been emerging since the mid 1980s as governments tried to steer the university sector towards a more vocational curriculum in order to increase economic output (Bennett, Dunne and Carré 2000: 1-3). Employability skills were regarded differently by the many 'heteroglossic' voices that make up the sector. While some could see the benefits of making skills development more explicit, others regarded them as 'a poor relation, developed as a by-product of exposure to the cutting edge of intellectual endeavour' (Walker and Finney 1999: 532) and their introduction was resisted by much of academe (Bennett *et al.* 2000: 164; Knight and Yorke 2003: 1-2; McLean and Barker 2004: 414; Mitchell, Johnston, Myles and Ford 2004: 1).

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[45] These included establishing programme specifications, the introduction of personal development plans, an entitlement to be able to study specialisms within a broad context, a commitment to skills development, including recognition of the importance of 'key skills' and work experience (Dearing 1997).

Probably anticipating this resistance and aware that policy

implementation is problematic (Bowe, Ball and Gold 1996: 286-287), the

government established two key agencies to effect change: the Quality

Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Institute for Learning and Teaching in

Higher Education (ILTHE) – later the Higher Education Academy (HEA[46]).

Dearing (1997: 7) had charged the sector with the pursuit of 'excellence' in

'learning and teaching' and the two organisations set about interpreting and

achieving this in different ways. QAA established what Skelton (2005: 29-35)

calls a 'performative framework' of enforced absolute standards in order to

create an efficient and fair educational meritocracy, while the HEA supported

practitioners. In Bakhtinian terms, these agencies act with 'centripetal' force

on the sector wielding their own discourses of 'quality' and 'advice'.

In 2003, the government's white paper, *The Future of Higher

Education,* evaluated progress in higher education reform and refined its

targets. There was less of a focus on the transformative personal and social

benefits of higher education and a greater emphasis on the economic

benefits of mass higher education. It contained a commitment to ensure,

amongst other aims, that 'the talented and best from all backgrounds' (DfES

2003[47]) had access to higher education, as well as to address funding

challenges by allowing universities to charge a higher fee and, significantly

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[46] The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was established in 1999 and was charged with supporting the professional development of academic staff in higher education. The LTSN (Learning and Teaching Subject Network), known now as the 'Subject Centres', was simultaneously established to support developments at the level of the discipline. In 2004 the ILTHE merged with the LTSN, and the TQEF National Co-ordination Team (NCT) to form the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

[47] No page numbers, taken from Foreword.

for this study, to introduce more initiatives to improve and reward excellent

teaching[48]. 'Excellence' is a term that, even before Dearing's (1997) first

report, was critiqued by Readings (1996: 39) as a 'non-referential unit of

value entirely internal to the system'. It indicated, for Readings, that 'there is

no longer any idea of the University' as the embodiment of 'reason' or

'culture' (1996: 14) and that the concept of excellence acted as a framework

within which the government's twin agenda of 'production' and 'diversity'

could be fostered (1996: 32). Raftery (2006: 7) agrees arguing that 'healthy

skepticism' of the term is needed not least because the concept of 'excellence

in teaching' has been little researched. There has undoubtedly been much

questioning, scepticism and resistance (Palfreyman and Tapper 2009; Skelton

2005: 29-35) to the imposition of the 'official monologism' (Bakhtin 1984a:

110) of the QAA. Bakhtin (1981: 345) suggests that,

> There is a struggle constantly being waged to overcome the official
> line with its tendency to distance itself from the zone of contact, a
> struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority.

The sector has responded by bringing its own 'centrifugal' (Bakhtin 1981:

272) forces to bear on the unifying discourse of government policy, such as

those relating to their discipline or their institution, research or teaching. In

addition to these, practitioners are influenced by their own views and

experiences (Bowe *et al.* 1996: 286-287). Hannan and Silver (2000: 88) point

to an inevitable tension between these various discourses. It has taken time

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[48] The paper proposed that this could be achieved by establishing Centres of
Excellence for Teaching and Learning, by introducing professional standards for
teaching, improving student choice through what was to become the National
Student Survey and the establishment of an academy 'to develop best practice'. The
National Teaching Fellowship scheme was also extended and university status
became possible based on teaching excellence, not just research capability.

and many attempts at dialogue, as Pennington (2003: 7) argues is needed,

between the sector and the organisations that were put in place to

implement Dearing's recommendations to bring about change[49].

The case studied here was particularly affected by some of the

government's initiatives to support bottom-up change in teaching, learning

and assessment and to provide the best possible experience for all students[50].

Through the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), funding was

provided to stimulate innovation and encourage the sharing of practice,

notably through the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning

(FDTL)[51] and its ensuing funding streams. Reward and encouragement for

academic staff came through different kinds of fellowship status awarded

firstly by the ILTHE and later the HEA, as well as accredited courses to enable

new lecturers to gain professional status. Discipline-based support came

through the Learning and Teaching Subject Network, later the Subject

Centres, which also had small-scale funding to support innovation. Explicit

training in the management of innovation was provided by the Change

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[49] In 2008 Dearing confirmed that he still believed in the way that his 1997 committee had defined the purposes of higher education, but he argued that the government had placed the emphasis heavily on those elements which related to employability and the economy. He reminded his audience of the importance of study for its own sake and of developing a broad knowledge-base and learning broader life-skills, such as knowledge of oneself. He did not mention the QAA or HEA's roles (2008).
[50] When Paul Ramsden became Director of the HEA, he drew on his phenomenological work undertaken at the University of Sydney and charged the sector with considering higher education from the perspective of the student experience, notably the 'student learning experience', a call that continues to be repeated (Ramsden 2008; HEA 2009b).
[51] The Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) was established in 1995 to support projects aimed at stimulating developments in teaching and learning in higher education and to encourage the dissemination of good teaching and learning practice across the higher education sector (HEA 1995). Since then it has mutated into first the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) and now the Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS) initiative.

Academy programme (HEA 2007). Little rigorous research was funded,

indeed Abbas and McLean (2003: 71) comment on the way the FDTL

positively discouraged 'research', allowing its funding only to support

'development'. Some research has, however, been undertaken through a

cross-phase network, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme

(TLRP[52]) and, more recently, the Centres for Excellence for Teaching and

Learning (CETLs[53]).

During this period of policy development and implementation, the

seminars began to emerge into their current format[54]. Following the

Department's move to a modularised structure in the early 1990s (Robin), a

change that generally brought widespread adjustments to the sector's

assessment practices (Brown 1999: 4), and through a number of internal

reviews and refinements, a coherent programme of study began to emerge,

in which teaching, learning and assessment methodologies were

'constructively aligned' (Biggs 1999: 31). Although initially resisted by most

tutors and external examiners (Robin), the practice was later part of several

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[52] The TLRP (2008) was established in 2000 and is overseen by the Education and Social Research Council. Its purpose is to undertake and promote excellent educational research of all kinds and ensure that it is used to enhance learning. Funders include the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Education and Skills.

[53] 74 Centres for Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLs) were established by HEFCE in 2005. CETLs have three purposes: to reward excellence; to develop that excellence through further research; and to disseminate and embed that excellence, in their institution and the wider higher education sector (HEA 2005).

[54] Current refers to the moment when the data was gathered between 2004 and 2006. Since then, as part of the continued dialogue between members of the team and the external environment, the seminars have been reviewed again (2006). One of the more significant features of this review was a decision to involve all tutors of first-year modules in the delivery of the 'Learning History' module, so that everyone had a real involvement and understanding of the development of the skills students need to run the later seminars.

funded, collaborative projects[55] (FDTL projects in 1996 and 1997 and a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in 2005), which, in addition to the funding, gave 'official' recognition to the practice in a way that helped address criticisms from protectors of traditional practice and enabled it to be noticed and considered by interested peers seeking to develop similar approaches. According to Robin, an important element in getting the innovative seminars accepted was that the students liked the modules and student pressure encouraged the practice to spread. By 1998, the University's *Teaching and Learning Strategy* stated that academic staff were being 'actively encouraged to develop existing and new approaches to teaching'[56] and in 2002-03 the department gained a hard-won 'exemplary' commendation from the QAA for the seminars in a subject review[57]. By 2004 40%-50% of modules in years two and three used assessed seminars and around 80% of the external examiners were at least supportive, if not fulsome, in their praise and this continues to be the case at the time of writing (2009) (Robin; Lesley).

I too was helped by the funding given to lone practitioners (Bentley 2003 and 2005). My own early practice and research in the area of assessed seminar discussion was also influenced by three government-funded projects: the ASSHE Inventory (Hounsell *et al.* 1996[58]); the Assessment and Expanded

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[55] Details are withheld to preserve anonymity (TLRP 2008).
[56] Not referenced to preserve anonymity.
[57] Not referenced to preserve anonymity.
[58] The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council financed a project called *Assessment Strategies in Scottish Higher Education.* The ASSHE Inventory, as it is known, brings together over 120 descriptions by Scottish university and college teachers of changes in how they assess their students' progress and performance.

Text Consortium (AETC 2000); and Speak-Write (2001; Avery and Bryan 2001) that respectively documented, evaluated and developed practice in matters related to assessment and oral skills development and encouraged me to pursue my ideas. Chapter six discusses in more detail the developments in assessment for learning and oral assessment, but, across time, these initiatives have started to have some effect with tutors from innovating departments reporting a broadly positive response (Hannan 2002; Hannan and Silver 2000). Beyond the immediate reach of the initiatives, though, there was less response to the call to reflect on and develop teaching and assessment strategies with writers commenting on the poor articulation between intended outcomes and assessment methods, and the limited range of assessment types deployed (Biggs 1999; Brown and Glasner 1999; Knight and Yorke 2003: 174; Rust 2002).

This was particularly the case in the area of oral assessment. Practice, such as that studied by Creme (1995) and in the case studied here, was more the exception than the rule. In 1999, Martin and Campbell (1999: 327) saw Dearing's report as a welcome catalyst for higher education to 'pay more attention to the development of students' communicative abilities', but by 2004, when Stowell and Woolf (2004[59]) undertook a wide-ranging, documentary, quantitative survey across history departments to identify recent assessment trends, there was little change in the diversity and amount of oral assessment undertaken. Taking account of some 250 undergraduate modules it concluded over 60% of all the assessment items took the form of

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[59] Some of the data from this unpublished paper was later published (Woolf 2004).

an essay (43%) or exam (19%). The next most common method involved the assessment of oral skills (14% overall, comprising some form of presentation, 59%, or the marking of seminar contributions, 41%). This showed little change on Doran *et al.*'s (2000: 194) study which reported that 15% of history departments used assessed seminars in 2000 at the height of the initiatives and projects. In 2004, there was little self- and peer-assessment, though there did appear to be an increase in assessed 'participation' and 'presentations' across the three undergraduate levels (Stowell and Woolf 2004: Chart 11)[60].

The wider changes in the sector, as Gibbs (2006a: 11-12) notes, do not help with the move to assessment for learning[61]. The reduction in contact hours means that it is difficult to undertake time-intensive activities such as assessed seminars. The pressures of other commitments on students' lives mean that learners are being encouraged out of necessity to behave strategically when it comes to their learning. Tightly prescribed rules and regulations that result from the quality assurance agenda also have a potentially dampening effect on this type of assessment, because sceptics believe that ensuring reliability and consistency is harder in such environments.

Diverse teaching and assessment practices were slow to emerge despite the catalyst of Dearing (Knight and Yorke 2003: *viii*), but change has

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[60] The study did not undertake any qualitative enquiry to try to understand why this is the case.
[61] The concept of assessment for learning is discussed in chapter six.

slowly come about across the years and, while there is no evidence that, even now, practice has become 'aligned' or co-ordinated in any significant way, nor that 'excellence' is close to being achieved, my own experience is that the incidence of so-called 'innovative' teaching and assessment practice has become more frequent and less unusual. Most courses, for example, have embraced the idea of assessing student presentations of various kinds. Some examples of so-called 'innovative' practice have become embedded in departmental cultures and structures. In the case of both my own and the case study's practice, this has been helped by the funding that was put in place to support government policy. When funding is awarded, the funders expect the outcome to be disseminated widely across the sector and through this process the practice influences and shapes the national picture. However, this influence can be limited and the innovative practice that is supported through funding can be short-lived without the presence of key facilitators of change.

4.3   The impact of the change agent

This case study focuses on practice which does appear to have benefitted from the policy climate described above and the particular reason for this appears to be the presence of a 'change agent' (Robin) and another supportive, long-standing colleague (Lesley). Understanding Robin's influence on this case study reveals how significant the influence of individual champions can be on localised practice and on national policy, as Hannan and Silver's (2000) study of innovation confirms.

Robin was described by two tutors as the department's 'guru' on learning and teaching and the person that inspired her/him as a new and less experienced colleague to try out the seminars (Lyndsey; Sacha). Successful leaders are, according to Lumby (2003: 292), 'created by the community', which is what appears to have happened in the case study's department, for almost everyone referred me to this 'guru' when I asked any searching questions about the principles on which the practice was based. When describing my interest in oral assessment, I was also referred to Robin at conferences by third parties, indicating that s/he is indeed a highly respected and influential figure.

Robin played an active part in two FDTL projects (in 1996 and 1997[62]). The first resulted in a major resource base, conference and publication and the second focused on the academic and personal development of students including the development of transferable skills. S/he was involved in the establishment of a CETL in 2005, which took an integrated and holistic view of learning and which drew heavily on the department's seminar programme linking it to entrepreneurship education and personal development planning. A running theme between these initiatives was an emphasis on transferable skills development and reflection. Robin was also awarded a National

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[62] Details withheld to preserve anonymity.

Teaching Fellowship[63], advocated the award of the 'exemplary' in the department's last QAA subject audit, was a member of the benchmarking planning team and, for many years, held a significant post in the History Subject Centre.

The presence of such an influential figure has undoubtedly played a significant part in initiating and embedding the programme of seminars, enabling them to survive periods of lack of interest and open hostility. Leadership in 'old' universities, such as the one studied here, tends to be based on a collegiate model with strong local agenda, subject-specific allegiances and activities driven from the ground (JISC InfoNet 2008a). Academics appear to be most readily willing to engage in this kind of 'bottom-up' innovation when it is linked to research, but typically this is harder to achieve in the area of teaching and learning which is more characterised by a 'hierarchical structure' (Petrov, Bolden and Gosling 2006: 8). However, in this case, the change agent was interested in extending his/her existing role and taking the initiative, which is what MacBeath (2005) calls 'opportunistic' leadership. Having such leaders scattered through an organisation, a model known as 'distributed leadership', is, according to Petrov *et al.* (2006), increasingly seen as a way of enabling innovation, perhaps because universities can be viewed as complex adaptive systems where many people are seen as being involved in emergent change and

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[63] Details withheld to preserve anonymity. The individual strand of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) started in 2000. It recognises and rewards individual excellence in teaching in higher education in England and Northern Ireland (HEA 2009a).

where leaders are seen as facilitators and supporters (Olson and Eoyang 2001). This view explains what Ackerman (1997: 45) calls 'developmental' change. This kind of change, which has happened in the case study, 'enhances or corrects existing aspects of an organisation, often focusing on the improvement of a skill or process' (JISC InfoNet 2008b). In this case, the change agent has brought about such change through influence and personal credibility, rather than because s/he held an authoritative role, as Pennington (2003: 7) argues is beneficial.

The case study offers a text book example of the emergence of what the sector has endorsed as contemporary good practice in teaching and learning. It should not be considered typical practice, because not all initiatives have a change agent who finds her/himself at the right time and place with the right set of personal qualities to act as the catalyst for development. However, it does reveal the importance of advocates, who are crucial people in the change process, since all dialogue is a socio-linguistic struggle between different viewpoints (Vološinov 1986: 106). Change does not come about because of any simple or direct action and the opportunity offered by the plethora of government initiatives is often 'squandered' and constrained by central systems and structures (Abbas and McLean 2003: 69). This is, in part, because the government is perceived as a wielder of 'authoritative discourse', who is attempting to force through change. The effects of authoritative discourse are superficial and short-lived (Bakhtin 1981: 342), but 'internally persuasive' discourse can shape the 'individual consciousness' (Bakhtin 1981: 345) and bring about deeper and more

sustained change within a team. In this case the change agent used 'internally persuasive' discourse to persuade and influence both the internal and external culture. Thus Robin's views are taken by others and are, as Bakhtin (1981: 345) argues is the case with 'internally persuasive' discourse, 'freely developed' and applied to 'new conditions' beyond the change agent's direct influence. This is when far-reaching change happens.

4.4   The form and structure of the seminars[64]

During this period of change, growth and development, the seminars emerged into their current format. It is argued here that the framework, within which the seminars operate, provides a structure and set of processes that has some commonality, but sufficient flexibility to allow the tutors and students to adapt them across the years and within the modules to their perceived teaching and learning needs, which scholars argue aids a 'deep' learning experience (Prosser and Trigwell 1999: 15). Across the last twenty years different dimensions of the seminars have been perceived to be particularly valuable according to the changing policy agenda and views on teaching and learning. Employability, for example, is something that chapter six suggests now features at the forefront of the students' minds in a way that the tutors believe it did not in the 1990s (Robin; Lesley). The programme of seminars has evolved to incorporate new dimensions, such as self- and

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[64] The information in this section came from a variety of sources. Initial extended interviews with two of the long-standing members of the department clarified all the basic structures. This information was then confirmed through observation, studying the documentation and interviews with a wider range of tutors.

peer-evaluation, as the sector began to value the personal and professional development of its students, as well as their academic achievement.

This section offers a brief description of the general format of the programme of seminars to provide a context for the later in-depth discussion. It explains the deployment of the seminars across the three years of the undergraduate programme of study, describing typical structures that are adopted. The processes associated with assessment and feedback are noted. Finally, Joughin's (2003) framework is used to articulate what form the seminars take in relation to other types of oral assessment.

All students undertake ''Learning History'', a first-year module which introduces students to degree-level study in history and which is a blend of historiography and study skills. It is underpinned by a belief that explicit skills development within a disciplinary context is an effective way of helping students develop the skills and dispositions they need for university study (Robin). The assessment of 'Learning History' is varied and includes a range of oral components[65], culminating in a group presentation which, according to one tutor, acts as a rite of passage (Jo). In years two and three, approximately half of the modules include assessed, student-led seminars, including the third-year special papers, and students have some choice over which modules to take. Typically, most students encounter modules with assessed, student-led seminars once or twice on the course though it is possible to pick a pathway that avoids them or to do several more. This helps

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[65] See Appendix 15 for an overview of the different elements of assessment associated with the programme of seminars.

students develop some of the more complex, 'transferable' skills which take time and repetition to acquire (Bonanno, Jones and English 1998: 365; Katung, Johnstone and Downie 1999: 56; Sambell, McDowell and Sambell 2006: 167).

More than half of the tutors[66] in the department use assessed student-led seminars and others use student-led seminars, but choose not to assess them. There is no particular demographic to those tutors who do and do not assess, though all those interviewed who used student-led seminars avowed particular interest in the quality of student learning. The deployment of the student-led seminars within the module is at the discretion of the module leader. Some modules run entirely through student-led seminars, others have them interspersed with tutor-led seminars, while some group the student-led seminars towards the end of the module.   These decisions are arrived at through a process of more or less explicit, informal dialogue, as the tutors take account of advice from their peers and the response and views of students. Some are also in dialogue with current theories of teaching and learning (Sacha; Robin; Lesley) and draw on these to make some of the operational decisions about the seminars' structure.

Within these structures, the students are given as much choice as possible. Generally, they select their own groups, though some tutors, particularly in the first year, give guidance. Sometimes the choice of topic governs the group as students are asked which topic interests them and this

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[66] There are around 30 full-time tutors.

is used as the starting point for a negotiation of who leads which seminar. Sometimes a finite list of topics is given, but often students have the freedom to select a topic of their choice as long it is relevant to the module and is deemed to be appropriate in terms of challenge and manageability by the tutor.

Assessed, student-led seminars typically adopt the following pattern. Small groups of students (3-5) take turns to run a seminar (class size normally 20-25)[67]. Groups generate an agenda with advance reading which is emailed around the whole class a week before. The seminars typically begin with a taster or warm-up activity and interweave five to ten minute presentations with activities organised by one group member with the support of the others. The activities include gobbet exercises, role play, debates (balloon and traditional), whole-class and small-group discussions, source work, the use of visual aids (such as artefacts, maps, video and audio recordings) and sometimes can even be run through a themed performance such as a television chat-show or a historical event. An individual presentation is compulsory in the assessed seminars. It should be ten minutes but was generally shorter, around five minutes, as students typically read from papers at a very brisk rate. The inter-weaving of presentation and activity, as well as small-group and whole-class discussion, ensured that there was a dialogue between the presenters and the class, between decontextualised and applied knowledge and between different ways of viewing the same issues. This relatively complex structure is different to the unassessed seminars that I

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[67] Initially, student numbers were lower with only ten in a class and then seminars were led by two students at a time (Lesley and Robin).

observed. Some were tutor-run with whole-class discussion and some group work. Some were run by a pair of students who, between them, asked questions and led a whole-class discussion, perhaps including a gobbet exercise. Others were a hybrid of the two with students giving a presentation followed by tutors leading discussion.

The seminars form only part of the assessment of a typical module (see Appendix 15). The assessment of the seminars themselves has several elements, including an agenda, seminar/presentation, self- and peer-evaluations and a report (see Appendix 15). There is no formal guidance about the weighting of the presentation and the report, though the consensus of opinion by tutors and students was that the presentation should get the greatest proportion of marks. I was not able to see any of these reports, but since the emphasis of the research was on the actual seminar environment, rather than the standards and precise format of assessment, this did not matter.

In addition to the tutor's assessment, there are both self- and peer-evaluations undertaken. The rest of the class carry out a brief peer evaluation of the leading group's performance. This is in itself not assessed, but the presenting group is expected to refer to the comments of their peers in the report. The peer evaluation introduces another layer of dialogue into the seminars. In addition, the students all carry out individual self-assessments of their own wider contributions. The mark that they award

themselves is moderated by the tutor and all agreed that the students were good judges of their contributions. To achieve this, the students must reflect dialogically, taking account of how others might perceive their performance, to arrive at a judgement, once again opening the students' minds to the views of others.

Feedback from tutors is another way that the student learning experience becomes dialogic. Feedback is present during the planning stage at the meeting where initial plans are set with the tutor and the topic agreed upon. There is the opportunity to send tutors agenda for comment. Immediately after the seminar the tutor gives the presenting group a quick verbal debrief to help them identify key issues for their report. Written feedback is returned with the marked work. One tutor notes that,

> You have to write a more descriptive feedback than you would do for a piece of written work because you know, if they've done something very well, you can't just say, 'The thing you did about [that historical figure …][68] was really good'; you've got to kind of say, 'Because you did this, this and this it was very effective', so that the external examiner can see you know why you're giving them that mark (Sacha).

The research literature indicates that Sacha's commitment to providing detailed feedback is a good way of supporting learning (Butler and Winne 1995; Gibbs 2006b; Gibbs and Simpson 2004; Hounsell 2007; MacDonald 1991; Race 2008). Certainly the many and varied forms of feedback, which are woven throughout the process, mean that the tutor and student are in regular dialogue about the seminars before and after they occur.

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[68] Edited to preserve anonymity.

Joughin's (2003) conceptual framework of oral assessment offers a helpful way of bringing this disparate description of the seminars together in a more analytical way that allows its form to be compared with other types of assessment familiar to the readers of this thesis. Joughin's (2003: 12) typography of oral assessment identifies six 'attributes' or 'dimensions' of oral assessment and all forms of oral assessment, Joughin argues, will exist at a particular point in this matrix. The first dimension he calls 'primary content type', that is, the relative weighting of the learning outcomes in relation to subject knowledge and understanding, and skills (applied problem-solving ability, interpersonal competence and personal qualities). The second dimension relates to the form the 'interaction' takes. Joughin sees practice as lying on a continuum from presentation to dialogue. The third dimension relates to how 'authentic' the context is for the oral assessment, that is, how close it is to a relevant, real-world situation. The fourth dimension is 'structure' and this captures how open or closed the form of interaction is. The fifth dimension captures the type of 'examiners' or assessors and whether they are authority-based (tutors or external examiners) or self-/peer-assessors. Finally, the sixth dimension relates to 'orality' and whether the assessment is entirely oral or whether it is supplemented by some form of written work.

The case study can be usefully defined using these criteria (Table 4.1). Because the seminars contain a range of diverse oral activities, they have several 'primary content types' and test a range of knowledge and skills. Tutors noted that the main emphasis in the seminars was on developing understanding (Robin), together with 'enterprise' and 'employability' skills

(Lesley). These skills demonstrate what Joughin calls applied problem-solving ability, interpersonal competence and personal qualities. Developing these 'transferable' skills is complex (Hitchcock and Shoemaker 1999), since they involve emotional, cognitive and reflexive dimensions (Mannion 2000: 392), but they are believed by the vast majority of the tutors and students to be important benefits of the programme of seminars.

With regard to Joughin's 'interaction' dimension, the case study seminars embrace both presentation and dialogue. The seminars are very 'authentic' in Joughin's sense, because the students are practising and being assessed in an educational environment which is not very different from that which they experience on a weekly basis. However, the texture of the seminars tends to be more varied in form and content than a regular tutor-led or even unassessed student-led seminar. The 'structure' of the student-led seminars is at the open-ended side of the continuum, between Joughin's open and closed interaction. They tend to take the form of ideas-sharing rather than problem-solving, though some activities, such as gobbet exercises, do embrace convergent discussion. In terms of Joughin's 'examiners', the formal examination is done by authority figures, the tutors. However, peers undertake formative assessment and the students assess and evaluate themselves. When the seminar is underway, it is arguable that the student group is more anxious about the reactions of the peer audience, than that of the tutor, though they are aware that each is looking for something different from the seminar and observations revealed that they try to please both audiences. Finally, in terms of 'orality', these seminars are primarily

oral, but there is a powerful literate element present in the report, which

students have to write and which weighs quite heavily in the marking.

Table 4.1 Joughin's dimensions applied to the case study

Dimensions	Range
1. Primary content type	Knowledge and understanding is most heavily valued in the marking, but applied problem-solving, interpersonal competence and personal qualities are all required.
2. Interaction	Dialogue with less than 25% presentation.
3. Authenticity	Contextualised as situated in a seminar.
4. Structure	Open structure with some closed elements.
5. Examiners	Self-assessment, peer assessment and authority-based assessment are all used.
6. Orality	The seminars are predominantly oral but additional written material is marked.

(Based on Joughin 2003: 12)

Like Joughin, I have used his matrix of dimensions to describe the oral

assessment in the case study. It has revealed that the seminars are relatively

open-ended, enabling them to be fairly diverse in their format at the local

level. This allows them to be shaped and re-interpreted by the tutors and

students diachronically across the years and synchronically within the

modules according to individual, departmental and external views on

teaching and learning, evolving views on the purpose of higher education,

the specific needs of particular curricula content, the timing of the seminars

within the course and the particular social mix of the students in the class.

Bakhtin's ideas add to what Joughin's matrix offers by suggesting that each manifestation of the seminars does not simply sit in a static manner at one point in this complex graph because tutors and students are in constant dialogue with each other and the external environment in a manner which draws them towards or away from the alternative possibilities within his dimensions. Every time a certain type of assessment occurs, it will occupy a unique and distinct place in Joughin's matrix. Thus the assessed, student-led seminars that occur in my own department are further away from presentation and nearer to the dialogic end of the interaction axes, as well as being slightly more open-ended than the ones that occur here. Even within the programme of seminars that are studied here, each module tutor interprets and nuances the seminars in their own way with some, for example, emphasising presentation more than others and some stressing the importance of the report more than others (Jo; Lesley; Pat; Sacha). As the students themselves noted in the interviews, they also plan their seminars in dialogue with their previous experiences of student-led seminars within that module and beyond, and according to the particular time and place where the seminar will be happening (Ali and Charlie - 2nd years; Toni - 3rd year). They adjust their plans and the emphasis of what they intend to say before and also during their seminars in response to their audience, shifting the orientation in Joughin's matrix slightly in a dialogic response to their environment.

Models like Joughin's provide a helpful initial vocabulary, but Bakhtin reminds us that oral assessment is a dialogic and untidy business, however

much we try to standardise it to ensure a common experience for all. This quality is also its strength, because the tutors and students are able to interpret the guidelines flexibly in order to make it appropriate for the moment. Participating students have the flexibility to establish situations where they can engage with the issues, as well as deploy and listen to Bakhtin's (1981: 345) 'internally persuasive discourses'.

4.5   Conclusion

The seminars are very much a product of the higher education environment of the last twenty years. They began as localised practice rooted in the culture of traditional history teaching aimed at making learning more interesting and engaging for the students (Robin and Lesley). As the policy environment developed, the HEA offered opportunities for funding and collaborative research and the QAA demanded that the curriculum be expressed in the new language of learning outcomes, knowledge and skills. The government supported aspects of higher education that enhanced the employability of graduates and little by little the seminars began to resonate with the language of government policy, as well as responding to the voices of the students. The rationale for the seminars came to embrace personal and professional development, notably study and employability skills. The module documentation began to embrace the language of the programme specification and benchmark statements (QAA 2000b).

Though this is harder to demonstrate, I would also argue that through the interface of the change agent, the seminars have played their part in influencing the wider higher education environment. Through the change agent's work on the FDTL projects, the History Subject Centre, the History Benchmark Statement Working Group, the CETL and other outward facing initiatives, Robin has played his/her part in shaping national policy and practice, particularly within the discipline of history.

The result of this two-way dialogue is that local, discipline-specific practice has now been enveloped within the wider discourses on higher education. The seminars have, in Bakhtinian terms, been 'canonized' by the official languages of the higher education policy environment. For Bakhtin (1981: 418), 'canonization' is when 'provincial patois or professional jargon' become re-accented and pass 'from one language system to another'. This is the process that has happened with the seminars. The seminars still serve the original discipline-based purpose for which they were designed by Robin and Lesley (enjoyment and understanding), but the official discourse of the government and its quangos have permeated the way they are expressed in formal documentation and public arena. Bakhtin (1981: 420) suggests that, 'Within certain limits the process of re-accentuation is unavoidable, legitimate and even productive' and this appears to have been the case here with chapter six revealing how the tutors and students speak positively of employability, transferable skills and personal development.

In addition to their dialogue with the policy environment, the seminars have been in dialogue with contemporary theories of learning in higher education, through the change agent and other tutors with an interest in this area (Jo; Lesley; Sacha). This is the subject of the next chapter which considers the relationship between the programme of seminars and some of the particularly relevant theories on student learning.

Chapter 5 – Approaching theories of learning

5.1   Introduction

I am arguing that the seminars studied here offer a particular kind of learning experience which is heavily influenced by the fact that they are assessed, oral and student-led. Across the last twenty years, there has been a discernable move, at least in the policy documents though, perhaps, rather more unevenly in the classroom, towards student-centred teaching, learning and assessment in the university sector. The research that underpins this has tended to focus on the general features of the different ways that students 'approach' learning[69], drawing on reports by students of their experiences. It has not probed deeply into its actualised complexity through the study of the socio-linguistic structures that enable those experiences. This chapter will provide an overview of the extant theories and research, locate this study in the field of higher education pedagogic research and propose what a Bakhtinian analysis of practice can contribute to the sector's understanding of student learning and sector practice.

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69 The set of studies which have come to be called 'approaches to learning' theory are discussed later in the chapter. (Marton and Säljö's 1976 study was seminal, but see also Entwistle 1988 and 1997a; Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Marton et al. 1984; Ramsden 1984, 1987 and 1988).

5.2   The development of student-centred learning theories

The programme of seminars studied here are ostensibly not only student-centred[70] in a variety of ways, they are student-led, which puts the student at the centre of both the teaching and the learning experience. They were introduced and developed during a policy paradigm shift in teaching and assessment practice in higher education, which saw a move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning. This section considers the development of the concept of student-centred learning and the theoretical assumptions upon which it is based.

Student-centred learning theory, which began in the world of informal and school education, was relatively slow in being applied to the higher education classroom. The notion of student-centred learning can be traced back across the twentieth century to the seminal ideas of the American philosopher, psychologist and educator John Dewey (1916), who placed the learner at the heart of the educational process. Dewey influenced many contemporary thinkers about education[71]: Kolb's (1976 and 1984) ideas on experiential learning; Rogers' (1951) development of client-centred learning; and Schön's views on reflective practice (Argyris and Schön 1974; Schön 1983). The general thrust of their arguments was that education

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[70] Boud questions what is meant by contemporary views of 'learner' or 'student-centred' education (2006: 20), arguing that scholars' definitions vary because they speak from different traditions (2006: 31).
[71] This belief is based on my knowledge of the teaching and learning advice literature and my experience of staff development events and courses.

should enable all learners to engage with and reflect upon new experiences in order to expand their understanding of the world.

Dialogue, which actively involves all learners, at least in principle, is seen as central to the realisation of these aims. Dewey was pivotal in establishing a new way of thinking about dialogic learning and key thinkers who followed later in the century, notably Paulo Freire, Martin Buber and Jerome Bruner, continued the shift towards a more holistic approach to education. These advocates valued dialogue because it was thought to open-minds and enable people to engage with each other in a way that the traditional curriculum and model of teacher-learner could not. This, it was believed, would support the creation of enlightened citizens who would play an active part in shaping society, a vision championed by Paulo Freire, who worked with the illiterate poor in Brazil. Since the 1960s, Freire (1996) has strongly influenced educators with 'progressive' tendencies, arguing that education should be dialogic rather than content-based and should break down the traditional role of tutor and student, so that all became learners. This belief was shared by tutors in the study, even if they have not been influenced directly by Freire (Frances; Lesley; Robin). Freire (1996) eschewed what he called a 'banking' model of education, where the educator makes deposits of knowledge in the student, and stressed that if learning became dialogic our conception of both ourselves and society could be changed for the better. He also valued the principles of what later came to be called 'situated learning' (Lave and Wenger 1991) and also of rooting education in the experience of the learners.

Although much contemporary educational thinking has been influenced by Dewey and other seminal thinkers in the area of student-centred education, another strand of development emerged, arising in some ways out of a more instrumental, behaviourist (Watson 1913; Skinner 1973) view of education that is underpinned by a belief that taking certain actions in the classroom will have a relatively direct affect on student learning. In 1956 Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues wrote a taxonomy which allows designers of curricula to set appropriate educational objectives that take account of different types of knowledge and cognitive processes (revised Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). More recently, Biggs and Collis (1982) developed the SOLO taxonomy (Structure of Observed Learning Outcome) which can be used to describe students' different levels of understanding. The effect of these taxonomies can still be felt in the learning outcome culture of the last ten years and its language echoes through the modular documentation given to students in the case studied here. Such approaches imply that teaching can be planned to result in the learning outcomes desired and, while their helpfulness when planning is noted, this study concentrates on a form of pedagogy that allows learning to 'emerge', as Wenger (1998: 267) notes is important.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, scholars began to consider not so much whether the objectives were being achieved, but rather how effectively students were approaching their learning. David Kolb (1976 and 1984) developed his influential 'Experiential Learning Cycle' and my experience indicates his ideas are still commonly included in the curricula of

higher education courses relating to education. Learning for Kolb is an iterative process of action and reflection on action that he sees as characterising the learning process. Building on Kolb's work, Honey and Mumford (1982) have created a typology of learning styles, identifying individual preferences for each stage of Kolb's cycle (Activist, Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist). Kolb's ideas have also been particularly helpful to those who stress the holistic and experiential nature of learning (Brown 2004; Moon 2004). Brown (2004: 15) and Moon (2004: 72), for example, separately argue that learning takes place when students assimilate a variety of material and apply their wider experiences in the new context, a process which Bakhtin also discusses and which chapter seven argues the seminars aid. The concomitant emphasis on reflection and self-evaluation can be seen in the case studied here through the self- and peer-evaluations. In addition, the longitudinal structure of the assessed seminars supports the iterative and cyclical nature of the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb (1984).

None of these scholars focused specifically on higher education and their influence on traditional university teaching was limited. Then, beginning with Marton and Säljö's (1976) early study, and soon followed by others (for example, Entwistle 1988[72] and 1997a; Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Marton *et al.*, 1984; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Ramsden 1984, 1987 and 1988), there were a series of seminal studies investigating and describing how students report that they approach their learning. These drew on phenomenological traditions of thought, which tried to articulate

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[72] Originally published in 1981.

participants' experiences from their perspective. Broadly, 'approaches to learning' theorists argue that a student's conception of learning and perception of features of the learning environment influence his/her approach to learning and that this, in turn, influences what s/he actually learns.

Marton and Säljö's (1976) study of university students in Sweden became a landmark text in higher education pedagogy. They consider how students talked about how they read texts and how they spoke of, what the researchers came to term, 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning. Different approaches, they argue, lead to different outcomes, with 'deep' approaches leading to a better understanding than 'surface' approaches (Marton and Säljö 1984: 46). Soon Marton (1986) was using the word phenomenography to describe the methodology they had adopted to enable them to report on students' different understandings of their experiences. Phenomenography attempts to identify and categorise participants' conceptions of learning, creating a descriptive, hierarchical typology of their experiences (Marton 1986).

This study is not phenomenographic and does not attempt to categorise or define different students' approaches to learning. It is, however, sympathetic to the phenomenological roots of 'approaches to learning' theory in its focus on the students' experience of the seminars. It shares the 'approaches to learning' theorists' desire to identify common qualities in effective experiences of learning. Although it shares these

similarities, this study is also distinctive in that it seeks to reveal the socio-linguistic structures that constitute learners' experience of the seminars, which is not a focus of 'approaches to learning'. These structures, it will argue, play a major part in creating particular kinds of experiences of learning which are akin to those associated with 'deep' approaches to learning, in that they engage students' 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282). Active understanding is an important aspect of a 'deep' approach to learning. Ramsden (1984: 159 and 1988: 19), for example, describes how students engaging in 'deep' approaches to learning are relating and distinguishing new ideas, looking for meaning, actively interacting and linking ideas with real life and personal experiences, all characteristics identified in this study as part of effective learning.

Another significant characteristic of this study and of 'approaches to learning' is that they both adopt a relational view of learning. While Marton and Säljö (1984) drew on cognitive psychology and information processing, Ramsden[73] and Trigwell tended to draw on sociological perspectives to argue that learning must fundamentally be seen as relational and is a function of both teaching and the context in which it occurs (Ramsden 1987; Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse 1999). In Bakhtinian terms, it is possible to see learners' 'conceptions' of learning as being shaped by previous and current socio-linguistic, dialogic experiences. Once in the classroom, they respond to their 'perception' of their addressees, including tutors, their peers and

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[73] As discussed in chapter four, Ramsden brought his ideas on how students experience learning from Australia to his post as Director of the Higher Education Academy (2004).

potential super-addressees, such as the discipline community or academe and the university more generally.

By 1999 Prosser and Trigwell (1999: 10-25) had drawn together these ideas on how students approach their learning and developed them into a clear 'model for understanding learning and teaching in higher education', which was drawn on in staff development sessions and to underpin the courses that were emerging for new lecturers. Perhaps because of this and Ramsden's influence on HEA policy, these views underpinned my own understanding of student learning, when I began this study. I soon went on to develop my own distinct, Bakhtinian theoretical perspective, though I will argue that its findings are broadly in sympathy with 'approaches to learning theory'.

By the early twenty-first century 'approaches to learning' had become, 'ubiquitous' in the UK and Australia (McLean 2008: 98). Marton, Biggs, Ramsden, Entwistle, Prosser and Trigwell, as well as Bowden and Schön, were identified in a study by Kandlbinder (2007[74]) as the most cited scholars in a leading Australian higher education research journal and he argued that together their ideas had made a 'small but significant' contribution to 'higher education research and development'. Their ideas permeate the studies and approaches of many contemporary influential writers and educational developers. For example, a prominent UK educational developer, Gibbs (1992a: 2), sees 'thinking, seeking integration between components and

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[74] No page numbers in paper.

between tasks, and "playing" with ideas' as key to 'deep' learning. McNally (1994: 120) adds that learning is particularly helped when students talk together about the tasks that they are undertaking, as happens in the seminars studied here. 'Approaches to learning' theory has also been colonised by educational psychologists seeking to define students' 'learning styles' (Entwistle 1988). Advocates of 'learning styles' have a tendency to imply that a student's approach to study is an inherent predisposition. Entwistle (1988: 95), for example, argues that teachers should adopt a method that allows students to learn in their 'preferred style'. This study is distinct in that it sees learning as relational not inherent, that is, it is a result of the reciprocal, dialogic relationship between the student and the learning environment.

It is clear that the concept of 'deep' approaches to learning has entered the vocabulary of the tutors and students in the study. They referred to 'deep' learning, perhaps drawing on a department-wide vocabulary that came from the change agent (Jac and Josh - 2nd years; Lesley, Robin and Sacha - tutors). Robin, the change agent, and Lesley, the co-founder of the seminar programme, both also referred to 'surface' approaches, implicitly making the case that the seminars were effective for engaging students in 'deep' learning.

Mindful of the ideas on 'deep' and 'surface' approaches and the avowed benefits of experiential learning, in the last decade or so research in higher education has tended to focus its attention on precisely what mix of

classroom activities would enable the students to achieve the stated learning outcomes most effectively and how the tutor could shape the perceptions of the student and, thus, their approach to learning. Biggs's (1978) early research on learning in higher education had drawn conclusions very similar to the work of Marton and Säljö (1976 and 1984), identifying how students' motivations affect their study strategies, and by 1999, Biggs was arguing that all elements of the curriculum needed to be 'constructively aligned' (1999: 31) for students to adopt a 'deep' approach to learning. He chose the phrase 'constructive' because he sees learning as constructed in the minds of the students and, as such, his views can be seen as another step in the trend in educational theory charted above from teacher-centred to student-centred approaches.

Biggs (1999: 26) argues that aligning all the elements of the teaching and learning process to a constructivist, student-centred approach is central to an effective learning experience. As this century established itself, the integration of teaching, learning and assessment strategies, in the manner of Biggs's method, received a strong policy emphasis when it came to curriculum design (Dochy *et al.* 2007: 88) with the approach finding particular favour amongst those in authority (QAA, HEA, university managers and educational developers). I myself tried to ensure my own English department's teaching, learning and assessment activities were all constructively aligned believing this was a fundamental building block of an effective learning environment. This belief is, in part, what led me to make a cross-section of the seminars that formed our principle teaching method both student-led and assessed.

However, I was not convinced that alignment was *per se* a 'magic bullet' (Cohen 1987) and so I undertook this study which has been designed to help me understand more fully why this combination of assessment, discussion and student-leadership seemed to receive widespread endorsement.

Although 'approaches to learning' received little criticism for a long time, some researchers have engaged in a more critical dialogue about its ideas (Haggis 2003 and 2008; Malcolm and Zukas 2001; Mann 2001; Säljö 1997; Webb 1997). Webb (1997: 205-208) argues that the simple binary of 'deep' and 'surface' approaches needs deconstructing to reveal the more complex inter-relationship between the two, something that Entwistle (1997b: 215) endorses in his response to Webb. Malcolm and Zukas (2001: 33) suggest that ideas on deep and surface 'approaches to learning' have become reduced to 'a set of professional rules for practice' and Mann (2001: 8) argues that it might be more helpful to change the focus from 'surface/strategic/deep approaches' to 'a focus on alienated or engaged experiences of learning'.

Meanwhile, others express concern that 'approaches to learning' theories have become too decontextualised and fail to take account of the needs of individual learners (Jones *et al.* 1999; Haggis, 2003 and 2008; Säljö 1997; Webb 1997: 207). Säljö (1997: 188) argues for a return to his original emphasis on the study of situated learning by particular individuals at particular times and places. Jones *et al.* (1999: *xx-xxi*) question whether either a study-skills approach, rooted in behavioural and experimental

psychology, or 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning, rooted in social psychology, can account for the discursive conflict experienced by diverse students encountering the language of academe.

Echoing this critique of 'approaches to learning' theory, Haggis (2003; 2006) argues that it is not a grand-narrative that explains how all students learn, irrespective of their discipline, personal background or learning activity. Adopting what Skelton (2005: 32-35) calls a 'critical understanding' of teaching excellence, she suggests that the sector, since mass higher education and the advent of a diverse student body, should tailor its teaching strategies towards this diversity and not fall back on a universal theory that might fit with a traditional university student. Marshall and Case (2005: 264) acknowledge this arguing that 'approaches to learning' theory can be usefully complemented by discourse analysis, as used here, or by theories relating to 'academic literacies', which draw on critical discourse analysis and cultural anthropology (Jones *et al.* 1999: *xx*).

This study straddles the divide between the universal and the more individualistic theories of student learning. I believe, like Ashwin (2006b: 132), that 'Individuals are part of a wider learning and teaching context'. I argue that it is possible to identify some universal, socio-linguistic structures that underpin all 'deep' or 'active' approaches to learning. However, I simultaneously acknowledge, like Wenger (1998: 3), the social nature of learning, recognising individuality and difference. The universal, socio-linguistic structures, that I discuss, explain how individuals form their own

unique identities and negotiate their encounters with others who have different perspectives within and beyond the classroom.

These issues are the focus of researchers interested in 'academic literacies', which is a body of literature which has attracted some interest from those interested in higher education pedagogy. Unlike 'approaches to learning', writing on 'academic literacies' shares my concern with language and the effect it has on student learning (Archer *et al.* 2003; Bowl 2003; McLean and Barker 2004; Reay 2003; Reay *et al.* 2005; Satterthwaite, Atkinson and Gale 2003). These researchers argue that 'academic socialization' is not a simple or easy process which can be achieved by 'focusing attention on learning appropriate approaches to learning tasks' (Sambell *et al.* 2006: 166). Instead, they have pointed to the covert influence of expectations surrounding academic literacies (Jones *et al.* 1999; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 2003; Zamel and Spack 1998). Chiseri-Strater (1991: 144) argues that the process of acculturisation into the academic community cannot be equated entirely with entry into disciplines:

> From the students' perspective, the literacy norm within most fields – the reading, writing, talking and thinking patterns of the discipline – most often remain powerfully invisible, not offering ready access for them to earn membership in any discourse community.

This study uses Bakhtinian theory to reveal the socio-linguistic structures of some of these 'powerfully invisible' 'talking and thinking patterns'.

Because of the complexity of academic socialisation, simple bolt-on study-skills courses have limited impact and so those writing on 'academic

literacy' and the challenges of an increasingly diverse student body have argued for a more fundamental way of addressing the need. Chiseri-Strater (1991:165), for example, argues for a change to curricula

> based on our understanding of the multiple literacies – "multi-linguality" (Maxine Green) or "multiple intelligences" (Howard Gardner) – that students bring into our university classrooms.

The concept of 'multi-linguality' and 'multiple literacies' echoes Bakhtin's stress on the heteroglossia of social interaction. This study will show that the seminar classroom offers a rich learning environment because of this heteroglossia, echoing this appreciation of the value of 'multiple literacies'.

Although the literature on 'academic literacies' is concerned with academic acculturation, it focuses predominantly on student writing. Even Lillis (2003), who draws on Bakhtin's concept of dialogics, does not apply his ideas to oral interaction. She acknowledges the importance of students having 'a talking relationship around their learning' (Lillis 1999: 144), but it is not seen as central. Applebee's (1996) work, on the other hand, does place the concept of 'conversation' at the heart of his theory of educational acculturation. Like Lave and Wenger's concept of 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), Applebee argues that in order for learners to engage with and become part of their school community, the curriculum needs to be reconstituted as a 'conversation' (1996). This would place the emphasis on 'knowledge-in-action' (Applebee 1996: 2) and get students 'participating *in*, traditions of literature and criticism' (Applebee 1996: 28-29; his italics).

Applebee proposes an approach based on dialogue between teachers and students, between elements of the curriculum and between elements of the teaching and learning strategy to ensure that across the board there is a participatory and situated approach to learning. He argues that 'Classroom discourse is the critical mediator between the conversation within the classroom and larger traditions of knowing and doing' (Applebee 1996: 127) that students can potentially find so alien. Dialogue provides students with the tacit knowledge that they need to become participants in that tradition because it

> is the background against which all inquiry proceeds; it provides a matrix of taken-for-granted assumptions, rules of evidence and procedure, and a sense of what is interesting and what is less so. (Applebee 1996: 11)

This sense of entering into the tradition through the implicit and embedded practices of the discipline has much in common with Lave and Wenger's theory of 'Legitimate Peripheral Participation' (Lave and Wenger 1998; Wenger 1991).

Lave and Wenger argue that inexperienced apprentices in a 'community of practice' initially observe from the margins, increasingly participating in communal activities, until, through a process of 'situated learning', they can become fully-fledged members of their work community (Lave and Wenger 1998; Wenger 1991). Whereas Lave and Wenger use the idea of 'participating' in workplace learning both metaphorically and literally, Applebee (1996) uses the concept of conversation to explain how actual dialogue, coupled with an open-ended curriculum, is needed to enable

school and college students[75] to participate in the academic community and engage students in effective learning.

Within the undergraduate taught curriculum, academic conversations normally happen in discipline-based seminar-style settings and these are believed to be effective places for higher order skills' development and acculturation (Bruce *et al.* 2007; Hounsell and Entwistle[76] 2005b; Jones *et al.* 2005). Haggis endorses such a discipline-based approach suggesting that we should engage students in 'collective forms of exploration in relation to different aspects of disciplinary practice' (2006: 10) and arguing that such an approach is based 'upon the notion of dialogue' (2006: 10). This is the approach adopted by the programme of seminars studied here, which begin with a discipline-based study-skills course that has oral interaction at its heart.

This study is not concerned with disciplinarity *per se.* While it acknowledges that 'attention needs to be paid to what may be distinctive within and particular to a given subject area' (Hounsell and Entwistle 2005b) and endorses discipline-based 'situated' learning, its theoretical orientation is more aligned to researchers who have pointed out the 'commonalities' that

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[75] Applebee (1996) takes his evidence base mainly from American middle and high schools, but does occasionally broaden his argument to embrace the 'college' curriculum.

[76] Hounsell and Entwistle (2005a) directed a large-scale project funded by the TLRP and ESRC called *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses* (2001-2005). Its two aims were to investigate what makes for effective teaching and learning in contemporary higher education and to use that understanding to try to bring about improvements in students' learning.

exist between different subject boundaries (Hounsell and Entwistle 2005b; SOMUL 2008). It will argue, like Wilen (1988: 314), that dialogue is an effective medium for education no matter what the subject area. Through its use of Bakhtinian theory, it is well-positioned to explore why this is the case and to argue that, through discipline-based discursive interaction, students are drawn into an active engagement with the language and issues of their academic discipline whatever it might be.

5.3   Conclusion

The move to student-centred education has and continues to evolve. Unevenly, but increasingly, the importance of thinking about teaching and learning has been recognised not just by policy makers, but also practitioners. The recommendations of Dearing (1997) galvanised people, policy and funding with the effect that student-centred education became an expectation, if not an everyday reality. Official discourse 'canonized' (Bakhtin 1981: 418) the arguments and approaches of liberal educators and used their 'internally persuasive' (Bakhtin 1981: 342) messages about the benefits of learning through dialogue to support government policy. As Director of the HEA, Ramsden adapted and broadened his ideas on student learning in the face of mass higher education and found himself in a position to charge the sector with focusing on the 'student learning experience'.

While educational developers and practitioner-researchers have enthusiastically encouraged 'student-centred' teaching and learning, the

rhetoric masks a more mixed reality in terms of practice on the ground where institutions struggle to meet the demands of increased student numbers, the RAE[77] and operation within a market economy from which they are no longer sheltered. Questions have increasingly been asked about how the diverse student body is enabled to engage with the alien and highly abstract world of academe. The use of dialogue and collaborative inquiry in discipline-specific settings is suggested as one way of engaging learners (Applebee 1996; Haggis 2006) and this study focuses on one example of this kind of approach to teaching and learning.

This study is rooted in all these debates about student learning. The seminars have evolved during a time when many of these ideas were taking shape and being applied for the first time to the higher education sector. The change agent, Robin, and other tutors in the case study's department, arguably the students themselves and certainly myself, as the researcher, have been shaped more or less explicitly by the discourses on higher education pedagogy and this study is well-placed to probe more deeply into practice which appears to be deeply influenced by and aligned to contemporary higher education learning theory.

The seminars are not only student-centred, but are also student-led. They ostensibly have the characteristics of a learning environment that might trigger 'deep' approaches to learning with their emphasis on different kinds of dialogic activity, which ought, in theory, to prompt students 'to

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[77] Research Assessment Exercise; now Research Evaluation Framework (REF).

understand ideas and seek meanings' (Prosser and Trigwell 1999: 91). They link the teaching of discipline-specific knowledge and skills with more general 'academic literacies' to form, potentially, a powerful induction into academe. Their use of discussion promises to be a way of valuing and giving voice to 'multiple literacies' or 'multi-linguality' (Chiseri-Strater 1991:165). According to the formal documentation, the curriculum within which they are located is 'constructively aligned' (Biggs 1999) to ensure that teaching practices are harnessed to the power of assessment to maximise the potential for student learning.

According to his/her own account, Robin, the change agent, initially acted intuitively, but became aware of the ideas on teaching and learning as s/he reviewed and refined the seminars. A number of the other tutors also revealed an awareness of the literature on learning (Jo; Lesley; Sacha). Sacha, for example, stated that s/he could see the influence that the teaching and learning literature has had on the seminars. S/he commented that, 'the practice', which she acknowledged has largely been defined by the change agent, 'was sort of ingrained in the literature on teaching' and that s/he (Sacha) was 'well focused on what the literature was saying'.

Bakhtin's ideas indicate that there is no single direction of influence when it comes to the relationship between theory, policy and practice. In particular, theory does not influence policy or practice in a simple direct manner. Rather, they are all in dialogue with each other. Policy makers are influenced by a wide range of external drivers and educational theory often

only has a fairly modest influence on government agenda. Nonetheless, in this case, Paul Ramsden brought his research-informed view of higher education pedagogy to his post as Director of the HEA meaning that in the last five years theories of student-centred learning have directly shaped UK, higher-education policy. Theoretical ideas, when they reach the ears of practitioners, nudge, support and encourage them to continue to refine their work and try out new approaches. Pedagogical theory itself often stems from practitioner research, which has often emerged relatively spontaneously in local contexts and which is shared or, in modern parlance, disseminated, both informally between peers and more formally through conferences, websites, reports and publications. Certainly, whether or not it is 'back rationalising' or just some fortuitous 'good learning ideas' that have been refined through practice, as Robin suggests, the seminars embody many of the principles of modern learning theory, including a concern with the creation of a student-centred learning environment, assessment practices designed to support learning and a commitment to inducting students into the language and discourse of higher education study.

I, the researcher, have also been shaped by these discourses on higher education pedagogy. Having witnessed the birth of the HEA and participated in some of its initiatives and projects, I was prompted to consider explicitly the student learning theories discussed above. I have brought my interests as a socio-culturalist within my 'home' discipline of English to my consideration of higher education pedagogy and consequently have an interest in the discourses that constitute the individual student's experience

in the university classroom. My early research (Bentley 2003, 2004 and 2005) arose from an intuitive belief that discussion was a powerful way of engaging my own learners, who had very diverse backgrounds (age, qualifications, family background) and who included a high percentage of 'non-traditional' entrants (see Appendix 1). This research convinced me that there was widespread agreement, amongst students, tutors, external examiners and reviewers, that the effect of the programme of assessed discussions we had instigated in my department was resulting in effective learning, but I still did not really understand how.

This brought me to this study where I have been using a Bakhtinian theoretical orientation, my sensitivity to the individual student's perspective and my conviction that dialogic learning is in some way a powerful approach to learning, to better understand the socio-ideological dynamics of seminar discussion. Although the case study has a narrower social range than my own institution, Bakhtinian dialogics has the potential to explain how all learners behave in the seminar environment, whatever their background or institutional context, which is why Lillis (2003) draws on Bakhtin's ideas in her account of the academic literacy of 'non-traditional' students. My experience and Bakhtinian perspective, prompt me to reject any over-simplified concept of student learning which offers a universal solution to complex issues and to probe more deeply into the actuality of the seminar environment.

Active learning and developing a deep understanding are phrases that permeate much contemporary pedagogic theory, but little work has been

done on the place of language in this process and Bakhtin's ideas can help fill this gap. My belief is that Bakhtinian theory can provide an account of how seminar discussion that is 'constructively aligned' to the wider teaching, learning and assessment environment can enable the student to become acculturated into their discipline, develop the necessary 'academic literacy' skills and engage productively with the learning opportunities given them.

Chapter 6 – Assessment: external 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourse

6.1   Introduction

The three empirical chapters address respectively the influence on student learning of the three defining elements of the seminar programme – the fact that they are assessed, dialogic and student-centred in form. The study is not significantly concerned with the emotional or psychological factors that affect learning, however I note now that the participants often express their experience in affective language. The study uses Bakhtinian discourse analysis and multiple sources of data in order to analyse this subjective and sometimes emotional expression of their experience and identify some of the contributory factors to more or less successful learning. This first chapter focuses on assessment and the ways in which this helps or hinders learning. The second considers the influence of dialogue and considers the variety of different modes of interaction in the seminars. The third reflects on the effect of placing students in a leadership role and considers the power dynamics of the classroom.

Understanding the impact of assessment on students is a complex issue, as tutors and students are affected by many personal and environmental factors, but there is a growing realisation that assessment can support learning. This chapter sets the context by offering a brief account of

the emergence of assessment for learning and of oral assessment in particular. It goes on to consider the data in the light of Bakhtin's (1981: 342) account of 'authoritative' discourse, arguing that assessment can focus the students' attention and effort to enable deeper learning strategies to be adopted. Then I qualify this point by arguing that the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment needs to work alongside 'internally persuasive' discourses in order for it to have a powerful and enduring impact on the 'evolution of the individual consciousness' (Bakhtin 1981: 345). When the two work together, they produce a lasting effect on the learners long after the assessment has passed.

6.2   Assessment for learning

Over the last couple of decades there has been an increasing recognition within the literature on higher education that assessment design and implementation sends strong messages to students about how they should approach their learning (Boud 1995: 37; Boud and Falchikov 2007: 3; Brown and Glasner 1999; Knight 1995: 13; MacFarlane 1992; Miller and Parlett 1974; Murphy 2006: 39; Nicholls 2002: 104; Snyder 1971). It shapes the way we teach (Dochy *et al.* 2007: 87; Gibbs 1999; Scouller 1998) and affects the opportunities students choose to take up (Boud and Falchikov 2007: 5; Falchikov and Boud 2007; Doran *et al.* 2000: 198) both within and beyond universities' programmes of study. As a result, there have been many calls for the diversification of assessment and the development of assessment

strategies that support 'complex learning'[78] (Knight and Yorke 2003: 210; see
also Boud 1998; Boud and Falchikov 2007; Brown and Glasner 1999; Brown,
Race and Smith 1996; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Ecclestone 2007; Gibbs
1992a and 1996; Mowl 1996; Ramsden 1992).

Though some changes in higher education have supported a
diversification in assessment, some have not, such as the reduction in contact
hours and the pressures of other commitments on students' lives (Gibbs
2006a: 11-12). Some changes brought with them both potential benefits
and problems. The move to modularisation and the development of a
learning outcome culture, for example, has resulted in a more fragmented
and commodified curriculum, but, on the positive side, it has encouraged
course designers to think more carefully about what was being taught and
assessed and how these were linked. For good or ill, modularisation meant

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[78] The concept of assessment for learning was simultaneously being developed in the
school sector initiating from the *Inside the Black Box* project (Black and Wiliam 1998;
Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam 2002) and being embedded in policy
(Assessment Reform Group 2002; DCSF 2002; DCSF 2008a; QCA 2008). In school
education,

> Assessment for Learning (AfL) means using evidence and feedback to identify
> where pupils are in their learning, what they need to do next and how best
> to achieve this. In practice, this means obtaining clear evidence about how to
> drive up individual attainment; understanding between teachers and pupils
> on what they need to improve, and agreement on the steps needed to
> promote sound learning and progress (DCSF: 2008b).

Assessment for learning is seen as inextricably connected to dialogic learning
(Alexander 2008: 33). Recently, the school sector's emphasis has been on
'personalised learning' and how on-going formative assessment can inform teaching
and learning (DCSF 2008b), whereas the university sector has focused more on how
teaching and assessment strategies can be aligned (Biggs 1999).

that the difference between formative and summative assessment became increasingly conflated as assignments were spread evenly across the programme of study.

Opportunities presented themselves for a greater variety of assessment to be used, not only to test but also to support learning. However, there has been a mixed response to the call for the diversification of assessment and the development of assessment for learning as many have noted (Boud 1995; Brown and Glasner 1999; Doran *et al.* 2000; Herrington and Herrington 2006; Knight and Yorke 2003; Ramsden 1992; Rust 2002). The reasons given are various and range from restrictive institutional policies that limit innovation (Herrington and Herrington 2006), poor articulation of learning outcomes and assessment tasks (Knight and Yorke 2003) and, where innovative assessment is tried, a failure to develop appropriate criteria for the new task (Rust 2002). Rust (2002) argues that the paradigm shift has been one of rhetoric in the policy rather than cultural change in everyday practice, which he suggests remains very traditional.

The seminars studied here incorporate the principles of assessment for learning. They appear to have been designed on the assumption that learning is ' "fuzzy" ', as Knight and Yorke (2003: 210) suggest is appropriate and that

> The assessment system needs to be able to accommodate the student who can branch off the expected, perhaps well-mapped, path whilst remaining true to the general intentions of the programme on which they have enrolled (Knight and Yorke 2003: 210).

As Cohen (1987) notes, assessment is no 'magic bullet' that can improve learning. Even when care is taken in its design, its impact is not always the one that course designers anticipate (Linn, Baker and Dunbar 1991; Murphy 2006: 39), but, as this chapter will argue, the students in this study believe that the seminars offer a positive and engaging learning experience, at least in part, because they are assessed.

The development of oral assessment is one way in which assessment practice has diversified in order to support learning. In addition to this, developing oral skills is *per se* recognised as valuable (Cosh 2004: 21) and the quantity and variety of oral assessment has increased during the last twenty years (Joughin and Collom 2003: 1; see also accounts of practice by: Allen and Lloyd-Jones 1998; AETC 2000; Bentley 2003, 2004 and 2005; Doran *et al.* 2000; Hounsell *et al.* 1996; Speak-Write 2001). However, if these records of practice are studied, it is clear that by far the most common form of assessment is the presentation, which was to some extent always part of traditional teaching and assessment practice. The assessment of discursive interaction is seen as being much less frequent (English Subject Centre 2005; Holland 2001; Knight and Yorke 2003: 76-86), possibly because the effective use of oral skills are assumed by many to be 'an inherent characteristic which cannot be learned' (Cosh 2004: 21). This is despite the fact that it has the benefit of drawing on skills and abilities that the students bring with them to the classroom, something that the non-traditional entrants in Bowl's (2003: 159) study requested. There are some recorded cases where seminar discussion, rather than presentation, is assessed and these tutors are enthusiastic (Allen and

Lloyd-Jones 1998; Creme 1995; Daniel 1991; Doran *et al.* 2000; Bentley 2003), but these cases are few. I have not found any studies of practice where the researcher concluded that oral assessment had few or no benefits and where any potential disadvantages outweighed the perceived advantages.

This chapter now turns to the empirical data, drawing on a Bakhtinian approach to discourse analysis, in order to explore the assessment practice in these seminars.   It intends to shed light on the link between assessment and learning and on the assessment of oral interaction in particular. Currently, there is little in the research literature on the impact of assessing what is typically an unassessed, everyday teaching and learning activity. The only study linking Bakhtin and assessment that I have identified is White's (2007) consideration of teachers assessing very young children who are not able to articulate their understanding. However, her approach was not particularly pertinent to this study, as it focused on the process of making the assessment judgement itself. This chapter is an exploration of the influence of assessment on the students rather than the validity of the judgement itself. It makes no attempt to be quantitative or to compare and contrast directly assessed and unassessed seminar experiences. Instead, it considers the discursive influences at work in the participants' accounts of the seminars in order to reveal something of how they themselves perceive the impact of assessing the seminars.

6.3   Analysis

6.3.1   The limited impact of unassessed seminars

When tutors and students tried to express their views on the merits or otherwise of assessing the seminars, they frequently compared their experience of assessed and unassessed seminars[79]. They spoke positively about the assessed seminars and, in comparison, presented the unassessed seminars as lacking something, which I will argue is the force of requirement and the allure of the reward of marks.

The majority of the tutors interviewed had a positive view of the seminars. One tutor, Pat, recounts his/her arrival in the department from another similar institution and indicates that her/his previous experiences had given him/her low expectations of the quality of seminar discussion. Pat heard about the assessed seminars and says:

> I thought I'll give that a go and introduced them in that second-year module. Worked extremely well, you know I went into those with really, with fairly low expectations having had pretty useless seminar experiences as an undergraduate and having a pretty open mind about what teaching seminars would entail here, because I didn't want to have the sort of thing where you just point the finger at people and say what do you think of this, it's just awful. And it worked incredibly well, the students were very, very good.

Pat does not elaborate, nor did I probe, what s/he means by 'good' and 'worked incredibly well', but the students were clearly achieving his/her intentions for the seminar without any 'finger pointing' and s/he is clear that

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[79] Appendix 15 provides an overview of the deployment and weighting of the assessed seminars across the modules.

the seminars were not 'useless' but useful. The rhetoric used to drive home his/her argument that assessed seminars are 'good' is powerful. Note the mediocre qualifiers that precede the adjectives, as Pat carefully creates a picture of his/her experience of unassessed seminars in other institutions: 'fairly low expectations,' 'pretty useless' and 'just awful'. These phrases are then countered with strong qualifiers that drive home his/her view that the assessed seminars are better: 'incredibly well', 'very, very good'.

A second tutor, Lyndsey, who regularly uses assessed seminars, argues that, even though s/he puts in the same amount of preparation and substantive effort for unassessed seminars as assessed seminars, the students do not. S/he directly compares assessed and unassessed seminars that s/he runs:

> I have to say that when I introduced this non-assessed seminar in the first semester I thought that the quality was not as good. Although I prepared them just as well, they didn't quite put the effort into this that they would have done had that been the full thing.

The tutor is using a deficit model of language to drive home her argument, re-defining the concept of the seminar, taking the assessed seminar as normal - 'the full thing' - and defining the 'non-assessed seminar' as lacking in relation to this benchmark. This is in marked contrast to the assumption in conversation with tutors who do not widely use assessed seminars in this department and in the research and advice literature on seminars more generally, where there is typically an assumption that they are unassessed and that assessing them is an addition. Because of this, it is easy for the tutor

to drive home the argument that the unassessed seminar is incomplete and to imply strongly that it is the lack of assessment that creates this deficit.

A third tutor, Jo, also overtly in favour of the assessed seminars, describes a seminar where some students in the same class are assessed (single-honours, history students) and some are not (students following only a subsidiary in history). The subsidiary students are described thus:

> they don't care very much because they're not assessed on the seminars. They have to attend three out of five and they're coming for me to tell them all about [these historical topics[80] …] or something. They're coming to find out. They're not […] not coming to discuss, no.

There are a number of variables at work in this situation and it may be that the subsidiary students will behave as they do whether assessed or unassessed, but this tutor believes that 'not caring' is linked with 'not discussing' and that both are because the student is not being assessed. S/he implicitly defines the subsidiary students as task-driven, 'surface' learners (Marton and Säljö 1976) or what Brown and Knight (1994) call 'knowledge-seekers', who 'have to attend' in order to 'find out' and who see her as someone who will 'tell them all about it'. By default, she implies that the other students, who are assessed and acculturated into the department, must be 'understanding-seekers' engaging in 'deep' learning (Brown and Knight 1994; Marton and Säljö 1976). The subsidiary students are defined as lacking in relation to the history students and the reason given for their lack of motivation is that they do not have their seminars assessed.

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[80] Edited to preserve anonymity.

The students took a similar line of argument. Once again the assessed seminar is taken as the benchmark against which everything else is compared. Here Charlie (2nd year) is discussing the 'poor' quality of the unassessed seminar: 'I'd say it's definitely a lot poorer to be honest. […] But, no, it's very different when you've got no driving behind you for it'. The phrase 'definitely a lot' emphasises the strength of Charlie's opinion, which s/he explains as being 'very different' because there is 'no driving' behind it, implying that it lacks a motivating or compelling force and energy. The authoritative nature of assessment that 'drives' behaviour is also referred to by Ali (2nd year) when s/he says,

> People don't want to lose out on their marks.[…] The ones where it's not assessed. Yes definitely, definitely, because if it's not assessed then people don't give you the right … [trails off into silence and changes topic].

The final sentence remains unfinished, but there is the implication that the students are less committed in unassessed seminars. The many and forceful negatives in this comment continue the deficit model, that without the assessment something is lacking and learning suffers.

The above tutors and students all hold positive views about the assessed seminars, but one tutor, Frances, does not. S/he spent a long time in the interview describing why s/he did not use assessed seminars, something that is discussed later in the chapter, but s/he does makes a striking acknowledgement about the assessed 'Learning History' module s/he was required to teach:

> […] the debate was excellent. I mean one of the things I found with my group, which I've been pleasantly surprised about, is how hard

working they've been. And I'm not quite sure why, because, I mean, I've taught on other first-year history modules for the period-specific modules […] and I've always found that fairly hard going because I felt that they've struggled and part of that, I think, is because they haven't really prepared. Whereas with 'Learning History', they've always done very, very well in terms of putting a lot of effort into it […] and they did it superbly.

Frances offers the praise reluctantly: 'pleasantly surprised', 'not quite sure why'. Yet the tutor has to conclude the debate was done 'superbly' and 'very, very well'. Frances has discovered, to his/her surprise that assessing a discursive activity has added something unexpected and desirable to the learning environment.

In different ways, both tutors and students present the assessed seminars as having something that unassessed seminars lack, as illustrated above. Unassessed seminars are generally presented as useless and mediocre, whereas assessed discursive activities are seen almost unequivocally as positive and beneficial, particularly when it comes to engaging the students in discussion and supporting their learning (six out of seven tutors and five out of eight students interviewed were overwhelmingly positive, with two further students being broadly positive). These participants here only offer partial explanations of why the assessed seminars have this affect, but all indicate that it is the assessment that is at least part of what makes the difference. Given that assessment is a coercive, 'authoritative' discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 342), this might be considered surprising. The next section turns to the discourse of assessment to explore this further.

6.3.2 The influence of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment

Chapter two discussed Bakhtin's (1981: 273) view that key discourses play a major part in 'accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher socio-ideological levels'. Assessment fulfils this function, corralling learners of all kinds into predominantly convergent thinking that has been authorised by the prevailing power.

Contemporary higher education assessment has its own language and the meanings associated with it are associated with 'the power relationships of the discourse' (Webb 1997: 209). The 'discourse of assessment' (Boud 1995: 36) draws on a specific vocabulary including set, sit, pass, fail, criteria, mark scheme, mark, moderate, hand-in, hand-back, threshold, classification, benchmark, level and framework (see, for example, QAA 2000a; QAA 2000b; QAA 2001; SEEC 2008). These processes and procedures are designed to protect assessment from 'interpretation', though these standards are by their very nature relative to each other and the 'norm' is decided upon by the wielders of the 'authoritative' (Bakhtin 1981: 342) discourse who decide what their own criteria are. These wielders operate at different levels: tutors, their departments, universities and government agencies. The discourse they speak is 'authoritative' in the sense that Bakhtin (1981: 342) describes:

> The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced

zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher.

When the student, or indeed the tutor, encounters the discourse of assessment, they are compelled to accept and respond to it. Review and inspection, external examining, validation events, policies and procedures all require academic staff to conform to the authority of the discourse of assessment whether or not it persuades them internally, something that is quite unusual for academics who strongly value their right to hold an independent opinion and act according to their views. One might argue that academe is based on a sceptical approach to knowledge that emerged from the Enlightenment and led to the critically analytical mind-set of the academic who has been acculturated to question and probe every assumption (McLean 2008: 50). While seminars and tutorials are often used to develop these skills and mind-sets in students, academe has generally traditionally accepted the presence of often quite closed systems of summative assessment as their outcome. Students also have little choice about assessment. It 'demands' that students follow its instructions and sanctions follow if they do not – low marks, poor degree, failure, expulsion from the course and exclusion from the cultural status of having a degree. It 'binds' students further by offering limited opportunities to re-sit assignments despite there being alternate models in use in other testing sectors, such as the vehicle driving test.

The discourse itself emerges from a 'hierarchically higher' past with Kvale (2007: 61) noting that assessment, notably in the form of examinations,

has been present since 200BC and has been a key feature of every dynasty

and empire since then. The discourse of assessment also has power because it

is located in a 'distanced zone'. For tutors this could best be represented by

the distant authority of the QAA, while for students the perception is that

the examination boards and external examiners rule on their success at a

distance in time and space. The discourse of assessment is reinforced with

rules, to use QAA's language, on rigour, explicitness, validity, reliability,

fairness and robustness, which ensures it is not diluted (QAA 2000a).

In general terms, the students and tutors are thus faced with

assessment as something that is 'indivisible' from their learning and teaching

experiences. They must

> either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with
> its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it
> stands and falls together with that authority. One cannot divide it up
> – agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject
> utterly a third part. (Bakhtin 1981: 343)

Such a perspective explains why there were no comments in any interview,

informal discussion or class about the validity of assessment itself, which was

accepted as a given. Instead, the participants simply focused on which form

of assessment was better than another, or on the way it was implemented, or

on their own personal brushes with this 'authoritative' discourse and how

they had managed it.

External examiners are guardians and gatekeepers of the

'authoritative' discourse of assessment. Although they are generally only

empowered to give an opinion and not to veto practice or marks, the

importance of their approval is a recurrent theme in the comments of the
tutors. Academic staff never questioned the authority of the external
examiners, but simply discussed the influence that they had on their practice.
One tutor, Lesley, notes that

> a lot of the externals have been very … [sentence is left hanging].
> Again like everybody else, some of the external examiners have been
> very hostile [about the assessed seminars]. We have one who's […[81]] a
> pain year in year out just writing quite hostile reports, but on the
> whole they tended to say they like what they've seen. […] On balance
> the feedback from examiners has been about 80% positive, but it has
> attracted some flak and it will be interesting to see what this guy says
> about the marking disparities.

It is interesting to see here that although the majority of examiners support
the seminars, the voice of the relatively few externals who oppose it
dominate the speaker's thoughts leading him/her to use phrases like 'very
hostile', 'a pain year in year out' and 'just […] hostile'. The support that the
majority have given is described in weak language 'tended to say they like'.
The discourse of assessment has, for the tutor, a clearly associated ideological
value, which s/he is defending in military language in the face of the external
examiner's opposition. When the assessed seminars are criticised by the
wielders of authority, s/he is prompted to express the strength of his/her
belief in the system.

Equally, when there is no criticism, beliefs are not expressed and they
sink quietly into the unarticulated realm of 'the norm'. In this department
the assessed seminars are accepted as the 'norm' because they have become
so established and embedded. This was not always the case. When they

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[81] Abridged to aid anonymity.

began in the 1990s, there was a significant amount of resistance and hostility from departmental tutors, but now it is rare and even those who oppose it are happy for others to assess seminars, as long as they do not have to participate themselves (Robin). Achieving this level of cultural acceptance is clearly crucial to their success and sustainability, because, if innovative practice is isolated and runs against the grain of both the voices of authority and the everyday norms of assessment practice in the given department, it will be silenced and marginalised by both, making survival doubly difficult.

In the account that Lesley gives, the external examiner's hesitancy about the assessment of the seminars is expressed through doubts about the fairness and reliability of the marking process, which are key concerns of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment:

> The external examiner said, he thought that it [the marking] seemed to vary between the tutors a bit. [… It] was pulling students up and others it wasn't, so that does get you into the question of what you're marking.

This is endorsed by another tutor, Pat, who states that 'I think there are a variety of viewpoints' on how much to weight the different criteria. These differences of judgement can relate to the balance of marks awarded for knowledge and skills. Jo supports this arguing that there is variation in the weighting of content and skills:

> It gets very confused about what's being assessed and it's very difficult to draw lines by saying 50% is on your presentation skills, 50% is on the content, because if they've got rubbish content, then they're not engaging with the audience etc. So there's, it's really difficult to draw lines between them.

Lesley also suggests that there is variation in how much tutors intervene during the assessed seminars themselves from those that sit in silence to those who dominates the discussion. The one factor which remains solid and absolute in this world of possibilities, is the assessment system itself, which Lesley is alluding to: 'I think certainly the students don't like it, if you don't give them a guideline'. The external examiner wants a reliable application of the criteria, the students want guidelines on what is required, the tutors find it 'very' and 'really' 'difficult' and 'tricky' to strike the right balance of control, intervention and advice and give the external examiners and students what they want, despite their best efforts. All these people are revealing the effect of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment, which operates in an apparent world of absolutes and precision that has to be accepted in theory but is impossible to achieve in practice, because of the 'heteroglossic' classroom environment where myriad discourses compete for the participants' attention, as they do in the Tower-of-Babel (Bakhtin 1981: 278).

It was not just tutors, who accepted unquestioningly the authority of the discourse of assessment, but so too did students. The only problems that they cited were described as fairly minor and the tone used by the students lacked rancour. Charlie (2nd year), for example, acknowledges that being the first group to lead a seminar in their module put them at a disadvantage, echoing some of the concerns raised by students in Doran *et al.'s* (2000: 202) study, but Charlie does not appear to have resented this because s/he comments: 'Even so I was quite pleased with it'. Jac (2nd year) has issues about

being dependent on the commitment and capability of others, whether by the group, 'Like you may have a really good question to put to people, but if they can't be bothered [trails off]'; or by the actions of a fellow presenter, 'One of the girls had gone over a lot, so a lot of that content I wanted to get out couldn't be put across'. But Jac is also happy that a dip in a seminar mark can be countered by a better mark given for general contributions, 'which sort of evens it out a bit, which is good rather than just being on that one thing'. As long as the issue does not significantly affect the fairness of the assessment, a few quirks are accepted with reasonable equanimity.

A belief that assessment should be fair permeates many of the students' comments. Charlie (2nd year), for example, describes 'the only problem' with the evaluation of general oral contributions as follows: 'There's only so much you know twenty people can contribute within a short space of time really and I don't think, you know, it is fair'. Ali (2nd year) does not use the word fair, but this is the concept being expressed. S/he does not challenge the right of the tutor to award the mark – that is unassailable as it lies at the core of assessment discourse – but notes, 'I was disappointed with my mark, because I put more work into that than I'd done anything for a long time, because it was an obscure subject'. The same student adds that marking 'varies between tutors'. Again the mark has to be accepted, but Ali 'finds it a bit depressing' that the system of assessment is not working as rigorously and fairly as it ought to. Another second-year student, Terri, comments that marking multiple, small, assessed tasks, as occur in the 'Learning History' module, is 'a tad arbitrary.' Note the soft and colloquial

word 'tad' which downgrades the seriousness of the student's concerns to a minimum. Billie, still in her/his first year, is unhappy about the continuous assessment dimension of 'Learning History', because s/he got a first for the essay, but a lower mark for the annoying 'many little things that you're doing all the time that seem to take up loads of time'. Ali has issues with a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) marking her/his work, 'S/he just seems to be like a TA [teaching assistant] and I would've preferred if [… the tutor] had marked it'. This was particularly because the GTA had said one thing ('you can email the report') and then penalised the student for doing this. Despite this the student does not feel strongly, because 'I mean I got the highest mark'. These examples do not question the rightness of assessment *per se*, they are bolstering it up and are policing the discourse of assessment itself by ensuring its rigour and reliability.

This sense of the pervasive acceptance of the principles and processes of assessment all resonate with its status as an 'authoritative' discourse. Billie (1st year) completely accepts the marking process, even though s/he acknowledges seminars have 'got to be harder to mark' than essays. Even though Billie believes that 'they all mark differently', s/he still says, 'You always have to trust your tutor', because 'it works both ways' and sometimes things go in favour and sometimes against one. Charlie (2nd year) captures the same sense of 'you win and you lose' with the system, but it all works out in the end, this time in the context of the marks awarded for the student's overall contribution. S/he argues that many do not know about the 5% for contributions (unfair), but this is counter-balanced by the acceptance that the

fewer who know, the more chance the student has to contribute and gain a good contribution mark. The student's comments are pervaded by a relaxed acceptance of the vagaries of the system. S/he doesn't mind that it must be hard for the tutor to judge this mark accurately, 's/he must just jot it down quickly' (Charlie, 2nd year).

Charlie also trusts the criteria-based assessment system even if s/he pays little attention to it in reality:

> Yeah, I mean, we all have sort of copies of the marking sheets so we can, you know, break it down and see exactly what we should be doing on the day.

Statements like these are not so much enthusiastic endorsements of the particular process adopted, but calm acceptance of the principle of assessment as something unchallengeable. The use of the phrase 'you know' marks recognition that there is a collective understanding that there is an assessment system which we all know and accept. The use of the verb 'can' indicates that students have the opportunity to use the criteria to help themselves, but s/he falls short of saying they actually do. The 'authoritative' discourse of assessment exists and is accepted without interrogation, questioning or deconstruction. Accusations of unfairness are muted and tend not to be a railing against the system itself, taking the form of refinements to allow it to do its perceived job of making fair judgements more effectively.

There were a number of positive comments too, which echo the same acceptance of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment. Toni (3rd year) notes, 'I think it's marked pretty fairly', repeating this sentiment twice.

Sandy, another third-year student, comments, 'I like' 'definitely' the balance of oral and other assessment adding that other courses are 'unfair', because they award higher marks for easier work. So, when the system lets them down they express disappointment, when it works they are pleased, but they never question the system *per se*.

Only one student, Terri (2nd year), was notably sceptical about the seminars and in expressing his/her reservations, s/he says s/he feels 'cheated' out of a high quality and good value-for-money teaching experience, a strong word that once again draws on the discourse of justice and fairness that reverberates through much of what the students say. In a fairly fragmented explanation, s/he heaps one reason on top of another to explain his/her unhappiness in a series of clauses joined by multiple 'ands'. Terri's main concern is that students are doing the work that tutors ought to do (and actually do at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which is her/his benchmark):

> They don't take the seminar. They don't really have a tutor give a seminar and they don't really mark the seminar as well, and we have to sort of do them and it's based on that, and then from that they jig up a mark for us and that's part of my degree.

Tutors are referred to as 'they' throughout and the sentence is full of negatives. 'Don't really' is repeated and implies a pretence that has been uncovered, something that is driven home with the phrase 'jig up a mark' which again implies a rigged rather than a fair and proper process. In associated comments the student also speaks of her/his rights as a paying customer and argues the student-led seminars are not value-for-money,

hinting at a view that teaching and assessment arrangements are a contract

that tutors and students have entered into which the student-led seminars

violate. Even this negative student is neither criticising, nor challenging the

assessment *per se,* but the fact that tutors are not doing the job they are paid

to do, as Brew (1999: 161) notes is common, particularly where peers are

involved in teaching or assessment processes.

It is not just tutors that are fixing things, students can also work the

system to their own advantage, as the same student goes on to argue:

> You just, you dread coming. You sit there and you've done a bit of
> reading and you might not have done a bit of reading. You stick your
> hand up once, ask the question and say something and that's your
> little bit done and then you just wait for the time to pass. […Y]ou're
> just happy you're not presenting. (Terri, 2nd year)

Terri does not articulate why s/he feels 'dread', but it is clear that giving a

presentation is part of it. After the above pronouncement, the student

moves on to make a final point which might indicate the reason for the

hostility. Terri declares all seminars, assessed or unassessed, to be poor, adds

that lectures are just as bad and concludes that the only way to really learn is

through an Oxbridge model where you have frequent personal input and

frequent formative assessment that makes you do the work and keeps you

closely on course. In saying this, Terri is revealing the influence of a different

sort of authority, that of a university culture that is so powerful that it acts as

a coercive force. Even though the formative essays of Oxford and

Cambridge's tutorial system are not 'compulsory' in any formal sense, the

expectation of the culture is so pronounced that they are part of what

amounts to an unquestionable, authoritative culture. Observations of first-

year classes and discussions with tutors, notably with Jo, backed up by the findings of Abercrombie (1989: 133), indicate that making the move from teacher-led school education, to more independent, student-led university learning is difficult for all young students and 'authoritative discourses', whether of assessment or a powerfully directive learning culture as Terri longs to experience, can act as a supporting framework to aid that transition. In Terri's case her/his dislike of the assessed seminars might arise from the fact that s/he, like many others in the department, applied unsuccessfully to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and s/he may have not relinquished the view that one is inferior to the other.

Charlie (2nd year) makes a similar point to Terri about the ease with which the assessment system can be side-stepped, when s/he acknowledges that students only act as if they are being assessed when the tutor is watching and listening:

> When there is sort of discussion or buzz groups, it does tend to sort of quieten everyone down because suddenly you know the tutor isn't really paying any attention a lot of people suddenly drift away.

Charlie's double use of the word 'suddenly' and the repetition of the number of people who behave like this – 'everyone', 'a lot of people' - indicates the direct connection between engagement with the material and the presence of the authority figure. Comments like this and the one above are rare among the participants interviewed. There are many more that link the fact that the seminars are assessed to a deeper engagement on their behalf, but the scepticism shown by Charlie and Terri point to an important tension. They certainly indicate that the push of assessment is not, in itself, enough to

engage the students and this needs exploring further as it is quite possible that it could have a negative effect on learning.

Frances, a tutor, begins to explain some of the reasons why assessment might actually inhibit student engagement at a deeper level. Frances explains why s/he actively chooses not to use the assessed seminars, offering three reasons why s/he prefers 'traditional' unassessed seminars. The first is based on a philosophy of education: 'the ethos of university learning that we're here, students are here, because they want to be and because they want to find out about the topic'. The implication is that if students are coerced into participating, they will not learn to discover that learning about a topic that interests them has its own intrinsic reward. Intrinsic motivation is associated by Marton and Säljö (1976) with 'deep' approaches to learning.

The second and third reasons offered by Frances for choosing not to assess student-led seminars somewhat paradoxically draw on the perceived importance of an 'authoritative' discourse. One argument made by Frances is that, if students get things wrong, 'the tutor needs to correct them' and, if the stakes are high[82] (Knight and Yorke 2003: 16-17), as this tutor believes they are in an assessed seminar, the correction will be crushing. There is much to unpack here about the implications of the comment, not least the assumption that assessing the seminars is a high stakes activity, which I would argue it was not because it is dispersed across many classes, shared with

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[82] High-stakes assessment has a proportionally big impact on the outcome of the student's course. Typically high-stakes assessment is summative, rather than formative, and is often located at the end of the module or course acting as a single or major judgement of what has been learned.

others in the group and relatively lightly weighted. The second assumption is that, in a seminar environment, the tutor validates all statements as truthful or otherwise, which can only be the case if the tutor is using an Initiation-Response-Follow-up (IRF) pattern of discussion (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). IRF interaction, a pattern of pedagogic interaction that is still widespread in the classroom (Alexander 2008: 47). It has some educational benefits, but it is criticised because it tends not to engage students in 'deep' approaches to learning, as the discussion is so strictly controlled by the authority figure of the tutor (Dillon 1994a; Nunn 2001). Frances's argument about the problem of assessing seminars should, therefore, be seen as a comment about a particular authority-led form of interaction and not something that is necessarily applicable to the wider range of types of interaction seen in the seminars. This is discussed further in chapter seven.

The other argument Frances makes is that the seminars are, in any case, indirectly assessed: 'I mean in order to do well in their exams they have to put their work in the seminars because the exam is based on the seminars'. The tutor might be yearning for students to engage with the material because of its intrinsic interest and to grapple with ontological and epistemological questions about the nature of knowledge. S/he might believe that assessing the seminars inhibits a discussion of these more subtle and complex issues. However, paradoxically Frances is suggesting that without the demands of the end of semester examination, students will not willingly engage. Even this link is, s/he concedes, 'sometimes tenuous', because 'it could be construed by students that you know they've got a

doddle of a module and all they need to do is work intensively for two weeks

before the exam and that's fine'. Only when the link is direct will students

amend their behaviour, as earlier scholars discovered (Miller and Parlett 1974;

Snyder 1971). When students fail to put sufficient effort into unassessed

seminars, the tutor uses his/her authority to try to effect change:

> So I probably do put quite a bit of emphasis on that and say you've
> got to do this work. But I don't know, I mean I, I think there's still,
> there are occasions where seminars haven't worked because the
> students haven't themselves worked and I just tell them. I say well the
> seminar hasn't worked, you've only got yourselves to blame and I just
> basically tell them off. (Frances)

The effect seems to be somewhat limited, though, with each authoritative

statement, 'you've got to', 'just tell them' and 'basically tell them off', being

interspersed with an acknowledgement used three times over that this

approach 'hasn't worked'. Bakhtin's concept of 'authoritative' discourse

points to why the tutor cannot force students in any simple way to comply.

Tutors wield a certain kind of power, as discussed in chapter eight.

They are seen as authorities in their area of knowledge. Although they do

not have any absolute and direct power over the students, they do, of course,

indirectly and more subtly shape and control student behaviour.

'Authoritative' discourse, according to Bakhtin (1981: 342-344), is not a

matter of rhetoric or knowledge, which is why Frances's students do not do

what Frances says, despite the fact s/he has assertively told them how to

behave. It emerges from historic usage and cultural belief. The discourse of

assessment has developed over many hundreds of years and has come to be

seen as an 'authoritative' discourse which must be accepted or rejected by

individuals. Tutors and students either choose to stay within the system and accept its structures and strictures, or they remove themselves, or, indeed, the system can reject them. All the comments made by the tutors and students so far accept this premise and work within and around its authority.

The extrinsic motivation of assessment together with the presence of the tutor controlling the discussion are powerful factors which must not be ignored, but the sentiment pervading Frances's comments is that by assessing the seminars something has been lost. By using compulsion the students are not learning the intrinsic value and pleasure of scholarly study. When this is put alongside research that argues 'high-stakes' (Knight and Yorke 2003) assessment, which either overburdens students by testing large amounts of knowledge (Dahlgren 1984: 21) or which makes them anxious or threatens them (Marton and Säljö 1984: 51), triggers surface or strategic learning behaviour (Ramsden 1984: 148-151) and that intrinsic motivation is important for 'deep' approaches to learning (Marton and Säljö 1984: 50-52), the concern must be that assessing the seminars is inhibiting what might otherwise be a fuller learning experience and personal development opportunity. In short, it is not clear whether using the force of assessment to shape behaviour has benefits to student learning which outweigh those that come from giving space to students to allow them to respond to intrinsic motivation.

Tutor and student comments point towards a possible resolution. Several tutors and students speak of the beneficial effect of authoritative discourse for developing a work ethic in students. Terri (2nd year) argued that

the Oxford and Cambridge tutorial system achieved this effect, which I would suggest is because it is seen as so central to participation in a highly prized academic community that it is functioning as an authoritative discourse. Other tutors and students point to the effect of assessment. One tutor, Jo, draws on a collective 'we' to make his/her point: 'If it wasn't assessed, we feel that they wouldn't do it [the work]'. Sacha also makes the case that students will not work hard for the many and varied educational benefits, but they will because of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment:

> I think kind of, you know, the teaching literature would say that they will get [something] out of it and it will be good for them, but I just don't think they would like to put that amount of work in if they weren't getting marked on it.

The students similarly cite the work ethic as having a powerful influence on their behaviour. Most students agree that assessing the seminars helps them to harness their efforts: 'No one would really, no one would really care unless it was assessed, neither presenters nor group participants' (Terri, 2nd year); and 'People do, if they're assessed, make that extra bit of effort' (Jac, 2nd year). The reasons for this are varied. It is fear of embarrassment that 'forces' Ali (2nd year) to work:

> If you are picked on and [do] not have an answer you're just going to look stupid. Especially how it is in [...this] module because your overall contribution counts which definitely forces you to do more of the work more often.

Ali has experience of both assessed and unassessed, student-led seminars during her/his second year 'and I don't think people put in as much effort, if they're not assessed, people don't really care'.

One lone voice from Billie (1st year) claims 'it's really annoying,' because the many small components 'take up loads of time'. Knight and Yorke (2003: 72-73), on the other hand, argue strongly in favour of multiple 'low-stakes' tasks which enable students to develop their own autonomy which they, Boud and Falchikov (2007) and the tutor who avoids assessing seminars as a matter of principle (Frances) believe is a key purpose of higher education. Similarly, Gibbs (2006b: 32-33) suggests that ensuring assessment captures sufficient study time and effort and distributes student effort evenly across topics and weeks is the best way to minimise stress and maximise achievement and learning.

Paradoxically, the lure of doing less work also makes the seminars appealing. Charlie (2nd year) notes that 'It is a way of obviously getting some marks and, comparatively, I would say it's probably a little less work'. Yet s/he goes on to say the seminars are more motivating. A similarly mixed attitude is expressed by Ali (2nd year), who observes, 'I think people generally see it as easy marks which I don't think it is. I think it's quite misleading because you do have to work harder for it'. The concept of work is relative, as this student realises, because it depends on what the point of comparison is. Compared with preparing for unassessed seminars, the tutors and students generally believe that assessment makes students prepare and more fully engage with the seminars. Whereas compared with doing examinations and essays, the preparation and work is perceived to be less. The students appear to be not so much working harder as doing a different kind of work – that associated with seminars rather than assignment writing. Assessment, as

an 'authoritative' discourse, is shaping student effort, directing them not only to traditional forms of writing, but to oral interaction and engagement.

This appears to be the nub of the issue. Assessment is an 'authoritative' discourse which compels students to behave in certain ways. By harnessing this force to a teaching and learning strategy, it is possible to direct student effort in one direction or another. Traditionally assessment has encouraged them to direct time, effort and thought at writing, but in this case study it is used to direct their effort at extended engagement in oral interaction. It provides parameters within which students should work in the seminars and, as with all human activities, this helps participants steer a steady path through the myriad of learning choices that they face. Within the broad parameters of assessment, they are still left to make many independent decisions about what to do and how to behave and these provide plenty of scope for them to develop as academic scholars, but the extrinsic motivation prompts them to undertake the regular, small-scale, participatory learning behaviours that are associated with low stress, deep engagement.

The 'authoritative' discourse of assessment may well direct student effort, but if researchers writing about assessment and Bakhtin's (1981: 342) own definition of 'authoritative' discourse are accurate, then there is a real possibility that it is likely to direct them to temporary, transient learning behaviours that do not endure beyond the module. If this were to happen then the seminars would have failed to create the independent, self-

motivated, 'deep' learners that every tutor, whom I spoke to, wanted to develop. Frances, a tutor who chooses not to run assessed seminars, does however indicate that the seminars are achieving something more than superficial learning and are having a positive knock-on effect on his/her unassessed seminars:

> I suppose also I think the fact that we do run assessed seminars, where students essentially run the seminar completely, probably has been beneficial for me, as somebody who doesn't run assessed seminars, in the sense that, even though they're not being assessed, they are still in that frame of mind whereby they, you know, this is how seminars are being done.

This moves the argument on a little because it implies that assessment might be more than a set of externally imposed rules and instrumental practices, which tutors impose on students at their discretion. Frances suggests that it is a 'frame of mind' where students 'know how seminars are'. For Frances, the fact that many of the seminars are assessed changes the way students think about unassessed seminars. Assessment is having a more subtle and further reaching effect on behaviour than as a simple 'authoritative' discourse, which loses its power when students are outside its direct zone of influence. This evokes Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a 'community of practice' where members are acculturated into a community's ways of thinking and behaving and assessment is one way of achieving this, at least in part.

The assessment of the seminars has entered the culture of the department. The seminars are perceived as the norm against which everything is compared. Even those tutors who choose not to run them,

generally find positive features in the assessed seminars run by others and they do not challenge the power and strong influence of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment *per se*. Assessing the seminars appears to provide a clear framework within which other activities occur and more positive influences take effect. Although assessment clearly is a significant influence, Bakhtin (1981: 342) indicates that 'authoritative' discourse has a strictly limited effect, as it only controls immediate, surface behaviour. This seems to be supported by the evidence of the participants, who refer to other discourses alongside their discussion of assessment. The next section begins to consider some of these other discourses and how they relate to the discourse of assessment.

6.3.3   The effect of 'internally persuasive' discourses on student learning

From the perspective of Bakhtin (1981: 343), the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment cannot be argued with, diluted or qualified, but it can be added to, reinforced and paralleled by other discourses: 'Authoritative discourse may organize around itself great masses of other types of discourses (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways)'. These discourses can include those which are 'internally persuasive' and this type of discourse is 'supple and dynamic to such an extent that [it …] may literally be *omnipresent* in the context' (Bakhtin 1981: 347; his italics) and may be invisible or unnoticed by those who use it, yet it still shapes their view of the world.   'From time to time', 'internally persuasive discourse' can break 'through to become a completely materialized thing' (Bakhtin 1981: 347),

particularly when it encounters opposition, and its values and principles are expressed explicitly. There are many 'internally persuasive' discourses associated with education and assessment. Educational developers and practitioner researchers[83], for example, have created a parallel language associated with assessment which arrays itself around the core, 'authoritative', summatively judgemental discourse of assessment. This 'internally persuasive' discourse speaks of self/peer/group/summative/ formative assessment, authentic, holistic, reflective and flexible approaches, as well as concepts such as assessment for learning, deep/surface, conception/perceptions/approaches to learning. The tutors in the study used only some of this language without prompting, when discussing the merits of the seminars, though they were able to discuss the concepts confidently when I introduced them to the interviews.

It is worth remembering that 'the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these [internally persuasive discourses] (by means of, say, gradual transitions); it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert' (Bakhtin 1981: 343). Whether or not the tutors see aspects of assessment as 'internally persuasive', they still have to work within the strict limits of the core, 'authoritative' discourse of assessment. All the interviewees, both students and tutors, referred to a group of potentially 'internally persuasive' discourses about university learning surrounding ideologies such as justice, the work ethic, enjoyment and the right to a fulfilling life, and, as discussed

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[83] Examples of such researchers can be found in chapter five and in the first section of this chapter.

below, the skills agenda and employability. Each of these discourses is drawn upon alongside the discourse of assessment by tutors and students, as they articulate their experience of assessment.

The relationship between 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourses is complex. On one level 'authoritative' discourse cannot be questioned and is accepted as being a compelling force that supersedes all others, as Terri (2nd year) notes:

> No one would really, no one would really care and I think it's because it's assessed that you want to get the group talking etc. etc., but I mean obviously I should want to get them talking.

The student drives home through repetition of 'no one' that, although there is an array of related teaching and learning ideologies, 'etc. etc.', that mean s/he 'should want to get them talking', it is the fact that they are assessed that acts as the final spur to ensuring this happens. However, these other miscellaneous discourses associated with university learning may be having a subtler and greater effect than the student is here acknowledging.

'Internally persuasive' discourses need further exploration in order to understand how they affect student learning.   While 'authoritative' discourse has to be unquestioningly accepted and can control the individual in so far as s/he encounters it, 'authoritative' discourse has no power to change permanently the individual once s/he is out of its zone of influence. The 'internally persuasive' discourses, on the other hand, can do just that. They are part of the individual's 'becoming', as Bakhtin (1981: 345) describes it, having a 'decisive significance in the evolution of an individual

consciousness'. These discourses work in conjunction with the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment to persuade the participants to engage in the seminars.

There are many and varied 'internally persuasive' discourses at work in any given seminar and others will be described in later chapters in relation to the development of the individual consciousness through dialogue and the exploration of the power dynamics present in the seminars. Here, the focus is on those discourses which the tutors and students identify as closely related to assessment and which they see as influential on why the assessed seminars work so well for them. The most frequently cited discourse is that of the skills agenda and employability, something endorsed by Doran *et al.'s* (2000: 198) survey of history seminars. Although referred to in the interviews, these discourses are rarely used within the seminars themselves, though it may be that they are acting as 'omnipresent' 'internally persuasive' discourses (Bakhtin 1981: 347; his italics) shaping the students' perceptions of their learning experience.

The discourse of skills is one which chapter four described as emerging in the last fifteen years, during the period when these seminars were developed. It is inextricably linked to the 'outcomes' culture, which 'canonized' and 'assimilated' (Bakhtin 1981: 418 and 282) the phrases 'skills' and 'knowledge'. During this process of 'canonization' the word 'skills' developed a whole discursive system around it. In the context of general and higher education, along with the word skills, now comes an array of allied

vocabulary and concepts such as intellectual, key, transferable, practical, professional, employability and higher level. Each of these breaks down into sub-sets; intellectual skills, for example, are now widely assumed to be those of synthesis, analysis, criticality and argument. Skills are spoken about as if they belong naturally together, even though they are in the most obvious ways disparate and varied.

Tutors and students alike value the development of such skills and draw on this discourse to explain why they find the assessed seminars so effective. This tutor, Sacha, values not the knowledge or product of the assessment, but the process and the skills developed along the way:

> So to quite a large extent, we're not, we're not marking them on what they know, we're marking them on the process of exploring that subject matter. […] They learn, they learn about their attitudes to reading rather than learning particular things through the reading perhaps. I think that helps them to read better.

Intellectual skills of analysis and synthesis are rewarded through the marking. The emphasis is on 'exploring', developing 'attitudes' and learning. 'They learn' is repeated for emphasis and is equated with intellectual skills development rather than knowledge.   The tutor wants the students to learn not only the skills, but an awareness of the ways they apply those skills, an attitude of mind.

Some skills are seen as more worthwhile than others and, according to the tutors and students, they are developed with different degrees of effectiveness through the seminars. The skills of peer and self-evaluation were initially spoken of in a positive light both by tutors and students,

echoing the research and advice literature[84] and demonstrating that they were seen as 'internally persuasive' and having a value in themselves beyond their direct link to assessment. Scholars argue that self and peer assessment practices aid learning and develop skills of reflection and autonomy in students (Bangert 1995; Fallows and Chandramohan 2001; Hinett and Thomas 1999; Knight and Yorke 2003: 131-32; Sambell *et al.* 2007: 158; Tan 2007: 114-115; Walker and Warhurst 2000: 47). Falchikov (2007) also brings together a tradition of scholars who have each pointed to the value of peer teaching and learning (Boud and Middleton, Bruner, Collins, Dewey, Freire, Greer and Bangert, Lave and Wenger, Piaget and Inhelder, and others). Despite this tradition of direct and indirect advocacy, the initially positive statements of the tutors and students quickly became layered with uncertainty about their practical implementation. This tutor's comments about the peer evaluations of the leadership of seminars are typical and are riddled with doubt about its efficacy:

> We do see them. They're actually supposed to submit them [the peer evaluations] with their reports as well, although they don't always do that. I don't know whether that's because they deliberately hold them back or if they just forget. They, they're very difficult, I'm really unsure about the extent to which they work. (Sacha)

Note the frequency of words expressing ambivalence: 'actually supposed to'; 'don't always'; 'I don't know'; 'they're very difficult'; and 'I'm really unsure'. Following year two and three assessed seminars, the students take these peer comments, their own reflections and the thoughts of their tutor and prepare a report on the seminars that they have just led, which, for some marking

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[84] By advice literature, I mean texts which are not informed directly by research, but which draw indirectly on an amalgam of research-based ideas in order to provide practical advice and ideas on teaching.

tutors, including Sacha, influences the mark they give, sometimes even more than the seminar itself.

This hesitancy about the peer evaluations expresses ambivalence and emerges in several other comments by the same tutor who notes that there is an element of encouraging and bolstering each other up among the students through these peer evaluations, though there is some pointed criticism. Although the students do get some advice on how to undertake peer evaluations, Sacha goes on to stress the emotional dimension of peer assessment expressing the turmoil of her contradictory feelings about it:

> There's a tension there between other students wanting to encourage the seminar leaders and give them good feedback and the fact that they're tired. You know, they've been working really hard for two hours and they want to get off. […] If they found some of the individual presentations too long, they'll make a big point about that. […] If somebody has a very poor presentation style, they'll nearly always comment on that, although hopefully in a kind of supportive way, but not always. They can be quite mean about each other [laughs].

Peer responses are heavily influenced by emotional responses, as this tutor's choice of words demonstrates: 'tension'; 'encouragement'; 'tired'; 'working really hard'; 'supportive way'; and 'quite mean'. Such a response is endorsed by research which indicates that assessment frequently has an emotionally negative effect on learning (Clegg and Bryan 2006: 218; Falchikov and Boud 2007: 144; Murphy 2006: 39; Nicholls 2002: 104). Another tutor also indicates that negative comments are not infrequent: 'Students are quite tough on each other' and […] don't […] pull their punches' (Lesley). While, the potentially negative effect of peer evaluation needs to be set against the many other researchers who praise peer evaluation, here, in the complex

world of everyday practice, the consensus was that the skills of peer
evaluation were good in theory but less efficacious in practice. Peer
evaluation may be accepted as an 'internally persuasive discourse' that might
engage students in reflecting on their learning, but in practice it appears to
have only a modest effect. This might be because the classroom is full of a
heteroglossic mix of discourses, which jostle and struggle to be heard, as
Bakhtin suggests (Bakhtin 1981: 294) and chapter eight discusses, which
drown out the discourse of peer evaluation.

There is greater consensus among the tutors that the seminars
develop transferable skills. One tutor, Pat, is very positive about the benefits
in terms of employability skills arguing that 'they simply are better as a result
of this process'. His/her next words indicate that this is a belief shared and
possibly even influenced by the students rather than the government or
her/his colleagues:

> The students want to hear what it's [the programme of seminars] for,
> you know, and the fact that you can sit there and say, 'Look okay our
> students leave here with very good presentation skills and it's going to
> help you in your future employment, it'll help you with your
> interviews, it'll be something that is going to stand you in good stead
> no matter what you do,' that's something they want to hear.

The shift from addressing the interviewer to the students in this section,
indicates that really the tutor is thinking about the students and not the
government's agenda, nor the discipline's needs. This interpretation is
backed up by Vološinov's (1986: 86) argument that the

> Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high
> significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act.* It is determined
> equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. (Vološinov's
> italics)

In this case, Pat uses the government's 'word' (employment) and addresses it strongly to the students with six uses of 'you' or 'your' referring to the students. S/he enacts speaking directly to the students and receiving immediate positive endorsement from them about the validity of the worth of the skills agenda, because this is 'something they want to hear'. The concept of employability is often thought to be part of a government-owned skills agenda, endorsed in part by educational developers, but there are multiple indications here that, when oral skills are described as relevant to later employment, this is something the students find to be an 'internally persuasive' argument.

The interviews with the students also indicate that when students make the connection between the seminars and the skills needed for employment, they appreciate their worth. As such, even though the classes are modelled on an academic activity – the seminar – they are perceived to be 'authentic' in that they are 'oriented towards the world external to the course' (Boud 1998: 10). Before the ensuing extract, Charlie (2nd year) downplays the 'knowledge-seeking' (Brown and Knight 1994) dimension of the seminars. Instead, he stresses the importance of the seminars, as the

> much more important testing sort of [… trails off], in a sort of a career-minded view of the degree. It's better because it teaches you skills that you can then use in the market place, such as you know giving presentations, arguing and debating rather than actually just learning for the sake of learning.[…] I think you know it's the sort of, you know, core, the issue thing. Perhaps they should put more emphasis on it.

Charlie drives home her/his argument with emphatic language. The seminars are 'better' and 'much more important' than other forms of learning. The

development of skills is the 'core, the issue thing' and tutors 'should put more emphasis on it'. S/he strongly values 'a career-minded view of the degree'. Charlie offers a list of different kinds of oral skills, 'presentations, arguing and debating', which are set against 'actually just learning for the sake of learning'. Here the second person address is used to persuade the interviewer, as the addressee, to accept the argument offered. The student is also confident with and has ownership of the language of the employability discourse, speaking of 'career', 'market-place' and 'skills'. Charlie has certainly accepted and made his/her own the 'internally persuasive' discourse of employability.

This first-year student, Billie, is of the same mind, speaking actively and persuasively in favour of the benefits of the assessed seminars on their future careers:

> Yes, definitely, because at the end of the day how many undergraduate history students are actually going to go on to be academic historians? Not many. Most of them will go into work. […] You know if I have to give, like, a little presentation at work or something, obviously now it's not going to phase me at all is it? […] Whereas before, it obviously would have done. So yeah, it definitely works.

The rhetoric is persuasive with 'yes' and 'definitely' repeated twice, two rhetorical questions, a generalisation, 'most of them will', and a personal account, 'If I have to'. As the tutor (Pat) above implied, it seems that the students value the employability discourse more highly than do the tutors, though the fact that the tutors explain what useful skills the seminars develop, when introducing them to students, means it is not accurate to go as far as to say that the high valuation of employability skills comes only or

even predominantly from the students. Assessment may coerce, but the

discourse of employability persuades the students that it is worth engaging

with the activities and opportunities they offer.

Both tutors and students speak of the wider transferable skills and

attributes that the seminars give the students, particularly confidence.

Lyndsey, a tutor, argues that

> I think the advantages of this in terms of their interpersonal skills
> development as well as intellectual development is absolutely
> enormous - the confidence it gives them.

This confidence and the 'absolutely enormous' 'advantages' are also linked by

Pat to employability and s/he cites examples of specific students praising the

seminars for helping them in job interviews. Once again, the tutor reports

employability as something that matters to the students.

While many students speak of the confidence that they have

developed during the degree, they also acknowledge that confidence cannot

be directly equated to assessment. Toni (3rd year, joint-honours) comments

that

> I don't know if it was from this particular one again but I've noticed
> from the first year, I mean you can see the improvement to everybody
> across the board […] just because you do get into that practice of
> having to speak out loud in seminars, whether it's just answering
> questions, contributing to debates or actual assessed seminar.

When comparing history and classics, Toni goes on to echo the same idea:

> Classics tends to be a bit more relaxed than the history department
> does. But I mean quite often you all have to give a bit of talk about
> something that, I mean, not assessed at all and usually very informal,
> […]

Interviewer: Can you discern any difference in the oral confidence of the students that don't do history or [tails off]?
Toni: No […] The only thing is that classics is a much smaller department and so the people within it tend to know each other a lot. […] So I think that initially might make a difference, because people are more confident talking to people they know.

For this student, it is the mere fact that students are speaking in class and developing the skills as they progress through the course that develops their confidence. Assessment may play its part in making the students take part in these confidence-building activities, but, as Toni suggests, anything that achieves this end, such as being part of a small, personal group, results in benefits. This is an important point because it indicates that it is not assessment *per* se that has the positive impact. It is simply one potential way of prompting students to behave in certain ways that have a positive impact. What makes them speak in class will be explored further in the next chapters.

The discourse of study skills is another one which tutors array around the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment. The development of skills needed for effective study practices, such as independent learning, information literacy, research skills and taking part in academic discussions, have, in recent times, been taught explicitly and implicitly both within and in addition to the core curriculum. However, few speak warmly of the teaching of study skills as a separate, bolt-on course. In the level-one 'Learning History' modules, these skills are carefully interwoven with an introduction to modern theories of the study of history (postmodern, Marxist and so on). Lesley believes that 'Learning History' is 'very clever in a way because I see it as something that quite successfully combines the development of study skills

with a philosophy of history', neither of which is interesting by itself. S/he believes that study-skills are perceived by tutors and students to be 'pretty tedious and beneath people's dignity' and historiography to be seen as 'incredibly boring' and 'pretty awful,' but together they form an introductory course that stands on its own merits. Haggis (2006: 10) suggests that students should not be taught 'how to learn', but should learn 'how to *do* the learning' in 'actual disciplinary assessment contexts', where they can learn 'how to think, question, search for evidence, accept evidence, and put evidence together to make an argument that is acceptable in that discipline'. 'Learning History' offers just such an opportunity. The argument that during this first module the students are developing their academic literacy is 'internally persuasive' and one that sits effectively alongside the coercive discourse of assessment.

There is a potential tension between the skills agenda and the concept of becoming a historian, in the sense of entering a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) or a 'specialized field' (Applebee 1996: 10), as discussed by McLean and Barker (2004) in relation to the discipline of history, and the two can 'uneasily' 'sit alongside each other' (Walker and Warhurst 2000: 39). Lesley describes the change agent, Robin, as now being 'very much into that enterprise stuff', whereas Lesley still adheres to their original belief, which was 'a sort of discipline-orientated selfish view that we didn't like what was going on in a traditional seminar and we wanted to change it, just to make a good history seminar'. Another tutor, Jo, goes on to cite the influence of a similar disciplinary discourse: 'Possibly it's teaching them to be

historians'. Developing an academic identity is another 'internally persuasive' discourse that was spoken about by the tutors, though not explicitly mentioned by the students. In addition to specialist subject knowledge, there are a complex web of professional skills, practices and behaviours, that are associated with being an academic and it is these skills that provide the common ground between enterprise skills and those associated with a specific academic discipline. The concept of becoming a historian is discussed further in the next chapter, for now it is enough to acknowledge that students undertaking seminars have always gathered to a greater or lesser extent a range of skills whether or not they are articulated as disciplinary, graduate, transferable or employability skills.

6.4   Conclusion

The 'authoritative' discourse of assessment undoubtedly has a powerful controlling and externally motivating effect on the students who accept and respond to it in a largely unquestioning manner because of its authoritative nature. However, arrayed around this are 'internally persuasive' discourses of different kinds (Bakhtin 1981: 343). These have 'a strong back-wash effect on students' learning approaches and motivation' (Murphy 2006: 39) and, because they are 'internally persuasive', they have a longer lasting impact on the students' individual consciousnesses.

Separating out the different kinds of 'internally persuasive' discourse can only be done, as Vološinov (1986: 94) notes, in relatively abstract analysis, because in reality the students are shaped simultaneously by many discourses. It is clear then that, in the context of the seminars, 'assessment matters' (Brown and Glasner 1999: *vii*), because it is an 'authoritative' discourse which cannot be challenged or qualified by either students or tutors. In absolute terms, it is the most powerful discourse at work in this situation and all other discourses are seen in relation to it. Yet if the only thing that assessment achieves is to force students to undertake certain activities in a specific place and time, it would be a poor contributor to student learning, because students would be engaging superficially with the issues simply to gain maximum marks. However, assessment seems to do something more than this. In this case it directs the students to focus their effort on preparing for and engaging with the seminars. It also creates a framework within which students encounter 'internally persuasive' discourses that they might otherwise avoid, because they were prioritising other personal and social discourses.

This chapter has focused on the 'internally persuasive' discourse of 'skills' by way of example and because this was the most frequently mentioned discourse by both tutors and students. Later chapters discuss some of the many other discourses at work in classroom interaction, but no account can be exhaustive. This chapter made the case that the 'internally persuasive' nature of the discourse of skills invites students to engage willingly with the seminar activities. Assessment pushes them to engage with

threats, while the discourse of skills pulls them to engage willingly and for their personal benefit and development. What could be called a virtuous circle of intrinsic and extrinsic reward thus begins to occur, spurring participants on to an increasingly high level of engagement and reward.

While this chapter has concluded that a combination of both 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourses appears to have a positive effect on student learning, it has not explored in any depth why 'internally persuasive' discourses have this effect. This is the topic of the next chapter, where a case will be made that dialogue is the key to the effective operation of 'internally persuasive' discourse, because it provides 'maximal interaction between another's word and its context, for the dialogizing influence they have on each other, for the free and creative development of another's word' (Bakhtin 1981: 346).

Chapter 7 – Dialogue: the 'assimilation' of new ideas

7.1   Introduction

While assessment may play an important part in pushing students to engage with the material being studied, the linguistic environment also enables 'internally persuasive' discourses to be effective. This chapter argues that dialogue is the key to pulling students into an active involvement in the seminars. 'Internally persuasive' discourses cannot work through 'authoritative' monologue (Bakhtin 1981: 342), rather they need dialogue to become persuasive. In this case, while the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment creates a context which permits and encourages dialogue, it is *through dialogue* that students demonstrate the ability to hear and respond with an open mind to the views of others.

Claims have been made that dialogue is an expression of the inter-subjective nature of the human condition (Bakhtin 1981; Guilar 2006; Merrill 2004: 16). Many scholars writing about education have argued that dialogue is a powerful vehicle for learning (Arnett 1986 and 1992; Black 2005; Bridges 1979; Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Burbules 1993; Dillon 1988 and 1994a; Jeffs and Smith 1996; Savin-Baden 2008; Wegerif 2006). The word 'dialogue' is here used as an umbrella term to include the full range of 'speech genres' (Bakhtin 1986: 60) that can loosely be called 'dialogue' and to express the nature of linguistic interaction of all kinds. Bakhtin (1984a: 183) argues that

> The entire life of language, in any area of its use (in everyday life, in business, scholarship, art, and so forth), is permeated with dialogic relationships.

Whether one values a consensual, agonistic[85] or more open-ended form of communication in the classroom, all interaction has the potential to be dialogic in that one person is in communication with another, whether through text, direct conversation or more indirectly.

Most of the arguments in this chapter can be applied, therefore, to dialogic seminar interaction of all kinds, not just to those which are student-led and assessed. My observations of, and discussions about, some of the unassessed seminars are as a result occasionally brought into the analysis. However, as the analysis demonstrates, the confluence of assessment and student-leadership with dialogic interaction offers a particularly potent learning environment, which has an effect on even the unassessed seminars in the case study. This needs to be acknowledged before the reader can apply the findings shared here in other contexts where seminars are neither assessed nor student-led.

This chapter begins with an overview of the relationship between dialogue and education before moving to analyse the empirical data. It looks firstly at the difference between presentations and discussions and argues that discussion appears to increase significantly the level of student engagement with the subject. The chapter then moves on to consider what conditions need to be in place for discussion to flourish suggesting that

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[85] I have selected to use the word 'agonistic' because it captures the competitive but also slightly artificial dimension of certain types of dialogue, such as debate.

practice and preparation are significant precursors. It explores the impact of effective facilitation and the importance of drawing on different types of dialogue and classroom activities within each seminar. This analysis is supported by Bakhtin's ideas on the ways dialogic communication enables speakers to develop an active understanding of issues and to assimilate the ideas of others.

7.2   The tradition of dialogic education

There is a long history of learning through dialogue, as discussed below, with different cultures, traditions and disciplines emphasising the importance of particular forms of dialogue. While there are many different ways of categorising discussion, Burbules's approach is particularly helpful to the socio-cultural orientation of this study. Burbules (1993: 112) argues that there are four types of dialogue:

Inclusive-divergent	Dialogue as conversation
Inclusive-convergent	Dialogue as inquiry
Critical-divergent	Dialogue as debate
Critical-convergent	Dialogue as instruction

Each has its own tradition and advocates and each relates to a different concept of teaching and learning, which are all manifested in the seminars that are studied here and discussed in the empirical analysis below. This section offers a brief overview of each of these types linking them to Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and contemporary practice in higher education.

'Inclusive-divergent' or 'dialogue as conversation' has been of particular interest to many of the seminal thinkers whose ideas underpin twentieth century views of education (Abercrombie 1989; Bruner 1960 and 1966; Buber 1961; Lasker 1949; Dewey 1916; Freire 1996; Vygotsky 1962 and 1978). It is characterised by a collaborative, open and liberal mind-set, which accepts, and is interested in, different viewpoints, which these seminal thinkers have taken to be a founding principle of education. This is a position that pervades much philosophical thought (Bernstein 1983; Bohm 1996; Gadamer 1989[86]; Habermas 1984). It also underpins the approach of a range of educators (Applebee 1996; Bridges 1979; Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Jeffs and Smith 1996). This view of dialogue embraces a divergent view of knowledge which Burbules argues is strongly expressed in Bakhtin's view of 'heteroglossia' and where every utterance is seen as 'irresolvably plural' (Burbules 1993: 111). The aim of this kind of dialogue is not to uncover the truth, nor reveal the answer to the question, but to gain a better understanding of the ideas and perspectives of the participants involved in the dialogue in order to secure new insights and a deeper understanding of the world.

Some forms of dialogue do, however, seek to answer a question or solve a problem and this Burbules (1993: 116-18) calls 'dialogue as inquiry'. While it remains an approach which seeks an agreeable consensus rather than conflict or competition, this kind of dialogue adopts a convergent view of knowledge. It involves testing the different sources of knowledge and

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[86] *Truth and Method* was first published in German *c*1960.

evaluating the evidence available before reaching a measured and balanced conclusion. Roby (1988: 165) sees this form of dialogue as near the centre of a continuum between the 'tyranny of the teacher' and an unregulated 'free for all'. Certain disciplines in higher education, notably the sciences, base their investigations on this kind of inclusive-convergent dialogue. The relatively recent interest in problem-based learning tends to use this form of dialogue to develop critical thinking and other transferable skills (O'Rourke 2001; Palmer 2002; Savin-Baden 2000). Savin-Baden (2000: 81) calls this 'transactional dialogue' and argues that it allows participants 'to engage with the life-worlds of others […] to challenge assumptions, make decisions and adopt new strategies and ways of knowing'. Dillon's (1994) definition of 'deliberation' also meets the criteria of 'dialogue as inquiry'. He (1994b: 4) comments that it is a 'discussion of alternative courses of action', asking 'What should we do?' and finding the most promising solution. Burbules (1993: 116-118) describes some of the different kinds of 'dialogue as inquiry', including investigating an issue, problem-solving, achieving a political consensus, co-ordinating activity, resolving a specific dispute and adjudicating moral differences.

The above approaches share a view of dialogue as inclusive and collaborative (Guilar 2006). They take as their starting point the assumption that the other speakers might well have a valid point worth assimilating (Burbules 1993: 111). Alternatively, speakers can take a less 'inclusive' and more 'critical' viewpoint, which sees interlocutors adopting an immediately more sceptical view of their fellow speakers. Both approaches can be seen in

one discussion, where the initial approach being taken by a speaker is to be very open and believing, to give the speaker the best chance of presenting her/his case, and then to become more critical and assertive of one's own views, albeit modified by what one has heard so far (Burbules 1993: 112).

Critical thinking is seen as a central tenet of an academic education, though developing a critical disposition is far from easy because it is a complex blend of many skills and attributes (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Browne and Freeman (2000: 301) have described a critical-thinking classroom as one with the following attributes: 'frequent questions, developmental tension, fascination with the contingency of conclusions and active learning'. All of these are developed through the medium of dialogue.

Burbules differentiates between two forms of critical dialogue. When a more critical view of one's speaking partners is harnessed to a 'divergent' view of knowledge, where no specific single answer is sought, 'dialogue as debate' occurs (Burbules 1993: 119-20). Certain disciplines in higher education, such as the study of law[87], particularly value such an approach because oral argument and debate are central to the development of their discipline's mindset and often to the specific professional or employment skills needed by their graduates. Ong's (1982: 43-45) views that oral discourse is more agonistic than written language underpins such an approach, because it does rely on the participants adopting an advocacy role, whether the views are genuinely held or simply being temporarily adopted in order to

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[87] Neer (2001) provides a summary of research on the use of Moot Courts within the discipline of law.

try out and test the relative merits of different positions. The purpose of 'critical-divergent' dialogue is not necessarily to reach a specific conclusion about which view is correct, nor to win the argument, but instead such dialogue can be used to increase knowledge and understanding and used by teachers to this effect (Burbules 1993: 120).

When a 'critical' and sceptical mindset is harnessed to a 'convergent' view of knowledge, the intention of the participants is to reach a firm, reliable and robust conclusion. There has been a long tradition of scholars looking at 'dialogue as instruction' drawing on a Socratic tradition (Burbules 1993: 120-24; Bakhtin 1984a: 109-112; Palmer 2001; Stott, Young and Bryan 2001: 8). This manifests itself in classroom discourse in a number of different ways. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) identified a particular form of classroom discussion as one which follows an Initiation, Response and Follow-up (IRF) pattern of communication between teacher and pupil. In school education the IRF pattern has now received widespread recognition as both common and poor practice (Nunn 2001: 1; McDonough and Shaw 1993: 243). When done well it can be an acceptable way of achieving specific learning outcomes in the classroom (Dillon 1994a), but in practice it is often dry and ritualistic (Andersen, Nussbaum, Pecchioni and Grant 1999: 372; Nunn 2001: 1; McCarthy 1991: 19). A practice which has received a more positive reception is Bruner's (1978) concept of 'scaffolding', drawing on Vygotsky's (1962) ideas. This theory argues that a teacher can provide support structures and draw on 'cultural tools' (Vygotsky 1981: 137), often in the form of skilled questioning, to develop a child's understanding, if they are operating within

what Vygotsky (1978: 84-91) calls the 'zone of proximal development'. There

has been much practitioner research drawing on Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF

model and the concept of 'scaffolding' across the last four decades and

covering many cultures and different phases of education (Brodie 2004;

Coltman, Petyaeva and Anghileri 2004; Smith and Hardman 2002; Todd,

Chaiyasuk and Tantisawetrat 2008; Yang 2008). 'Dialogue as instruction' has

been seen as a useful way of teaching particular areas of knowledge, but

researchers have also acknowledged its limitation, which is that it is tutor-led

and is largely restricted to the tutor's perspective, knowledge and skills sets.

Burbules (1993: 129) is clear that any given classroom discussion can

contain several different types of dialogue as teacher and students draw on

different approaches to help them achieve their overall aim:

> The four types of dialogue have quite distinct characters and
> purposes; and a good teacher, or skilful player of the dialogue game
> generally, is one who is aware of these various forms and their specific
> characteristics, so that he or she can make an intelligent choice from
> among them when dealing with particular kinds of students,
> particular communicative contexts, or particular subject matters. Such
> a choice requires experience, judgment, and a sensitivity to others.

This range of dialogue was immediately obvious to me as I observed the

seminars studied here. In addition, as I listened to the tutors and students

talk about their experiences, I could hear their enthusiasm for dialogue as a

medium for learning.

Recently, the value of 'dialogic learning' has been recognised and discussed by school educators[88]. However, there is still little in-depth discussion by those interested in the pedagogy of higher education, who tend to view dialogic learning positively, but without attempting to understand what is happening in the dialogic classroom. Linguists have demonstrated the complexity of language as it goes about its social and pragmatic functions[89], but their approach is too decontextualised and abstract for this study which focuses on situated learning[90]. Bakhtin's ideas, on the other hand, describe not just the structure of language, but also how dialogue influences individuals and, if Bakhtin's ideas are applied to classroom interaction, how it aids learning.

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[88] In school education, the concept of 'dialogic teaching' or 'inquiry' drew on research by Vygotsky (1962; 1978; and 1981) and Bruner (1960; 1966) and built on the work of Wells (1999a and 1999b) and Mercer (1995). Projects were variously undertaken by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE 2009), the National Union of Teachers (NUT 2003) and a group of teacher educators working on the Thinking Together project (Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif 2000). Momentum built around the idea that dialogue aids critical thinking and learning (Fisher 2006; Lipman 2003; Mercer and Littleton 2007; Seal 2006; Vass 2003). Together these led to the development of the concept of dialogic learning (Alexander 2008; van der Linden and Renshaw 2004; Wegerif 2006; Wells 1999a).

[89] Coulthard 1977; Drew and Heritage 1992; Garfinkel 1967; Halliday 1993; Jefferson 1978; Maybin and Mercer 1996; Poland and Pederson 1998; Sacks *et al.* 1978; Schegloff 1988; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Searle 1969; Stubbs 1983; ten Have 1999; Wardhaugh 1985.

[90] As part of more general studies, some linguists do briefly consider educational settings. Carter and McCarthy (1997) consider an example of school classroom interaction, as well as a university seminar presentation and its ensuing question and answer session.

7.3   Analysis

7.3.1 The feeling of dialogic learning

Effective discussion is made up of 'so many different things', as Billie (1st year) notes when describing a successful seminar. On the one hand, it is an everyday commonplace activity in which everyone can take part, but the more one thinks about the elements that make up an effective discussion the more elusive they become. One tutor, for example, appeared to Jac (2nd year) to do nothing very special, but somehow the tutor made 'you want to tell him/her something […and] that was amazing'. Bakhtin suggests that when people engage in active discussion, texts, in the broadest sense, come into contact with and spark off against each other. 'A light flash' occurs (Bakhtin 1986: 162) and the participants experience 'a dialogic feeling for the world' (Bakhtin 1984a: 265) that transforms their understanding. This chapter makes the case that, for many participants, this 'dialogic feeling' marks out the successful from the less successful seminar and looks at the factors associated with the creation of this state.

It is worth reflecting on the phrase 'dialogic feeling' a little further because Bakhtin's choice of language is unexpectedly romantic and essentialist and somewhat at odds with the view that both he and I hold, which is that language forms and shapes identity. I would suggest that he has chosen this metaphor carefully for two reasons. Firstly, Bakhtin is seeking to communicate complex and abstract issues in a way that his readers can

understand and with which they can engage in the spirit of dialogue. Secondly, he is seeking to demonstrate the affective power of language, something that was particularly relevant to his contemporary readers, since linguistics had been reduced in his day to decontextualised formalism.

Grappling with the affective power of language is also important to this study on a number of counts. Firstly, the study is attempting to understand the impact of the seminars on the students' learning *experience*. This is a phrase now used by the HEA, as discussed in chapter four, and which, though a complex concept, certainly incorporates an affective dimension. Secondly, participants in the study were also trying to express the affective power of dialogic learning when they talked to me in their interviews. They variously described the seminars as 'good' (Charlie, 2nd year; Sandy, 3rd year) or 'amazing' (Jac, 2nd year; Sandy, 3rd year) and as a learning environment where things have really 'worked' (Toni, 3rd year). This intangible and affective dimension of the seminars is implicit in many of their comments. Ali (2nd year), for example, speaks about the importance of building the group's 'dynamic' which s/he says takes time:

> I think it's hardest to go first because the group doesn't really have a dynamic yet. The more recent ones that we've had, everybody kind of knows each other and everybody is really like [trails off], a bit of banter goes on. Whereas ours was the first one and everyone was a bit [trails off …] it didn't go that well.

For Ali, building social relationships and the 'banter' that then follows seems to be a contributory factor in the creation of the 'dialogic feeling' when things go 'well' and the group 'dynamic' helps the seminar to be effective.

This chapter attempts to understand what generates these 'amazing' 'dialogic feelings'. Several factors appear to be influential and the chapter considers the influence of: discursive as opposed to presentational modes of communication; practice and preparation; effective facilitation; dialogue which enables assimilation; and, different types of dialogue.

7.3.2 The different effects of presentation and discussion on student learning

When one speaks of oral assessment my experience indicates that the automatic assumption by the majority of tutors and students in the present-day higher-education environment is that presentations, possibly individual, possibly group, are being assessed or that attendance is being rewarded through a minimal mark for oral contributions to the class. These assumptions were revealed even among the participants, as discussed below, despite the fact that the whole seminar is being assessed. When the students were directed to consider the more discursive parts of the seminar, it was these that they preferred. One of the students in Walker and Warhurst's (2000: 41) study of assessed debates, declares 'In most classes you sit around very quietly at a table and get lectured at'. Walker and Warhurst (2000) and this study both argue that students prefer a more interactive approach. Sam (1st year) who has experience of both presentation and discussion in the 'Learning History' module explains why. Discussion, s/he says, is

> a much more comfortable environment for me to sort of work from. But also it's easier, because at the same time you tend to develop ideas on the go. Your ideas tend to evolve as you interact with other

people, whereas in presentations you, you take an idea, you develop it but almost solely from a single perspective - your analysis of problems, which we already do anyway in essays, and that's pretty much what we are doing anyway and, mm, it's not, I'm not so sure how much I'm actually taking away from you know in terms of having learned.

Sam identifies a 'comfortable environment' which avoids the unhelpful effects of negative emotion on learning (Falchikov and Boud 2007: 146). The references to the way that ideas 'develop' 'on the go' and 'evolve as you interact' are an acknowledgement of the vital role played by others in learning. This is set against the student's view that there is a decided absence of learning when doing presentations because the student is working 'solely from a single perspective'. This point is made across five lines and is full of hesitancy and repetition: 'you, you', 'pretty much', 'mm', 'it's not, I'm not sure,' 'I'm not sure how much', 'actually', 'you know in terms of'. This hesitancy implies an awareness that presentations are frequently spoken of as a good way of learning and are viewed as the normal way of assessing oral skills. To speak against the benefit of presentations seems to Sam to be something that s/he needs to express with caution.

The observations that I undertook support the tutors' and students' views of the efficacy of discussion as opposed to presentation. Without exception among the observed seminars, the presentations were satisfactory, but they never became more than short, read essays on the selected topic. They conveyed information to the listening group who were being invited by the mode of communication to absorb it – a 'banking' view of knowledge (Freire 1996). This is clearly not necessarily true of all presentations, but the ones observed here tended to follow that form. Judging from my own

listening experience, observed body language and later comments by the listening group and tutor, some were more successful than others in the sense that the ideas conveyed were clear and comprehensible, interesting and persuasive. However, even those who seemed to my judgement to be the more successful presenters – those who, perhaps, used Powerpoint effectively or who made appropriate use of certain rhetorical techniques – appeared to lose their audience half way through a short five to ten minute presentation. Field-notes on a second-year module record my observations of one of the more confidently delivered presentations as follows:

> *Presentation 3 (10mins)*
> Confident style, looked up, some gesture, eye contact, clear strong voice, read but with some sense of improvisation, variation in tone. Referred to handout. Referred to content of other presentations. Another detailed, student friendly handout. […] Predominantly written discourse but accessible and not jargon filled. Group listening in desultory unmotivated manner as before, a few more notes being taken. No vocal sense of an ending and, as before, no visual aids. (2nd year, assessed seminar)

This was one of the better presentations in terms of the use of rhetoric and the level of confidence of the speaker, but the group still 'listened in a desultory unmotivated manner as before'.

Field-notes on the presentations given by other group members that day included the following: 'group looked bored'; 'group about as interested in her/him as in the other presenters, no hostility or resentment visible'; 'group listening as before, several hands under chins, some looking up, acquiescent not riveted'. All these convey 'acquiescent' passivity and general disengagement or a sense of being disengaged. The field-notes also imply that I think that the group expects to respond this way. I noted 'no hostility

or resentment' because they looked so disinterested one might have expected the group to resent the wasting of their time, but, as chapter six identified, the group did not challenge the processes of assessment unless they were deemed to be unfair.

These presentations were typical of all presentations at all levels, though the students' confidence and grasp of the subject grew across the years. Generally, body language indicated the groups began in an actively listening mode, but soon initial note-taking ceased and students stopped looking up alertly at the presenter and, instead, almost without fail, stared passively down at the table. The most passive audiences were those when the presenters had provided a detailed handout. As the student cited above concludes, 'I'm not so sure how much I'm actually taking away from, you know, in terms of having learned' (Sam, 1st year).

Although much dialogue serves a 'technical' or transactional function, or is really a series of monologues with no true listening and responding (Buber 1961[91]: 37), true dialogic education rests on a 'mutual experience of inclusion' (Buber 1961: 126) between the educator and the learner to generate engagement, active learning and positive emotional responses. In the same second-year seminar there was between the presentations a range of discursive activities and these seemed to trigger this active learning. Field-notes for one activity, an informal debate, record, 'Group discussed animatedly in groups, chipping in, arguing with a will'. Against another

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[91] First published in 1947.

activity I noted that 'Advance reading had been given and it looked like it had been done'. Each group member individually

> put their arguments on the white-board in bullet points – time consuming but clear, a kind of written discussion – interesting. While the listing was being done, student chats in fulsome phatic[92] conversation to further social relations rather than because information needs to be shared. Then one person from each group had to defend their views in role. […] Whole thing very entertaining. (2nd year seminar)

A third activity involved straightforward source work, but even here there was 'Plenty of irony' with one student introducing it with 'Now a very exciting Clermont source activity' that caused a ripple of laughter. Leaders were 'available but not needed' to support small-group discussion. The level of challenge was good and the 'Tutor said it was a well-structured seminar. The source was not easy but all the ideas were in there and it related well to the seminar as a whole'. The only weakness was that by the time it had been read, they 'Only had a few minutes of discussion', but in the 'plenary each group said a couple of points'. Throughout the 'Leader was very positive: "Yes, I thought that […] good point […] Yes that's pretty straightforward […] Well done everybody." ' This routine source activity included many of the features of an effective seminar, including the use of effective advance reading and the use of tabled papers. Soft skills and phatic communication, irony and humour were used to lighten the mood and keep the students concentrating. Overall, it appears to have worked in the sense that there was a marked difference in the level of positive engagement in all these discursive activities compared with the presentations. Doran *et al.*'s (2000: 204) study came to a similar conclusion that 'Assessment of general

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[92] Phatic speech has a social, rather than an informative function.

contributions to seminars appears to have a greater impact on the quality of

the learning experience than assessment of presentations only'.

These activities were all small-group work, but dialogue happens at

whole-class level too. Several different types of whole-class discussion were

observed, some more halting than others, but common in the field-notes are

descriptions along these lines:

> Some IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) pattern, but not purely that. This was a good exploration of the issues through interactive dialogue. It even broke out across the group as a whole. (2nd year seminar)

> It began as IRF with the student leading, but quickly broke out of this and became free-flowing interactive discussion. Steers were intermittently provided by the leader and the tutor, but sometimes came from the student group where one of the three chatty ones would raise a question. (3rd year seminar)

> Discussion moves on. Sometimes tutor adopts IRF pattern, sometimes it breaks free of this. […] Pattern of note-taking, response and listening fairly equal. (3rd year seminar)

Whole-class discussion also spontaneously broke out following feedback from

small-group work in plenaries:

> Female fed back; another female spoke; then a male – all in the group; then the tutor interrupted ('it's also about …'); another female from across the room chipped in and a free and open discussion developed focusing on the feedback from this group. (3rd year seminar)

The common feature here among these second and third-year seminars is

that highly structured discussion such as plenary feedback or IRF dialogue

occurs, but groups often take ownership of the topic and move into a more

dialogic and exploratory mode of communication. The sense that, during

second and particularly third-year seminars, all the people in the room, tutors

and students, whether leading or not, feel able to initiate questions and further develop a discussion on a topic illustrates the level of engagement.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogic speech captures the lively and varied form of the discursive interaction that I observed to be effective at engaging the students. He explains why it is a potentially powerful way to support learning. Bakhtin (1981: 282) comments that 'active understanding' only comes when the speaker

> establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. […Then t]he speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, [and] constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background.

When speakers actively participate in the kind of dialogue described above, jostling and responding to the flux of conversation, adapting what they say to the context, using different speech genres, social dialects and registers freely and skilfully, the 'active understanding' of new ideas occurs. When they interact like this, they gain a 'dialogic feeling for the world'. There is much more to consider here about exactly what constitutes this kind of dialogue which can potentially create an 'active understanding' in the higher education classroom. This will continue to be considered in the ensuing analysis, but the marked difference in student engagement in dialogic as opposed to presentational modes of communication indicate that although presentations have a clear addressee and, because of this, can be considered dialogic to some extent, they are failing to generate that 'dialogic feeling' associated with 'active understanding'.

7.3.3   The influence of practice and preparation

Both tutors and students recognise the importance of students having sufficient knowledge and skills, if they are to benefit from the seminars. Readings (1996: 156) has pointed to the emptiness of radical pedagogic approaches that imply 'there is nothing to learn'. Preparation of a sufficient knowledge-base and coupled with the practice of seminar skills were repeatedly identified by the tutors and students as important precursors to effective seminars that generate that 'dialogic feeling'. Bakhtin identifies the 'mastery of speech' as the first step on the process towards the 'assimilation of the wealth of human culture' (1986: 143) and, as noted in chapter two, he argues that 'the better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them' (1986: 80). This 'mastery', according to the tutors and students, is enhanced by taking part in different kinds of seminar interaction across the course.

In 'Learning History' students are able to practice many of the separate skills and competencies needed for the later seminars. All the tutors and all bar one of the students interviewed were able to see that this was a useful module to undertake, though all had some reservations.   One of the students did not realise how helpful it had been until later in the course (Billie, 1st year). Several found it difficult to see the usefulness of the historiographic content, preferring the study-skills element (Charlie and Terri, 2nd years). One described it as hard work with too much assessment (Billie, 1st year), something that two tutors also noted (Jo; Pat). However, none of the

participants linked a 'good' seminar experience to having undertaken 'Learning History' and only referred to it when I directly prompted them to talk about skills development or 'Learning History' itself.

Instead, tutors and students focused more on where the assessed seminar under discussion came within the wider programme of study. Lesley, one of the tutors, was clear in her/his assumption that those who go later in a semester or in the second semester of a year are perceptibly better because they have learned from their peers. However, Lyndsey tried experimenting with inserting a non-assessed seminar before the assessed one, but felt that this made no difference to the quality of the assessed seminar. S/he adds that 'They really can come up with it straight away as long as you've prepared them for it' and given that Lyndsey also believes in the importance of pre-loading the seminars with knowledge-heavy lectures, the implication is that, for Lyndsey, preparation equates to knowledge rather than skills.

Some of the students echoed Lesley's point of view. In one sense this is the obvious effect of learning, but several students attribute the effectiveness of the seminars to learning how to run them. Charlie (2nd year) comments,

> One of the problems was that I was in the first group and, as I say, this was also my first assessed seminar, so we were all quite, you know, inexperienced and we didn't quite know what to do. But in the end it went well. But, because we made some quite obvious mistakes, other groups seem to pick up on exactly what we did wrong and, obviously, if we'd followed another group, then I assume we could've been able to do the same and give a better seminar.

Despite these reservations, Charlie is happy to accept this peer-taught model

of learning and s/he concludes, 'But [inaudible] I was quite pleased with it'.

Toni (3rd year) has a touch of pride in her/his voice when s/he speak about

her/his formative role in the class:

> People weren't using sources in their discussions, but I think it worked
> quite well doing that. I think we were one of the first groups to and
> it sort of, I think it helped get people started.

Toni is pleased with the way s/he has introduced a new structuring device

that has helped the class engage with the material.

Lesley, a tutor, points to the trial and error process of learning

through practice:

> The idea is they do try out things and they come and they argue their
> corner and so on. Sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't, but
> I think on the whole, as they get better at it, they're more confident. I
> mean in some ways the second year in the second semester are an
> awful lot better than the first semester, when they're pretty shy and
> restrained and so on, but in the third year they have a go at each
> other.

The 'try[ing] things out' here refers to the exploration of ideas and the

presentation of arguments, and this appears to be one of the characteristics

of dialogic learning. When Lesley comments that 'sometimes it happens',

s/he could be expressing Bakhtin's dialogic 'light flash' suggesting that

practising and 'trying things out' is part of the dialogic learning experience.

Having sufficient knowledge is also frequently noted as important for

a successful seminar experience. Scholars point out that students are at

different stages of development in their understanding of epistemological

issues (Baxter Magolda 1992) and in their intellectual and ethical

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development (Finster 1988 and 1989; Knefelkamp 1974 and 1980; Perry 1970). Knowing should, therefore, be seen as a process not a product (Bruner 1966: 72), since students develop their understanding of the nature of knowledge as they pass through the degree. Participating in the seminars appears to enable the students to take part in that process of becoming more knowledgeable. As they engage in interaction, they begin to 'interthink' (Mercer and Littleton 2007: 4). Dialogue seems to help them develop their critical thinking and skills of meta-cognition (Walker and Finney 1999: 531), which arguably helps them improve their grasp of the limitations of knowledge and develop a personal evidence-based position in relation to those maintained by others (Katung *et al.* 1999: 58). However, dialogue needs some ideas or knowledge or discursive material to use as its starting point.

Billie (1st year) believes a secure knowledge-base can overcome natural shyness:

> If you know your stuff, you'll be confident, because you see that all the time. Somebody might be really quiet, but then if they know their stuff then they'll be confident, if they know what they're talking about.

This student values a secure level of 'declarative knowledge'[93] (Biggs 1999: 40), as well as the ability to use it. Tutors in the study generally saw lectures as a useful way of sharing 'declarative knowledge' in years one and two, when students have limited abilities to seek it out themselves (Jo, Sacha, Lesley; Lyndsey).

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[93] As opposed to 'functioning knowledge' (Biggs 1999: 40), where declarative knowledge is applied appropriately to solve problems and reach conclusions.

Lectures are sometimes given alongside student-led seminars and sometimes at the start of the module (Lyndsey; Sacha). By year three several tutors were speaking positively of the fact that the lectures were no longer needed (Pat; Frances). The lecture-free 'special paper' and dissertation are seen as final proofs that students have learned the professional processes that will allow them to uncover and evaluate their own sources of information (Pat; Lyndsey). However, although the tutors believe that lectures can provide useful background information, ironically, this third-year student suggests that 'if you have lectures you usually have a sort of vague knowledge of what is going on anyway' (Toni) and so you do less preparation of your own. Toni believes that, when there is a lecture on the topic, the students' knowledge level in the related seminars is worse than it is if they have no preparatory lecture and are forced to research the topic themselves. This is an awkward paradox: students need knowledge to be confident, but make less effort to develop new knowledge if they are given it.

Engaging in advance preparation and reading is another related feature that is cited by tutors and students, as contributing to an effective seminar discussion. A standard practice is to set advance reading, which can then be drawn on in class discussion. Here tutors act as portals to a wider world of knowledge, directing students to other sources. However, Billie (1st year) is quick to note that

> reading alone isn't enough because you… [trails off]. It's aspects of all things, because obviously if I discuss something with you it makes me think about it and then I'll take it in. So, yeah, definitely the discussions are really, really important.

The reading is important not *per se* but because it provides material for the ensuing discussion, which is when, for Billie, the real learning happens. Both tutors and students comment that leaders prepare thoroughly. Talking about the first-year, 'Learning History', group presentation, Jo, a tutor, uses the first person plural to argue that 'if it wasn't assessed, we feel that they wouldn't do it [their preparation]'. Toni (3rd year) suggests this is because 'You don't want to be standing up there and then someone asks you a question and you haven't got a clue what the answer is', but 'when you're not leading, it can be a bit dodgy as to how much work you actually do before you get there'. The way Toni overcame this problem, when s/he led a seminar, was to embed the reading and sources in the seminars themselves to ensure that everyone read source material before being expected to discuss it. I observed students do this repeatedly by tabling short extracts and providing reading time in class, or showing a short video-clip, or sharing other kinds of visual source material.

Ensuring that students have the opportunity to practice through trial and error, particularly at the lower levels, may help them to engage in dialogic learning. In addition, enabling students to develop the necessary knowledge-base to allow an intellectually rigorous discussion to ensue also appears to be important, though there is less consensus between tutors and students on how that can be acquired effectively. Engaging students in dialogue is not easy to achieve simply by asking them to discuss a given topic, but practice and preparation increase the likelihood of generating the 'dialogic feeling' that appears to accompany effective learning.

7.3.4 The importance of effective facilitation, organisation and discussion skills

The skills that the students have to learn include facilitation and effective seminar planning and organisation. The leaders of a seminar, or facilitators of discussions within them, are potentially highly influential on whether or not dialogic learning takes place (Andersen *et al.* 1999: 361). It is normally the leader(s) of a seminar or the facilitator of a discussion that decides on the structure and style of the session they are leading and ensures that it is implemented as planned. They are the ones 'orchestrating […] the basic lines of movement and play of intentions' (Bakhtin 1981: 418). In discussing successful seminar leadership, the tutors and students tended to refer to tutor-led seminars, perhaps because these offered them a greater variety of models to compare, or because their leadership/teaching skills were deemed to be better, or perhaps because they were unconsciously defaulting to tutor-led seminars as the norm. In any case, it was interesting to hear which kind of seminar-leadership style students were using as their model.

The advocates of the use of dialogue for personal development and education have argued that people engage in effective dialogue by being granted a degree of independence that requires them to become active rather than passive learners (Dewey 1916; Freire 1996; Bruner 1966 and 1978; Vygotsky 1962). For Sandy (3rd year) the tutor-led seminars that she has experienced are much more successful if the tutor builds in activities that encourage this active independence. S/he refers to some tutors who

'basically talk through the whole of it and, you know, it kind of, it tends to be them just sort of asking you for an answer rather than stimulating discussions', adopting an IRF pattern of interaction. This 'puts you off because, well, what if it's [your answer's] wrong?' The IRF pattern appears not to capture the 'dialogic feeling' for this student, but another tutor offers Sandy a much better model:

> S/he might sometimes speak in a seminar, get up and like s/he lists the topic. This is the context, this is what we're going to talk about, give you a brief overview so you know the situation and then it is more or less up to the student to get up and write on the board and s/he'll you know provide the sort of stimulants every now and again if the discussion gets a bit stagnant. But other than that, it's very much still up to the students to keep it going and it works because if you know that that's the process, that's how it's going to work or you're not going to get anything out of it, then you're that much more much inclined to actually work for it.

This lightly guided, open-ended style of whole-class discussion requires students to teach themselves and the student describes the tutor who achieves this as 'a really good tutor' who 'does stimulate discussion' indicating it is a motivating approach. The crucial elements for the student appear to be some guidance and structure, brief intervention if things go astray, but generally an acceptance that if students do not bring material and engage in discussion then nothing will be forthcoming from the tutor to substitute for it. It could be argued that the first tutor's over guidance and desire to keep the students on track appears to have been counter-productive, forcing the students into more reliant learning practices. The second tutor seemed to engender more confidence in the students and give them space to make errors and to realise language's 'semantic openness' and 'its capacity for further creative life' (Bakhtin 1981: 346). The first tutor ran a

tightly managed discussion that closed down the development of ideas and left the students afraid to suggest things because they worried that they would be the wrong ones. The question of control and student ownership of discussion will be considered further in the next chapter.

There are several suggestions by tutors and students alike about the kind of structuring that supports dialogic learning. The tutor above drew up a list of key points, whereas Lyndsey, another tutor, suggests a balanced package of short activities:

> I find that in the ones that I lead I always have some sort of document. There is something in front of them that they can see and discuss. And it has to be twenty minutes of this, ten minutes of this and twenty minutes of this, so long as it's structured. If you just expect to have a discussion on it – nothing.[…] You have to divide them into groups, get them to discuss this issue, come up with these points, order them in a certain priority, may be look at this document. They've got to be very structured. […] Then they can engage.

The variety of short activities, includes quite a lot of small-group work, some whole-class synthesis and some source work, all woven together in a related patchwork. To use Bruner's (1978) term, these activities are 'scaffolding' the students' learning, enabling them to develop their thoughts and ideas in new directions thanks to timely prompts rather than heavy-handed instruction. If these activities and prompts are absent the result is 'nothing'. This point is echoed by Jac (2nd year) who claims a need for students to influence the structure. This happens with student-led seminars, though, paradoxically, Jac also comments that 'The best ones have been the ones where they've said you can do it this way, this way and this way'. It seems that a judicious balance of freedom and structure aid effective discussion.

Sandy (3rd year) and Lyndsey both pointed clearly to the kind of structure that they thought enabled their group to engage with the issues being studied, and observations of the seminars revealed that the assessed student-led seminars conformed quite closely to the kind of class they describe. The seminars were always broken into multiple sub-sections of five to twenty minutes and interspersed with whole-class and small-group activities, presentations and discussions, source work and other performance activities.   However, facilitation is an altogether more intangible and complex art than planning a series of suitable activities.

The skills needed for successful facilitation take time to develop, otherwise the silences that were regular in several first-year seminars, the 'nothing' to which Sandy refers, linger longer than both tutors and students would like. One tutor I observed teaching first-year groups (Jo) made a particular effort not to fill in the silences that followed many of his/her questions, a skill that Andersen *et al.* (1999: 368) argue is important, as a longer 'wait-time' can be linked to an increase in the quantity and quality of participation. Equally, Charlie (2nd year) acknowledges the need for 'some prompting' if silence is to be avoided. However, facilitation is not just about getting people to speak, it is, as Lesley, notes, 'intellectually challenging'. S/he argues that

> You can show off your knowledge of the topic and your clear thinking because the group will get into a mess. It will start going round in circles. It will start repeating stuff and you then can jump in and clarify, 'Well, this is what we're meant to be discussing'. Or it's flagging and you keep asking questions and again, in principle, if you're clever, you come up with a sharp question.

The complexity of the role of the facilitator is clear from this. The facilitator needs to 'orchestrate' (Bakhtin 1981: 418) knowledge and skills, and needs to be able to use them both together in a timely fashion. It is no use knowing, for example, when a discussion flags, if s/he cannot think of a 'sharp question' that will revive the discussion. S/he adds that, 'Some students can do that', but others find it much harder, presumably because they lack either the knowledge, or the skills, or the ability to bring the two together. In addition, as chapter eight explores, the power dynamics differ in student-led seminars, compared with tutor-led classes.

Discussions can be aided by facilitation from within the group. Higher education has paid less attention to the explicit development of oral skills than the school sector[94]. Advice on the development of oral skills has been offered by, amongst others, Burbules (1993), Bridges (1979), Dillon (1994a) and Brookfield and Preskill (1999), generally emphasising the importance of learning 'the language game' by participating in discussions (Burbules 1993:

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[94] In the 1970s, both Britton and Barnes pointed out the relationship between language use and learning in the school classroom (Barnes 1969; Britton 1970). The National Oracy Project (1990-92; see Norman 1992) then followed aiming at developing oral skills in the primary classroom. Despite this and the implementation of the *National Literacy Strategy* (DFEE 1998)*,* concern remained that children's oral skills were weak (Riley, Burrell and McCallum 2004: 657-58) and so the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority produced the *Speaking, Listening, Learning* materials (DfES/QCA 2003). They make explicit the link between discussion and learning, emphasising not just presentations and formal debates, which have a fairly established place in the curriculum, but also the importance of informal group discussion.

54; Gadamer 1989; Wittgenstein 1958). This is the approach that is taken in the programme of seminars studied here. Students are given the opportunity to practice a range of skills in 'Learning History' and then to apply them in the seminar context in years two and three. Brookfield and Preskill (1999) give practical advice to tutors on developing students' discussion skills and the study-skills guide given to students in the case study covers some of this ground. The study-skills guide was found by the participants to be useful when they first started and all knew it existed, though there was no evidence that it was studied after the first few weeks. One student commented that 'to get advice from something in a book' was 'nowhere near as good as experience' (Charlie 2nd year), while another commented that 'beyond that [the study guide] it was sort of up to you, basically, what you do' (Toni, 3rd year). A third commented that the guide was 'a lot of just written information about how to, you know, present seminars' (Sandy, 3rd year) indicating the limitations s/he thought it had.

Lesley, a tutor, recognises that, in practice, you need both a good facilitator and a group who have reasonably well-developed discussion skills, if a discussion is to be a success. Speaking about 'Learning History', s/he says it

> is very much geared up to getting them used to talking, but also getting used to thinking about other people around them and not looking bored when other people are talking. Or thinking about, if you're in a team, you shouldn't just do all the talking, you've got to make sure that your chums get involved as well. So […] the more the rest of them talk the better.

The 'prompting' of the facilitator can be from the front or within the group. For Lesley, effective discussion needs a facilitator to play an active part in encouraging people to talk, to keep them on track and to ask questions that drive thought to a deeper level while ensuring things remain clear to the participants. Facilitators ensure that the 'repertoire of little behavioural genres' (Vološinov 1986: 97) appropriate to that particular speech event are managed and directed. They also play a significant role in defining the type of interaction that occurs. Discussions can be encouraged to reach a conclusion or remain open-ended. They can be argumentative, critical and polemic or more inclusive in nature. The next section looks at the impact that different types of dialogue have on the students' experience of seminars.

7.3.5   The implications of using different types of dialogue

This section makes the case that all types of dialogue are able to take the students from a passive acceptance of others' views, to an 'active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system' (Bakhtin 1981: 282). All four of Burbules's (1993: 112) different types of dialogue were visible in the seminars I observed. Indeed, they frequently embraced several different forms of discussion, with one type flowing into or merging with another, as the seminars progressed from one activity to another.

It was, however, sometimes possible to discern a clear pattern in their use. The field-notes, written immediately after observing a 'Learning History', tutor-led, unassessed, first-year seminar note:

> <u>When tutor-led</u>, the dialogue was critical-convergent, (instruction/teaching) - a highly directive form of teaching in which the teacher led the students through the process of learning without supplying the answers, only prompting them (usually through a question) to help them move to the next stage in the thought process.

> <u>When the tutor worked with them in small groups</u>, this was also the case, but the tutor tended to engage in longer IRF patterns which led students to moments of 'confusion' and the realisation that they are wrong or have contradicted themselves, a Socratic *aporia* or moment of deep confusion.

> <u>When alone in small groups</u>, the students were engaged in inclusive-convergent (inquiry/problem-solving) dialogue, as they tried to reach an answer to the problem of which project or topic to choose and how to tackle it.

In this and other seminars, I clearly noticed a difference between tutor-led and student-led dialogue in terms of its form and this will be explored in chapter eight. Here I will explore some of the ways that different types of dialogue, including those in the example above, manifest themselves in the seminars and the kinds of learning with which they are associated.

Burbules (1993: 112) makes the case that there are two different types of 'divergent' dialogue. 'Dialogue as conversation' emphasises the consonances, while 'dialogue as debate' stresses the dissonances. Inclusive-divergent or 'dialogue as conversation' (such as advocated by Dewey and Freire) and critical-divergent or dialogue as debate (such as the polemic debate seen in the discipline of law's Moot Courts) were both apparent, particularly the former.

Applebee (1996: 127) suggests that students' 'conversational' engagement with their curriculum supports their acculturation into the traditions of thinking associated with their discipline and sees this as central to a fuller learning experience. Such an approach falls within Burbules's (1993: 112-16) 'dialogue as conversation' (inclusive-divergent) category. Students never explicitly mentioned their acculturation into the discipline and the idea of learning to be historians, though they alluded to it in a number of ways, not always in a positive manner. As noted earlier, in their first year, even when I prompted them, they were unable to see the connection between the study-skills element of 'Learning History' and the discipline of history. Sam (1st year) responded to my suggestion that 'Learning History' might have been 'part of settling you in as a student' by saying that he was 'not actually sure what the application is in terms of history'. As the years progressed, they spoke more generally about 'a good feeling' in the class' (Sandy, 3rd year), but never linked it to becoming a historian.

Many tutors, on the other hand, spoke at length about this process of acculturation. Jo says, 'I'm training them, I suppose is a good word to use, to put forward historians' views'. The tutor goes on to stress that it is not enough for the student to simply accept the views of others, rather the student must critically evaluate them. However, the first step the student has to take is to be open to new views and engage in inclusive-divergent discussion. A couple of tutors took this idea beyond the concept of being a

historian to the very nature of university education and 'academic freedom'.

Pat says,

> I feel very strongly that that's the case, that we're producing young people who are able to think for themselves […] and I think the seminar environment is one that is very much encouraged, where they can have discussions among themselves and, you know, I've had numerous instances where on the self-evaluation form people have said, 'Well, actually, I've come into this topic with a set of ideas that I've then had challenged. And I then change my ideas about it because of things that have been said in the seminars - you know, where I've been forced to confront issues. And it's made me change my mind by actually going through these, you know, myself and thinking through these issues anew. And I think, really, that is incredibly powerful and that it really is part of producing critical thinkers. And not just about history but about everything.

This is part of an uninterrupted five hundred word speech, which conveys Pat's passion and commitment. The speech shifts from the tutor's perspective to the students' who are afforded direct speech. There is a high proportion of 'I's and 'my's, strong qualifiers ('very strongly', 'very much encouraged', 'actually', 'incredibly powerful', 'really') and powerful verbs ('forced', 'confront', 'made me'). The final all-encompassing phrase that this is, 'Not just about history, but about everything', shows the extent of the tutor's beliefs and conviction. Clearly, the belief in inclusive-divergent, dialogic communication is fundamental to this tutor's professional belief system.

Other tutors echo this positive view of inclusive-divergent dialogue. Sacha sees the main aim of 'Learning History' as helping the students 'to become a historian'. Jo uses the same phrase and adds that

> We're developing them intellectually and I think we are opening their minds. […] And the skills that they develop as historians will hopefully be skills that can be transferred into their lives after history. […] It's a criticality of mind, it's open-minded, it's a way of looking at life, I think, that we teach them.

The emphasis on open-mindedness, repeated twice, coupled with the explicit reference to its all-encompassing 'way of looking at life', drives home that inclusive-divergent thinking is not merely a mode of communication, but an ideology. This view echoes those of some of the key advocates of dialogue, notably Dewey (1916) and Freire (1996), as well as being the radical underpinning of Bakhtin's views and the reason behind his exile by the Marxist government of his day. It is echoed in the comments of Sacha, a tutor, who describes discussion as 'an exercise in itself,' saying that 'We're not marking them on what they know, we're marking them on the process of exploring that subject matter'. This is not a focus on process as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. The process is seen as a vital set of professional skills that will allow the student to seek out, test and judge future potential sources of knowledge.

I observed many examples of this kind of inclusive-divergent dialogue. It was generally the form adopted when student-leaders led a whole-class plenary after a period of small-group discussion and this occurred in almost every seminar observed. This is an example of the field-notes taken in relation to plenaries in a third-year, student-led, assessed seminar:

> Responses were not given to everything the students said in feedback sessions, though everything was received with a positive word – 'yep', 'good', 'excellent', 'absolutely', nods abounded. At the end of each feedback session the tutor would briefly intervene to develop one of the points, giving evidence, examples in a few sentences of confirmation and elaboration. There was no criticism or undermining of ideas by students or tutor in these sessions.

There is a clear sense that the student leaders, and in this case the tutor[95], were doing everything that they could to welcome all views, however different, using a range of positive words.

When I listened in on small-group discussions[96], they also tended to use an inclusive-divergent approach as the standard mode of communication. This is recorded in my field-notes with such comments as:

> Discussion in groups very even and all-inclusive. (2nd year, student-led, assessed seminar)

> The group had a broadly inclusive-divergent attitude. (2nd year, student-led, assessed seminar)

> A general liberal approach seemed to be taken, underpinned by a belief that the discussion could open their minds and help them progress in their understanding. (3rd year, student-led, assessed seminar)

This is not to say that small-group discussion was always 'inclusive-divergent'. Students were observed to break into more 'critical-divergent' forms when a particularly contentious and debatable point occurred. Equally, the discussion became 'inclusive-convergent', if students were charged with undertaking a specific, closed task that required them to reach a joint decision. Sometimes a discussion became convergent when all students agreed about a contentious issue and what I call a 'building pattern' occurred, where each speaker sought to add an argument to build on and reinforce the group's shared view.

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[95] In some student-led seminars tutors would add occasional comments, but in others they remained silent.

[96] I did not normally note down details about what was said in small-group discussion, so I am only able to draw on general comments in my field-notes.

The concept of inclusivity is linguistically at odds with more critical forms of dialogue. Being critical is one of the defining skills of the historian and arguably of academics in general. According to the tutors and students cited above, a critical mode of communication appears to be a key ingredient of a seminar experienced as successful. Critical-divergent or dialogue as debate (Burbules 1993) occurs in the seminars in various forms, in brief exchanges between students in small-group and whole-class discussions, in formal debates of various kinds (for example, 'polemic two-way', 'balloon', 'hot seating,' 'interviews-in-role'), all of which I observed, and during the preparation for the seminars where the students were working out their argument.

Pat, a tutor, actively encourages her/his students to argue with him/her stressing how views can only be challenged and changed through such an encounter:

> My view of that is to encourage them […] to disagree with me. But I want them to disagree with me because that's what we're here for and, you know, I really want to have that kind of discussion because it's going to challenge my view of things.

Disagreeing with each other is 'what we're here for' and Pat 'really wants' this kind of discussion, not just the more co-operative kind. Another tutor, Jo, similarly stresses the importance of developing a critical mindset. S/he wants them to 'put forward historians' views, but I also expect them to be critical of those views'. Jo notes that single-honours students develop this skill, but, 'quite often you have subsidiary students who don't really want to engage'. Critical-divergent dialogue brings about 'engage[ment]'.

It is not just tutors that value this kind of engagement. Charlie (2nd

year) also drives home the importance of argument:

> You need to have gone off and done some research and you know
> have got together a good argument. And you need to be sort of
> quite confident on the day and actually be willing to say this, you
> know, and stand up for your argument and actually argue in favour of
> something. And that's actually quite a good debate then, because as
> long as someone else does that then you've got two people arguing
> and other people join in and contribute as much as they want really.

Charlie is suggesting that this way of communicating is triggered when two

people deliberately move into that mode. There is an emphasis on the

activity of the student: 'you need to'; 'have gone'; 'have got together'; 'be

confident'; 'be willing to say'; 'stand up for'; and 'actually argue'. The

student cannot do this alone, though, for a polemic mode of communication

is dependent on another person adopting a similarly agonistic approach.

Ironically, the speaker wishing to engage in a polemical debate is arguably

even more dependent on the response of the other than a more inclusive

mode of communication.   This begins to deconstruct any concept that

polemical discourse can not be dialogic.

Bakhtin's concepts of 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive'

dialogue illuminate this further. It may seem that in the polemic the speaker

is closed to the listener's viewpoint and is simply powerfully asserting her/his

own viewpoint, but in actual fact, unless it is 'authoritative' discourse, in

order to persuade the listener of the validity of his/her view, they have to

take account of the listener's perspective and build their argument and

rhetoric in a way that maximises the persuasiveness of their argument. As a

result, even polemic dialogue can be dialogic in the sense used by Bakhtin

(1986: 94), because

> From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response.

As a result of this openness to the listener, the understanding and

perspectives of the speaker are inevitably informed and amended by the

experience of making the case, even if this is masked by the rules of a

polemic game, such as a debate, where the speaker has to pretend to be

unchanged for the duration of the activity. As Vološinov (1986: 102-03) says,

> Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the *effect of interaction between speaker and listener.* (Vološinov's italics).

Through the debate, a shared meaning is arrived at despite the ostensibly

opposing positions.

The observations of moments of critical-divergent dialogue in the

seminars showed this to be the case. In the first year, during the first

'Learning History' module, students are explicitly introduced to the structures

and nature of polemical debate. The group undertakes an assessed whole-

class debate where the class is divided into three sub-groups, those who were

'for' the motion, those 'against' and the 'jury', and where the class observed

was explicitly told that 'Everyone needs to know both sides'. In the debate,

they were advised, according to my field-notes, to say,

> This is what I think, why I think it, what others opposed to it might think, and here's the evidence why it's wrong. Go away, hold several meetings, decide what you want to do.

All of these activities require active engagement with the other side's perspective (1st year seminar). The presence of the jury acts as a physical reminder of the dialogic process. It voices the outcome of the interaction between the different speakers. Through this structured engagement with various perspectives, the students' attention is drawn to the dialogic process itself.

By the second and third years, the debates are less formal and are just one optional element of the interactive seminars. The students choose to use a debate because it 'scaffolds' the engagement of the group with the issues under discussion (Bruner 1978). One second-year, student-led, assessed seminar included the following balloon debate. During the preparatory stage, where each table had to prepare the speech of the 'famous' person representing them in the balloon, field-notes reveal that 'discussion flowed easily', the 'student leaders were circulating and contributing but not dominating', there were 'lots of smiles' and sometimes 'two discussions broke out at the same table'. Ultimately, the balloon debate speakers 'marshalled a range of reasons' to justify their continued existence and these 'were delivered succinctly'. Afterwards in the verbal de-brief with the tutor, the students noted that it was 'good to see people were listening', that 'the debate made everyone speak and that 'it broke our own presentations up' (2nd year seminar). Together the experience of engaging in the polemic debate required all the students in the group to take account of each others' views and those of other historians, to listen and speak actively and with engagement, and to develop their own understanding of the material in

hand. This is dialogic communication where meaning arises not from the confident assertion of evidenced views, but from 'the effect of interaction' (Vološinov 1986: 102-03).

Another example of 'critical-divergent' dialogue occurred during a small-group discussion during a role-play activity based on a *Pop Idol*-style talent show, where the group members were in the role of critical judges and commentators. My field-notes record such comments as:

> Students discussed animatedly in groups, chipping in, arguing with a will. Much smiling and coughing from excess emotion. (2nd year, student-led, assessed seminar)

The debate about the merits of the historical figures was active and was being enjoyed for its own sake. Although ostensibly they were seeking to reach a conclusion about who was the greatest figure, there was actually no will to reach a conclusion, but great pleasure in and intention to perpetuate the polemic debate with 'much smiling and coughing' for as long as was allowed.

The seminars clearly contained inclusive-divergent and critical-divergent dialogue both of which are seen by the tutors and students as central to the learning process, but the seminars also contained the other two types of dialogue cited by Burbules: inclusive-convergent/dialogue as inquiry, which might be thought of as a problem-solving approach, and critical-convergent/dialogue as instruction, such as that practiced by Socrates, advocated by Bruner (1966: 72) and frequently seen in the classroom in the form of more and less effective IRF structures (Burbules 1993: 116-18). Given

the emphasis on critical engagement and argument, it would be easy to

conclude that key features of seminars, which are experienced as successful,

were the adoption of divergent dialogic discussion, but large parts of the

discussions observed were much more convergent in their structure.

One third-year seminar included both inclusive and critical-convergent

dialogue. Although unassessed, it was student-led and typified the kind of

source work that I saw in several other assessed seminars. The module

booklet described the seminars as follows:

> It is up to seminar leaders how the discussion is organised: you could
> have a debate, a trial, a conventional round table discussion and so
> on. Initial presentations should be no more than 10mins in length.
> […] Remember the main purpose of the presentation is not to recount
> or list chronological events or historical 'facts' (the group will have got
> to grips with these basics in their preparatory reading) but to provide
> a launching pad for lively informed discussion.

The discussion that was observed was indeed 'lively and informed', both in

the part of the seminar that focused on the general exploration of the topic

and the final third which revolved around the gobbet'[97] exercise. Later

interviews with the tutor[98] and one of the students (Toni) indicated that they

both thought the discussion had provided a positive learning experience.

The first two-thirds of the seminar was a general discussion of the

topic. Field-notes from the beginning of the seminar are recorded thus and

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[97] In the 'gobbet' exercise, students analyse an extract from a source document (the gobbet) in order to engage in increasingly close readings with the purpose of gleaning as much understanding about the source and its context as possible, answering questions such as what, by whom, for whom, why, when and so forth.   Though often used as examination tests, gobbet exercises and other, more open-ended source work, occur frequently in the seminars.

[98] Tutor is not referenced to preserve anonymity.

show a broadly inclusive-convergent approach as together the group tried to

arrive at a consensus about the issue in question:

> One of the student seminar leaders (L1) posed a question as the first thing for them 'to think about'.
> Comments/discussion began immediately.
> Class member 2 (C2) qualified the question.
> L1 countered the implied argument in his/her counter-question
> C2 said, 'But just a quick point which we haven't looked at …' – and asked a question.
> L1 Answered.
> Leader 2 (L2) Qualified
> C2/L1 quick fire exchange in question/answer format
> C1 checked pronunciation of [foreign …] name with tutor who nodded.
> Pace quick, fast spoken exchange. (3rd year seminar)

This brisk exchange is already not just a simple question/answer exchange.

The class member took the initiative, developed and took ownership of the

question posed by the leader and showed engagement with the underlying

issues and assumptions. The structure is clearly inclusive-convergent where

there is a sense of equality between all the participants who each had the

implicit right to have their voice heard and who collectively were drilling

down to get to the heart of the issue under discussion and reach a common

understanding. This exchange did not adopt a classic IRF pattern with the

leaders in the role of a wise Socrates-like figure, perhaps because the student

leaders lacked the authority naturally attributed to tutors.

This form of interaction continued to be the vein of the discussion

which widened to include most members of the group. There was then a

short break before the 'gobbet' exercises, which followed a much more

critical-convergent, IRF structure, because the student leaders here 'knew the

answers' since they had chosen the texts. Perhaps because of this they

prompted, 'scaffolded', and managed the discussion to ensure the

participants interrogated the text and drew on their own knowledge and

skills to elicit the answer from the group in the manner of Socratic dialogue.

Examples of critical-convergent/dialogue as instruction led by tutors

were also observed. Field-notes record the following exchange in a tutor-led,

whole-class discussion in a third-year class:

> Sustained two-way dialogue between tutor and student ensued, each
> offering contributions of several sentences. It was quite Socratic with
> the teacher helping the student to explore and test ideas to develop
> understanding, though it was still somewhat open-ended. (3rd year
> seminar)

The tutor did not give answers but engaged in a form of discussion where

s/he was in the role of a knowledgeable facilitator, enabling the student to

work through a learning process. It is 'scaffolding' of a form, but is

something much richer than a typical IRF question/answer structure, because

the exchange is more extended, open-ended and predominantly uses

statements rather than questions and answers.

Such types of inclusive and critical-convergent dialogue proved to be

typical of all the seminars observed. Both kinds of convergent dialogue

contained evidence of encounters which provided positive learning

experiences. In the example above (page 228) from the student-led,

unassessed, third-year seminar, the class member (C2) was clearly initiating

and actively participating in the discussion. Some of her/his comments were

questions and some were statements. Indeed, s/he offered a particularly

explicit example of another of Bakhtin's defining characteristics of dialogic

discourse, when she said, 'Just a quick point', which turned out to be a question to help her clarify her own understanding. Bakhtin notes that, 'Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign' (1986: 7; Bakhtin's italics) and that, 'Anything that does not answer a question is devoid of sense for us' (1986: 145). The leaders and group members quoted above all demonstrated the intrinsically questioning/answering nature of every utterance which both answers the explicit or implicit question in the previous utterance or wider linguistic context and asks a similarly explicit or implicit question of the listener or receiving context. The IRF pattern of communication is often criticised for only prompting a surface exploration of the issues (Andersen *et al.* 1999: 372; Dillon 1994a: 78; Nunn 2001: 1; McCarthy 1991: 19; McDonough and Shaw 1993: 243), but it *can* be as much a dialogic exchange as any divergent discussion. The examples above show that the students engaged with the issues and used questioning to respond to and prompt each other to deeper levels of understanding.

One of the tutors, Frances, also identified the quality of questioning as significant, a common argument in the literature on discussion (Andersen *et al.* 1999: 366-371; Brookfield and Preskill 1999: 67-72). Frances recognises that this questioning culture is not a set of practices, but a participatory culture that pervades the department:

> I do remember in [my previous institution …], and it might just be the questions I asked, but asking questions and, really, there being silence and nothing, nothing being said. […] What lies behind 'Learning History' permeates through to the other modules that we teach and I'm sure that, you know, both staff and students have that assumption

that students participate in the seminar. And I suppose also I think the fact that we do run assessed seminars, where students essentially run the seminar completely, probably have been beneficial.

Asking the right kind of questions is important, but the creation of a culture where both tutors and students routinely engage in dialogic participation is even more fundamental to student learning.

7.3.6   Dialogue which enables assimilation

Bakhtin (1981: 282) argues that 'every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system', a process that is central to a constructivist's view of learning like Prosser and Trigwell's (1999: 13). When students are motivated, they begin to engage with the material and the issues that are raised. Jac (2nd year) points to this when s/he describes the most effective seminars as being those which are issues rather than knowledge-based:

> Certain modules, perhaps the more political ones, are, like, more conducive to a debate, you know that they're more, you know, is it energetic? […] Because in the internal history of the Middle East […it's] got that quite contemporary feel but it sometimes like … [trails off]. It's much harder to get that when you're talking about the Gothic period, […] because you know you could read every book about Gothic Renaissance history and, really, all you're reading is some other people's opinion about it. If it's like recent history, you can, it's more contemporary, more sort of focused on your, like, life. You have more of a command of, like, the deeper level of knowledge.

S/he is trying to describe how speakers need to be able to engage with listeners for effective dialogue to be experienced. Bakhtin (1986: 88) describes this as follows:

> Any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an *other's* word, which belongs

to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and, finally, as *my* word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression. (Bakhtin's italics)

Jac is already able to assume confidently that a word means little in itself and that when spoken by others it belongs to them and 'all you're reading is some other people's opinion'.   S/he also recognises that 'energetic' debate which focuses more 'on your […] life' leads to the expression of '*my* word' (Bakhtin 1986: 88) where 'you have more of a command of, like, the deeper level of knowledge'. Achieving this 'deeper level of knowledge' is the aim of advocates of 'approaches to learning' theory and both Bakhtin and this student believe that linking '*my* word' to 'an *other's* word' is an important element in this process.

The same point emerges in this second-year student's comments about successful discussion, which similarly tracks the transition from seeing knowledge as the 'neutral word', through to it being the opinion of others, to making it '*my* word':

> You need to have gone off and done some research and you know have got together a good argument and you need to be sort of quite confident on the day and actually be willing to say this, you know, and stand up for your argument and actually argue in favour of something. (Charlie)

The ingredients once again appear to be preparation, 'done some research', motivation and interest, 'willing to say this', and dialogic participation, 'stand up for your argument'. This student attributes the willingness to a feeling of confidence, while another student qualifies this saying that 'somebody might be really quiet, but then, if they know their stuff, then they'll be confident'

(Billie, 1ˢᵗ year). When this debate between people starts to happen, Bakhtin

(1986: 89) argues that

> the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and
> developed in continuous and constant interaction with others'
> individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some
> degree as the process of *assimilation* – more or less creative – of
> others' words. (Bakhtin's italics)

Assimilation of others' words leads to an understanding of their views.

Students spoke indirectly of Bakhtin's process of dialogic assimilation.

Charlie (2ⁿᵈ year) praised role-play because

> You're seeing someone arguing from a certain position and, yeah, it
> does help your understanding and again it's quite a novel approach to
> it as well. Not just someone standing and just speaking about
> something quite abstract, you know, when they're taking on the
> character.

Sandy (3ʳᵈ year) pointed to the new ways of seeing that the discussions in

history had offered him/her, as opposed to those Sandy had experienced in

his/her other joint discipline, politics:

> You know it will be a range of opinions again, like I said. One thing I
> have noticed most about, like, this seminar is people coming up with
> stuff that I hadn't even, hadn't crossed my mind in that sense and it's
> the way people interpret different readings and the way their mind
> works. So in that sense I suppose it's different.

This sense of how the seminars are different is because, instead of being

purely polemic, the student begins to assimilate the ideas of others. They

discover how other people's minds work and learn how to see things from

their perspectives. As Bakhtin (1984a: 271) argues, 'it forces them to perceive

better their own possibilities and boundaries, that is, to overcome their own

naivetê' (Bakhtin's italics). It is the way that the acculturation spoken of by

Lave and Wenger ('communities of practice' - 1991) and Applebee ('cultural

traditions of knowing and doing' – 1996: *vii*) takes place. This kind of

dialogue marks the difference between observing others' views and taking in

what these views can offer. When ideas are assimilated, cultures do not

merge and mix, rather they are mutually enriched while each retaining their

distinctiveness (Bakhtin 1986: 7). This is Sandy's feeling, when s/he says

others were 'coming up with stuff […] that hadn't crossed my mind'. This is

the moment when new knowledge is assimilated and when dialogic learning

takes place.

7.4   Conclusion

Chapter six discussed the impact of assessing the seminars and one of

the issues it identified was the relationship between the force of assessment

and the importance of students choosing to engage willingly and therefore

more deeply in the process of critical engagement and scholarly enquiry. This

chapter has explored the medium through which students can, if we accept

Bakhtin's arguments, willingly and fully engage in a transformative manner

with the issues the course raises. It has argued that dialogic communication

is powerful and is a real possibility in all interactive situations, assessed and

unassessed, and in all forms of dialogue, critical and inclusive, convergent

and divergent.

In their interviews, tutors and students referred to the importance,

but also the variability of the effectiveness of discussion. They see all kinds of

dialogue as being potentially beneficial, but certain conditions need to be in

place for them to be effective. The evidence presented here suggests that there needs to be a sufficient knowledge and skills-base with which the class can work. Leaders and class members alike need to have at their disposal a range of facilitation skills, notably questioning which is seen as a powerful tool for keeping a discussion on track.   They also need to be familiar with a selection of structures and activities that can be adopted, particularly the use of small-scale activities, which change every five to twenty minutes so that different modes of dialogue come in to play and student concentration is maximised. When these conditions are met, the participants believed, and this belief was backed up by my observations, that there was an opportunity for the kind of dialogic communication to occur that they value.

The empirical data confirms that when communication becomes dialogic, students experience 'a light flash' (Bakhtin 1986: 162). Their 'speech experience' 'is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' (Bakhtin 1986: 89) forcing them 'to better perceive their own possibilities and boundaries' (Bakhtin 1984a: 271). Dialogic communication is woven through with 'internally persuasive discourse' which does not rely on authority (Bakhtin 1981: 345) and which effectively creates 'an active responsive understanding' (Bakhtin 1986: 94). Bakhtin (1981: 347) says that omnipresent 'internally persuasive' discourses have the potential to change the individual's views and perspectives and can be more or less overt in any given speech situation. They are a powerfully influential element of the positive learning experience that the students say they have undergone. It motivates them, 'scaffolds' their intellectual development and engages them

actively in verbal interaction of all kinds. However, in themselves 'internally persuasive' discourses are neither positive nor negative. Some which had a positive influence on the students' learning have already been cited, but others have the potential to derail the dialogic culture. These issues are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 8 - Student-leadership: the 'living interaction of social forces'

8.1   Introduction

The previous two chapters addressed the issues of assessment and dialogue and this final analytical chapter focuses on the student-led dimension of the seminars, which is another of their three defining features. Assessment appears to act as an important, extrinsic motivating force by creating a context within which students have the opportunity to encounter discussion. Dialogue appears to act as a means of intrinsically motivating students so that they engage with the issues. However, there is inevitably a tension between the push of authority and the pull of open-ended discussion in which participants can choose whether or not to engage. This chapter explores this tension considering the effect of tutor intervention and peer involvement on the student learning experience. As with the previous chapter, many of the ideas discussed here can be applied by the reader to unassessed seminars, but with the *caveat* that assessment has influenced this case and these findings.

The chapter begins with an overview of the relationship between learning, ideology and culture. It then moves on to the analysis of the empirical data, drawing on Bakhtin's (1981: 272) ideas about dialogics, 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces and personal development to shed light on the power dynamics at work in the seminars. It is suggested that the lack of a clear authority figure, the constant movement from one discourse and

'speech genre' (Bakhtin 1986: 60) to another and the performative dimension of the seminars enable students to break free of the established identities that they bring to the classroom and open themselves to a deeper learning experience, transforming the way they think about their subject knowledge and skills. If a balance can be achieved between the 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourses (Bakhtin 1981: 342), between the tutor and the students, between passivity and activity, then a potentially powerful environment is created, where the 'living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41) works to support rather than hinder learning.

8.2   Learning, ideology and culture

The issue of power is inextricably linked to that of ideology and this in turn is expressed through language. Vološinov (1986: 70) argues that 'Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behaviour and ideology' and language can be used to include, exclude or otherwise position groups and individuals (Cameron 1985). Language used in the educational environment is no exception. In themselves, ideologies are neither good nor bad, but they are always perceived as having some kind of value and they have a significant influence, overtly and covertly, on the university classroom where all forms of dialogue are saturated with them. Dialogue is at once the means by which ideology is expressed and the process through which ideological influence is dispersed. Claims have been made that dialogue can create 'a culture of mutuality, a dialogical culture, a democratic culture' (Bhabha and Gilman 2001: 6; see also: Dewey 1916), echoing Bakhtinian

language. Dewey's focus on 'transactive inquiry' is similar to Bakhtin's 'dialogic framework' and both believe it can aid reflective learning, but is affected by ideology (Wegerif 2007a: 38).

Bakhtin has provided a useful general explanation of why this is the case. Since the advent of 'polyglossic' cultures

> There is no more peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons […] and so forth. (Bakhtin 1981: 12)

Within the classroom these dialects and languages will jostle and compete with each other, variously experiencing dominance and subordination, and dialogising into hybrid forms. Bakhtin's list of discourses could be extended to include some of the many different discourses or languages of the classroom, academe and government educational policy, those belonging to different gender, ethnic, national, regional, age, class groups and so on. All these and more are present in every classroom, so when students speak they are using a language that

> is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (Bakhtin 1981: 294)

It is because of these variously present and more or less covert discourses that classroom discussion is difficult to prescribe, describe and assess.

Researchers have explored the different ways in which those who are not part of the dominant group or class find themselves both metaphorically and literally silenced by dominant discourses considering in particular the

effect of the key discourses of gender, class and race and how these define individual identity and influence learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule 1986; Bowl 2003; Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Butler 2001; Kaplan 2001). The explicit rules and implicit cultural practices of academe are mystifying to students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds (Bowl 2003: 124). In the university sector practice has often favoured a male, western, middle-class discourse, stressing the presentation of knowledge which relies on the hierarchical structure of the tutor as the active presenter and the student as the passive addressee. This is clearly the format of lectures, but even seminars can easily become interactive lectures where the tutor remains firmly in charge.

Dialogic interaction can break down this pattern involving everyone in the active process of teaching and learning (Freire 1996: 53). This view has been advocated by the tradition of critical pedagogues (such as Apple and Weis 1983; Freire 1996; Giroux 1997; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren and Peters 1996; Kincheloe 2008). Freire (1996: 70), for example, argues that

> Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument […]. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another.

Flecha (2000) speaks of 'dialogic learning' as a specific methodology for informal adult education. He (2000: 1) argues that 'dialogic learning' should be egalitarian, develop cultural intelligence, create meaning, have an instrumental as well as a transformative dimension and encourage solidarity and equality. It is an approach that, according to its advocates, can engage

all learners, not just those from the dominant group, which is a point of particular relevance to any generalisations made about the case studied here since the students tend to be from a historically privileged class of people.

Bakhtin's theories explain how this is possible. He (1981: 272) points to the 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces that are at work in language and how these stop the individual being brainwashed into accepting all that they encounter. Dominant hegemonic discourses exert powerful 'centripetal' forces, but the 'centrifugal' forces of 'living heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1981: 272) prevent the dominant discourses from having full control of any dialogue. The result is what Vološinov (1986: 41) calls the 'living interaction of social forces'. 'Centrifugal' forces also distribute the 'tacit knowledge' (Applebee 1996: 11) and 'non-formal requirements or implicit messages that are picked up or passed on by students, that suggest strategies for academic survival or success' (Miller and Parlett 1974: 13). I will show how, in the student-led seminars, students are able to negotiate some of these implicit messages, which can act as barriers to a full engagement with educational opportunities. Doran *et al*. (2000: 205) found that in student-led seminars the 'the results' were 'very impressive', which is a view endorsed here. In student-led seminars, students are not able to be silenced by the articulacy of the tutors or, indeed, some of their peers. They are not able to stay physically at the side or the back of the classroom. They must come forward to the position of authority. They are no longer able to listen to 'knowledge-out-of-context' (Applebee 1996: 2), but must participate in situated learning.

In the seminars studied here there are a wide range of group activities, including everything from paired and small-group discussion to plenaries, presentations and debates. Group work is, in effect, a student-led activity, once any briefing by the tutor is complete. Many claims have been made and much advice offered about collaborative group work (Abercrombie 1970; Allen and Lloyd-Jones 1998; Bruffee 1993; Exley and Dennick 2004; Foyle 1995; Hendry, Heinrich, Lyon, Barratt, Simpson and Hyde 2005; Millis and Cottell 1997; Race 2000; Rudduck 1978; Thorley and Gregory 1994). Its merits for involving students in active discussion have been widely recognised for decades. Working together provides opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to solve complex problems (Falchikov 2007: 131), argued to be one of the characteristics of a 'deep' approach to learning.

When students work in groups, the oral interaction also has the effect of dispersing dominant discourses as they jostle and dialogise with each other, potentially preventing the effect of a dominant tutor (Doran *et al.* 2000: 200; Francis 1988: 269-270). However, dialogue is not an ideological free-for-all, rather it is an attempt by the speakers to persuade the listening audience to accept their view of the world through the, mostly unconscious, use of 'internally persuasive' discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 345-46). I will show that making the seminars student-led increases the opportunity for 'internally persuasive' discourse to occur and for students to assimilate ideas and approaches that were previously foreign to them.

Student-led seminars not only contain a variety of modes of communication which allow for a constant interplay between discourses and a jostling of 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces, but they are also formed of peer-to-peer dialogue rather than tutor-student interaction. Neary and Thody (2009: 35) argue that 'there seems to be general agreement that learning is most effective when it is self-initiated and interconnected' and peer-to-peer dialogue is a mode of interaction that supports and enables both of these characteristics. The case study seminars provide unusually extended opportunities for peer-to-peer dialogue and the effect of this on student learning is the focus of this chapter. It presents evidence that, with tutor-student dialogue, it is very hard to overcome the hierarchy of power but, with student-to-student dialogue, there are higher degrees of uncertainty, not just about knowledge and truth, but also socio-linguistic skills. Relationships are inevitably affected by power, but hierarchies are of a different order and they are constantly changing, as the group moves from one activity and mode of communication to another, preventing one view or voice dominating, and legitimising diverse perspectives.

8.3 Analysis

8.3.1 Tutors, students and power dynamics

Power in the university classroom is expressed through the language used by both tutors and students. Whoever has a 'voice' has the opportunity to influence their listeners, but some speakers enter the dialogic arena with

greater authority than others. This creates what Readings (1996: 161) calls an

'asymmetrical obligation, which appears to both sides as problematic'. This

chapter considers this 'asymmetrical obligation' and argues that, because of

this, there is a notable difference between tutor-led and student-led

seminars. The empirical analysis begins with a consideration of some of the

immediate and direct influences of power, notably the physical environment

and the actions of the tutor during seminar discussion, noting the influence

of 'authoritative' discourse and the effect of Bakhtin's (1986: 126) concept of

the 'superaddressee'. It will then move on to consider cross-cutting, socio-

linguistic ideologies such as gender, race, age and class and how these

influence the seminar learning experience of the students. This will include a

consideration of how the linguistic dynamic of dialogic interaction, that

chapter seven showed was frequently created in the seminars, can ensure

that a diverse range of perspectives is shared and explored. It suggests that

this is because the 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces can create a self-

balancing socio-linguistic dynamic that ensures extreme ideological

behaviours are countered and moderated. It concludes with an examination

of performance techniques and how these can open up new ways of thinking

that traditional seminar activities cannot achieve.

8.3.2   The influence of physical structures on the learning environment

'Authoritative' discourse, as it manifests itself within higher education,

is associated with the abstract power of the university. It demands respect as

the source of all knowledge. This implicit influence is coupled with the

concrete power of the assessment regime, which has the ability to expel and repress anyone who does not conform. Two ways in which this 'authoritative' discourse manifests itself is through the physical environment and through the presence and behaviour of the tutor. I will begin with the influence of space because the evidence indicates that this is a relatively minor factor in the learning experience compared with the effect of human factors.

Bakhtin acknowledges that speech is the expression not just of 'centrifugal', divergent forces and 'centripetal', convergent forces, but also of diachronic and synchronic elements. The diachronic elements of speech are those which emerge from the socio-linguistic history of the participants, while the synchronic elements are the influences present in the immediate context. For Bakhtin (1986: 134), every utterance is also 'chronotopic, that is, it includes both the spatial and temporal aspects'. While the temporal aspects include the previous experiences of the individuals, the spatial aspects include the immediate formal structures and practices that define the seminars. For Vološinov (1986: 41), 'A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces', making the utterance the expression of the synchronic and diachronic, temporal and spatial, and 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces of language.

The physical environment is one such structure which influences learning (Gair and Mullins 2001: 27-30) and observations revealed that it variously supported and hindered the emergence of a dialogic, as opposed to

a presentational mode of communication. University buildings frequently adopt physical structures that signal the institution's mission and values (Neary and Thody 2009: 30) and these are expressed through its built environment, whether this is through the location of a tutor's office on a corridor full of closed doors or the lecture theatre layout that allows the tutor to observe everyone simultaneously. Recognising this, recent projects have started to design spaces that facilitate students' ability to work collaboratively with their peers (AUDE 2009; Francis and Raftery 2005; University of Warwick 2009). These designs explicitly try to counter the effect of the deification of university staff (Belenky *et al.* 1986: 216) that traditional building structures can have and to explore the possibilities of 'non-representational' forms of space (Neary and Thody 2009: 33). Such matters may have a particularly powerful effect on those who have been traditionally marginalised from higher education. Creating a 'comfortable class environment' (Habib 2007: 3) is, therefore, important.

The seminars had the advantage of taking place within one building which belonged to the department and with which all the students were familiar after a few weeks. Sometimes there were distracting elements, such as sound through a folding wall that would open up two rooms into one, the noise of classes waiting outside in the foyer, the cold when the heating was malfunctioning, the oppressive quality of certain rooms due to a lack of natural light and so forth. Mostly, though, the students seemed not to be unduly troubled by such matters implying that a powerful learning experience can transcend immediate physical discomforts, something that is

apparent in the work of Freire (1996) whose work was with the Brazilian poor. Nonetheless, observation revealed that the layout of the classrooms did have some impact.

Although variously advised to consider the arrangement of the tables, some classes took more care than others. In particular first and second-year classes tended to leave the room set out in whatever configuration it was already in. This could be a somewhat chaotic and irregular arrangement or it could be in rows facing the front. In typical fashion, students clustered at the back, meaning that on several occasions the presenting group were in front of a solid row of empty tables that created a wall between them and the students at the back. This immediately created a presentational rather than a dialogic dynamic, as did the use of lecterns when these were used. In classes that by good luck or good judgement were laid out in a way that had even-sized, well-distributed tables for discussion groups, and where the leading group made confident full and flexible use of floor-space without restricting themselves to a safe island at the front, I saw much more dialogic interaction. Awareness of these issues became more prevalent among the students at the higher levels as students took more ownership of the space and realised the impact that it could have (Ali and Terri, both 2nd years).

The tutor's use of furniture also has an influence on the behaviour of the students (Abercrombie 1989: 69; Andersen *et al.* 1999: 371; Doran *at al* 2000: 206; Neary and Thody 2009: 36-38). In the student-led seminars, the tutors tended to sit quietly at the side, aware of their influence, but

positioned so that they could occasionally contribute a comment or easily circulate to listen in on small-group discussion.   In the tutor-led seminars, they tended to make effective use of space and tutors spoke about the benefits of moving around tables to facilitate discussion (Sacha; Lesley).

8.3.3   The influence of the tutor

The physical environment appeared to have a relatively limited effect on learning compared with the human dimension. Tutors have a powerful influence on the power relations in the seminar classroom, creating the rules of engagement in a way that is sometimes mystifying to students, particularly those from families without experience of higher education (Bowl 2003: 124). Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, Readings (1996: 158) argues that tutors should be aware of the influence of their own authority and seek to establish a different kind of relationship with their students based on a

> pedagogy that is a *relation, a network of obligation.* In this sense, we might want to talk of the teacher as *rhetor* rather than *magister*, one who speaks in a rhetorical context rather than one whose discourse is self-authorizing. […] The *rhetor* is a speaker who takes account of the audience, while the *magister* is indifferent to the specificity of his or her addressees. (Readings's italics)

This kind of classroom dynamic based on the realisation by all participants in classroom dialogue, whether tutors or students, that they have a 'mutual obligation' (Readings 1996: 189) to each other is easier to achieve in theory than in practice, as this section on the influence of the tutor will demonstrate.

Even within student-led, assessed seminars the tutors have discretion about how to implement the seminars, including timetabling, group-size and how much they themselves intervene. This influence is in itself neither good nor bad and it can vary considerably as Lesley, a tutor, notes:

> So you can see a spectrum from if you're sitting in the corner watching what's going on and not saying a dicky bird to their being a bit of a nuisance really, sort of dominating the thing. [...] So it's quite a tricky one. I think certainly the students don't like it if you don't give them a guideline. They are a little nervous. 'We're students, you're supposed to know about it and tell us,' which is why I had that session at the end just to sort of dot the Is and cross the Ts and have my say.

One second-year student, Terri, certainly confirmed that they liked input from the tutor and strongly disliked only getting it from fellow students. Jac (2nd year) valued the assessed, student-led seminars, but pointed to the importance of the tutor's influence, because they have to get them 'off to a good start, then it encourages the students to deliver'.

Tutors varied in how comfortable they were to hand over control to the students, as Neary and Thody (2009: 39) note, and this section analyses a range of different types of tutor intervention[99] and how it can be managed to aid rather than hinder learning in both student-led and tutor-led seminars, describing the effect that each has on the socio-linguistic dynamics of the class. Davies and Lynch (1999) believe that tutors need to manage their own intervention in class discussion carefully, arguing that it is central to improving discussion in history seminars. The findings of this case study demonstrate that achieving a helpful level of intervention is not easy. Sacha,

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[99] These are labelled Examples 1 to 5 to aid clarity in the ensuing discussion. The tutors are not named to aid anonymity. Occasionally the field notes are abridged for the same purpose.

a tutor, acknowledges 'that, I do find it actually quite difficult to relinquish control [laughs] over the outcomes really'. Frances, a tutor who chooses not to use assessed seminars, comments that s/he made this choice because s/he felt that, if the seminars were assessed, then s/he could not intervene to correct mistakes, something s/he believed to be important. In Abercrombie's (1989: 76) study of her own practice, she notes that she tries to avoid unnecessary intervention in her own use of free discussion with students because, like Sacha, she believes it will quell the students' willingness to engage in discussion. However, although both Sacha and Abercrombie (1989: 76) did their best to avoid intervening and explicitly correcting students' mistakes, aware of the impact that their authority as tutors has on the students, they found the task difficult.

Perry, discussing college teaching in the 1960s, suggests why Sacha and Abercrombie's self-imposed restraint is likely to be the most helpful approach. Perry argues that students are often reduced to silence in class discussions, because they are being over-corrected by their tutors owing to a deep-seated tendency to view knowledge as 'fact'. Even where they take a 'less atomistic' view of knowledge and try to use open-ended discussion to help students 'develop their own thinking,' Perry's (1970: 237) study of several hundred tutor-student discussions shows that tutors still repeatedly succumb to the 'imperative of correction'. He (1970: 237) observes that

> three to five corrections of this kind appear sufficient to defeat the students' initiative for search and the flow of their exploration. The initiative for conversation then falls back upon the instructor, who then finds himself in a monologue or lecture, with the sensation of

being somehow trapped, compelled, by powerful forces, in himself
and the students, to do what he had never intended to do.

It is likely that students come to seminars with a long history of educational
experiences that have taught them that tutors often think they are wrong
and do not value their ideas. Even when the tutor goes to great lengths to
foster an open discussion and to avoid correcting or dominating the students,
silence is likely to be the initial response that they receive.

Because Sacha wants to fight the strong desire in him/her to seize
control of the discussion and correct any errors, s/he decouples the seminars
from the examination topics, tries to accept whatever is said on a given
subject without correcting or qualifying too much any views s/he believes are
wrong and concentrates on marking 'the process of exploring that subject
matter'. Observation revealed Sacha did indeed have a hands-off approach,
allowing the assessed seminars to be entirely managed by the students.

Even if tutors are aware of their influence in the classroom, try to
establish Readings's (1996: 189) culture of 'mutual obligation' and are clear
about when they are leading and offering input and when they have
handed-over control to the students, they are not always able to avoid
disrupting the dialogic flow with their voice of authority. In this third-year,
unassessed, student-led seminar (Example 1) there is a marked and distinct
shift in the power relations as initially the student, then the tutor, is seen as
the source of knowledge. The student leader has asked a question and a
peer has countered this with another question back to the student leader.

My field-notes record, 'Tutor silent during this, hand in front of mouth

(implying he is restraining himself from speaking)'. A few exchanges later

and the

> Tutor interjected with a question distinguishing between blame for
> the military and personal failure to deepen the discussion. 'You made
> a very good point but how […] why […] was it [this or that]?'

What happens next is interesting because the student leader attempts to

wrest control back to her/himself. The notes record the student leader saying

> 'We'll come on to that' (s/he clearly steered the discussion on without
> allowing the tutor's question to be answered). 'I'll do a quick
> summary'. Student leader gave a summary of the history. Tutor
> nodded and took a note at one point.

However, the class member, who has been previously counter questioning

the student leader, shifts his/her attention to the tutor and the dynamic shifts

so that the tutor is treated as the only source of knowledge in the room. This

dynamic is hard to shake off despite the tutor's best efforts to throw

questions back to the floor and return the authority to the student leader.

A similar pattern occurred in this second-year, assessed student-led

seminar (Example 2), where the tutor appeared to choose when a topic

warranted further development. Field-notes record that

> Plenary led by Student 2. It was his/her section. S/he sat in an
> informal manner in the middle of the students on a chair. S/he
> managed this skilfully. S/he was a competent 'teacher'.   Student
> leader took notes on the flipchart.
> Feedback from Group 1 - lack lustre, but okay.

At this point the tutor sat forward in her/his chair, which was positioned at

the side in a way that enabled this kind of intervention while remaining low

key at other times, and initiated an IRF dialogue. Afterwards the tutor

indicated that s/he had intervened because an important point was being glossed over in the 'lack-lustre' discussion. This matter-of-fact IRF exchange lasted several minutes. The same pattern was then repeated as the second group fed back:

> Student leader fed back for Group 2 well enough.
> Student leader synthesised the points and asked for a vote on whether [x or y] was the best approach. Students said they couldn't decide. Tutor intervened to insist they grapple with the subject and a couple of students from the class gave a fuller answer, which the tutor developed and then the student leader developed further. This was interesting because the skilled questioning of the tutor forced the students to deeper thought than the student leader could manage, despite being competent in his role as facilitator. (2nd year seminar)

The student leader had been guiding the class into thinking about this complex political issue in terms of a simple binary opposition asking which of the two views was correct. Then the tutor had intervened to force them to deconstruct this simple view, getting them to understand how the two political movements were inter-related. The seminar then moved on to another section and, perhaps because of this, the focus of authority shifted back to the student leaders in a way that the on-going, whole-class discussion in the previous Example 1 had found difficult to achieve, perhaps because it had been taken from a less structured, third-year, unassessed seminar.

Another example of a tutor's relationship with a class was of a different second-year module also with assessed, student-led seminars (Example 3). During small-group discussion, field-notes record, 'Volume level rises as chatter gets going. Tutor flits about'. My choice of the word 'flits' for the notes captures the unobtrusive role the tutor takes. During plenaries s/he sat quietly or confined him/herself to an affirmative point which re-

focused the group on the value of the speaking student's own comments. Field-notes record one such moment thus: 'Tutor pointed to its similarity with another source, earlier in the seminar – brief and succinct, a confirmation of the two student leaders' points' (2nd year seminar). The focus of authority stayed with the students throughout the seminar. This may have been because, as the tutor notes, 'This group really don't need any prompting to get going on discussion' and my notes confirm, 'The discussion did get going easily', but I would argue that the behaviour of the tutor has contributed to the creation of a level of ownership and confidence in the group that meant they were not looking towards him/her for knowledge, encouragement or correction.

This first-year, tutor-led, unassessed seminar revealed yet another kind of tutor-class intervention (Example 4). The tutor actively and explicitly refused to allow him/herself to become the students' prop in terms of knowledge and understanding. The first-year 'Learning History' class had, as one of its functions, the development of the students' study and seminar skills and the students were only in their second week of university education, fresh from the heavily teacher-focused environment of the school classroom.   The field-notes record a section from the middle of the seminar as follows:

> Tutor put a map on the OHP and talked through it.
> Tutor asked where they should start their discussion and why.
> Students answered with 2 or 3 sentence answers. Tutor pushed and they developed their ideas.
> Many 'why' questions.
> Tutor allowed silence when they didn't answer (up to 20secs). Then rephrased as simple questions.

German student stumbled with vocabulary. Tutor supported and helped.
Tutor asked student to explain and develop a point.
All students were chipping in.
Tutor did say 'No' to a factually inaccurate statement.
All students were alert and listening.
Voices were quiet. Pace was steady.
It was a good example of friendly recitation (IRF).
One student gave an extended, developed answer, speaking about her interest in the topic.
Very little note-taking.
There was a sense that the group was cumulatively piecing together knowledge of the [… topic]. (1st year seminar)

The tutor provided a prompt in the form of the map, but got the class to decide what questions it posed and why (in the manner of a gobbet). A full answer came, but the tutor challenged and 'scaffolded' (Bruner 1978) their exploration, enabling them to reach for points that had hitherto been out of their understanding without the prompt questions. The 'why' questions were notably frequent as the students were challenged to explore more deeply rather than move on to a new sub-topic.

This tutor frequently allowed silences both after his/her own questions and after student responses, something that is rare in classroom interaction according to Swift *et al.* (1988: 193), as well as my own observations of practice in the case study and at my own institution. 'Wait-time', as this silence has been called (Swift *et al.* 1988: 193), is believed to be important to learning through discussion, because it allows time for thoughtful or multiple responses to be developed and shared (Brookfield and Preskill 1999: 78-79; Dillon 1994a: 90; Exley and Dennick 2004: 47; Smith 2004). Normally classroom 'wait-time' is around 1 second (Swift *et al.* 1988: 193), but during the class discussed above, there was, after one question, a very, very long

silence (20 seconds) and many silences of around 5 seconds. Perry's (1970: 237) explanation of student silence, as discussed above, attributes it to tutors who over-correct their students leading them to lose confidence in their own ideas. Example 4 shows the tutor correcting the students quite explicitly and the field-notes record that this happened several times in other sections of the seminar. If Perry's argument is applied, it is perhaps unsurprising that the tutor has to make a point of unusual extended silences in order to get students to speak. These extended silence do, however, seem to achieve their desired purpose of getting the students to respond and Bakhtin's ideas explain why.

Once a dynamic of silence is established, a tutor feels an overwhelming need to answer their own question within just a couple of short seconds, because, as Bakhtin (1986: 127 argues, 'For the word (and, consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response*' (Bakhtin's italics). Silence normally indicates that the speaker has misjudged the communication and not connected with the listeners. Nonetheless, although the speaker is usually the one to break the silence, if s/he is patient, the listener will ultimately search for a connection they can make, reaching towards an understanding that was beyond them until that moment. In the Example 4 discussed above, the tutor generally does get an answer to his/her question simply by waiting around five seconds. On one occasion, s/he ultimately has to break the bigger question into smaller, staged questions, but this gets everyone participating again. Example 4 is an interesting example of IRF where the onus is on the students to produce the

knowledge and develop their understanding, not on the tutor to explain things to the students.

Another similar first-year session by the same tutor (Example 5) sees him/her refusing to fall into the standard IRF response, where the tutor is seen as the expert. The field-notes record the exchange as follows:

> The class moved on to a new topic at a more general level again. This seems to be the tutor's pattern, moving from the general to the particular.
> <u>Student 1</u>: Gives an example.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Yes, but I was thinking more of …'
> <u>Student 2</u>: Another example is given.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Yes', s/he paraphrases and develops the answer; then asks another question; this is followed by a 4 second silence.
> <u>Student 3:</u> Gives a one word answer - 'Patronage'.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Go on'.
> <u>Student 3:</u> Explained.
> <u>Student 2:</u> Gives another example.
> Tutor asked further questions of the 'how' type. S/he kept his/her vocabulary colloquial and accessible.
> <u>Student 1</u>: 'It's not a good point, but were there any public events like the Olympics?'
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'I don't know – did anyone find anything?'
> <u>Student 4:</u> Gives an example.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Yes, that's all I've got. Has anyone got any more thoughts?'
> <u>Student 5:</u> Gives an example of an approach to the topic.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Yes, I can't think of a way of expressing that any better. For example?'
> <u>Student 5:</u> Gives an example.
> <u>Student 6:</u> 'What did he say?'
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'Say it again, I can't put it better'.
> <u>Student 5:</u> Explains clearly.
> <u>Tutor:</u> 'You've done really well because you didn't have a lecture on this. Do you feel able to write an essay or an exam with a little more work on your part?'
> Group collectively answers in the affirmative.

The actual examples that the students give are not as important to my point as the structure of the IRF exchange. Particularly significant is the way the tutor refuses to answer the student's question, but throws it over to the class.

Then when another student makes an interesting comment, the tutor draws attention to it by praising the student's explanation, which immediately arouses the interest of another student who asks, ' "What did s/he say?" ' Once again the tutor asks the original student to repeat the answer, which comes in a fuller and more articulate manner enabling everyone to grapple with the concept, as well as ensuring that the ownership of the knowledge and ideas stay with the students. The conclusion is that the students have a good grasp of the topic without the necessity of a lecture, as they answer the final question in the affirmative.

The first example of tutor-class intervention (Example 1) indicates how easily the power balance can shift away from the students and back to the tutor, despite the tutor's best intentions. But when the tutor refuses somehow to provide knowledge, as in Example 5, the students are forced to draw on their own resources and prove remarkably able to fill any gaps, though 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1966 and 1978; Vygotsky 1962) prompts are clearly a definite help. If tutors do intervene for some reason, it is difficult for them to then extricate themselves from the ensuing discussion because all eyes are on them (Example 1). A degree of persistence or a new phase of activity is required to shift attention back to the student leaders, as happens in Example 2. One advantage of the student-led seminars is that they are broken down into more distinct and shorter sub-sections than a tutor-led seminar, meaning that creating a fresh start with the class focusing on the student leaders or on their own resources is easier to engineer. All the tutors observed here were consciously aware of their own power and took steps to

counter its influence, though students comment in their interviews that not all tutors in the department have or use these skills. The students themselves are well aware of the benefits of having a tutor with these skills. Facilitating or leading a group engaging with the 'living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41) is neither simple nor easy, but it seems that making the seminars student-led, rather than tutor-led immediately breaks down normal hierarchies to create a potentially more inviting learning environment.

In the final two examples (4 and 5), the tutor has been actively motivating and supporting the students in this seminar, but even when the tutor deliberately sits quietly and refuses to become the locus of attention, s/he is still exerting a powerful influence on the session. Charlie (2nd year) says that if the tutor is listening, then students speak more frequently and use academic language, but if the tutor is not within earshot then they do not:

> There seems to be quite, you know, this grown belief that if, you know, you start giving facts or whatever, you look kind of bookish and nerdy. […] And it's quite bizarre when you're got five or six people all in the same position, all pretending to be quite stupid.

The student is here revealing something about the relative authority of different kinds of addressee. In addition to the speaker, Bakhtin (1986: 126) argues that

> Any utterance always has an addressee (of various sorts, with varying degrees of proximity, concreteness, awareness, and so forth), whose responsive understanding the author of the speech work seeks and surpasses. This is the second party (again not in the arithmetical sense). But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time. (Bakhtin's italics)

Charlie's comments indicate s/he sees tutors as addressees or 'second parties' in the dialogue. Charlie 'addresses' tutors when they are within earshot and, during these times, will seek their 'responsive understanding' by trying to speak their language. However, Charlie states that s/he does not 'address' tutors when they cannot hear him/her, implying that s/he does not view them as 'superaddressees' (Bakhtin 1986: 126).   This could be read as indicating that tutors are seen as the wielders of 'authoritative' discourse, which has little influence outside its immediate domain and is not 'internally persuasive'. Understanding more about how students can be influenced by academic matters outside the direct hearing of tutors is clearly important for the creation of an effective learning environment. Since, a 'superaddressee's' influence can transcend time and space and shapes the speaker's behaviour in the absence of any physical or immediate presence, it is a concept worth exploring further (Bakhtin 1986: 126).

8.3.4   The presence of the superaddressee

The concept of the 'superaddressee' is useful in explaining how these students ultimately move to a view that being and talking as a historian is something that they want to do whether or not the tutor is present exerting his or her influence. I will argue that the disciplinary discourse can act as a 'superaddressee' which is 'invisibly present' in classroom dialogue (Bakhtin 1986: 126). Often Bakhtin's (1986: 126-27) 'superaddressee' is referred to as a god-like figure, but the

third party is not any mystical or metaphysical being (although, given a certain understanding of the world he can be expressed as such) – he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deeper analysis, can be revealed in it.

When the participants come to accept the view of the disciplinary discourse as a grand-narrative or super-ideology through which they can understand the world, it takes on the status of and has the effect of a 'superaddressee'.

When students begin willingly to believe in and subscribe to the disciplinary discourse, which is normally by the time they become third years, they are becoming fully-fledged members of their 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and are becoming properly acculturated in the 'living traditions' of academe as Applebee (1996: 8) advocates. Sandy (3rd year) describes a level-three seminar and compares it to a first-year class:

> All the students are really strong and they do work hard and so everybody comes to the seminar fairly well prepared and they have stuff to talk about. Whereas sometimes, you know, especially in the first year, you get in and it's sort of silence for about an hour and you can see the tumbleweed rolling across the floor.

Sandy goes on to describe how, in the third year,

> It's a really good feeling because it's something you just do not realise until you get to this point and then you're suddenly like ah [laughs] that's what it was about. It all just clicks into place, you know. Better late than never I suppose.

For this student, 'a light flash' has occurred (Bakhtin 1986: 162) and the student has moved to a position where s/he no longer works because s/he is being observed, but because s/he is part of a community of scholars and can see it is 'relevant' and 'interesting' to her. For Sandy, the discipline of history

has become a 'superaddressee', who is present in all the seminars s/he participates in henceforth.

Observation of Sandy's third-year assessed, student-led seminar reveals that, for this class, the language of the historian, of academe and the written domain have started to routinely merge with their student, everyday, oral language. Field-notes repeatedly note this. In this example, two females (later interviewed) are here feeding back to the whole class after a buzz-group discussion relating to gender issues in a particular historical period. During this report on their group's ideas, they make the following comments:

> Female 1: 'The freedom bit keyed into their ideology in a Marcusian sense. Their ideas are warped and their consciousness is warped. […]'
>
> Female 2: 'The sensuous woman gave no attention to homosexuality. […]'
>
> Female 1: 'Very male-dominated according to the feminists' perspective. […]'
>
> Female 2: 'A calculated contest against the status quo. […]'
>
> Female 1: 'Metaphorically as heavy as a chastity belt. […]' (3rd year seminar)

Their speech draws on specialist disciplinary discourse, 'Marcusian', more general academic discourse, 'feminist theory', as well as rhetorical flourishes, such as imaginative metaphors, alliteration and repetition, showing the students have mastered a high level of dexterity in the discipline's way of thinking and communicating. This level of communication was sustained across the two hours of the seminar by most students in the class, even outside the tutor's hearing. The language of the historian has, in the manner of Bakhtin's (1986: 126) 'superaddressee', become, 'a constitutive aspect of

the whole utterance' transforming the students' behaviour both within and outside the tutor's sight and hearing.

The discipline is a 'superaddressee' for the tutors as well, though associated with it can be other influential discourses which vary in how they are perceived. Sacha speaks of educational rationale as a major ideological influence:

> I knew that the, that the practice was sort of ingrained in literature on teaching, […] but, I mean, I very much wanted to know […] what they are supposed to get out of it before you start doing them.

An interest in higher education pedagogy is generally fairly unusual in the sector, where other drivers, notably research and scholarly activity feature large. However, this case study has been influenced by the change agent, who is interested in student learning theory and has been involved in the History Subject Centre and this quite possibly accounts for why the discourse of higher education pedagogy functions as a 'superaddressee' in this department. Pat, another tutor, also refers to the positive influence of the LTSN (now Subject Centres) and the benchmark statements, as does another tutor who focuses on the pervasive influence of quality assurance. This is acknowledged as beneficial, because it helps eliminate 'woeful' practices, but is also seen as problematic, because it threatens academic freedom with its 'culture of accountability'. Quality assurance sits therefore on the cusp between being an 'authoritative' discourse that is only responded to when inspection and review is at hand and a presence which acts as a 'superaddressee' and which is seen as a beneficial voice of improvement that tutors wish to respond to willingly even when out of its direct influence. The

QAA themselves appear to have realised this, hence the more recent emphasis not just on assurance, but also on enhancement.

8.3.5 The stratification of ideologies in seminar interaction

So far the chapter has discussed the influence of the physical environment, the tutor and potential 'superaddressees' such as the discipline, educational rationale and quality enhancement. These operate specifically in the environment of higher education, but there are other influential cross-cutting ideologies that affect the whole of society including university education. Few would dispute that 'There is no such thing as a word without an evaluative accent' (Vološinov 1986: 103), though identifying the relative influence of different discourses is inevitably complex. In any social interaction, including a higher education seminar, there will be

> The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purpose of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases). (Bakhtin 1981: 262-263)

These languages form the 'living interaction' (Vološinov 1986: 41) of classroom dialogue. They interweave and jostle for dominance, variously winning out, being subsumed and collectively creating the seminar experience of the participants. In their interviews, the tutors and students identified many of these 'languages', though they held different views on the effect that they had on the seminars, as Walker and Warhurst (2000: 44) also discovered in their study of assessed, student-led debates.

As I have explained, in themselves ideologies are neither good nor bad, but they do have a potentially powerful effect on the power dynamic of any interaction. If any of these languages get out of kilter and dominate an interaction, a potentially unhelpful power dynamic is created and when, through their interviews, the tutors and students identify problematic ideologies, it is when they have got out of balance. There is more potential for this to occur when marginalised or minority groups are involved.

8.3.6   The ideologies of gender, race, age, class and disability

There are a number of major ideologies which influence all the seminars studied and have the potential to prompt reactions and behaviours that are triggered by the discourse rather than any specific individual behaviour, as Vološinov (1986: 93) points out:

> The biological-biographical factor does, of course, play a crucial role, but its importance constantly diminishes as the utterance penetrates more deeply into an ideological system.

These ideologies are frequently the focus of ethnographic research particularly the 'ideological systems', which are 'manifested in the body' (Gair and Mullins 2001: 30-33), notably gender, race, class, age and disability, which influence behaviour overtly and covertly.

Most of the participants held well-developed views on the gendered behaviours in the seminars, mentioning this more freely than other cross-cutting ideologies. In the seminars there was an even split between males and females (see chapter three) and opinions were expressed quite

passionately with a ready flow of specific examples to support their points, but there was no clear consensus of views on what impact gender had on the students' experience of the seminars. Just one male student[100] and one male tutor dismissed any potential influence with a succinct, 'it's very hard to generalise' (1st year student), but male tutor (1), added that if a 'bloke' is 'annoying', it is not because he is male, he is just simply annoying, revealing a perceived association between bad behaviour and 'blokish' men that he felt a need to argue against.

This expectation of stereotypical, gendered behaviour permeated a number of comments. There is more talk by a first-year, male student of behaviour being rather 'juvenile with blokes' and a statement that having a 'girl in our group […] would've been very helpful in terms of organisation'. Another male student (2nd year), declares almost with pride that 'guys are, like, they really are a bit useless'. Male tutor (2) characterises male behaviour as, ' "Lads, let's go to the bar instead of having a meeting about this" type thinking or, "Let's not turn up at all" type of thing, "I've got a hangover" '. There is a consensus, expressed here by a second-year male student, that 'girls […] prepare more, [… and], if no one is saying anything, they will come up with something, so they're more ready to speak their minds'. Though more generally the view is taken that in the session, the males will be more vociferous and articulate (a female tutor and a female, 3rd year student). However, another female, third-year student points out that females can be

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[100] The gender of the participants is revealed in this section as it seems pertinent to the topic in hand. Because the gender is revealed in this and several other cases in this section, the participants have not been named to preserve the gender neutrality principle adopted elsewhere.

highly articulate and confident at public speaking as well, but she then

chooses to add the rider: 'I mean, I know it's very stereotypical, but it's

something you still don't expect'.

These tutors and students appear convinced that the defining

difference is a poor, male work-ethic and a strong 'play' culture and,

although there was only moderate evidence to back this view up from the

observations, there was no evidence to counter it. However, this marked

difference seems to disappear, as the student progresses through the course.

In the first year, a male tutor, notes that

> It's interesting the men sit together and then the women sit together,
> whereas in the second and third year, they just sit where the nearest
> chair is.

This self-regulating behaviour and avoidance of excess is something that the

females also notice and approve. Two of the female tutors both advise first-

year students to avoid all-male groups, advice which the students fail to

heed, but by the second and third years, they have learned for themselves

the benefits of a mixed group and they avoid the gender 'silos' and the

consequent perceived exaggeration of stereotypical, gendered behaviours.

One reason for this is offered by a male tutor who points out that an

eighteen-year-old female is more mature than a male of the same age, but

by twenty one the male has caught up. It could also be affected by other

factors such as the quality of the learning environment and the general

acculturation into the department's general academic and disciplinary

practices.

It seems then that gender has some influence on learning behaviours, particularly in the first year when students act in what are perceived to be stereotypical ways, but it has a diminishing effect, perhaps as the students gain in confidence and self-assurance. Other ideologies appeared to have even less of an impact.

The students remain silent on the influence of race and nationality on the seminars, directing discussion onto gender, class or age when encouraged to talk about groups of students who may feel marginalised in seminars, though it should be noted that only one of the students interviewed came from an ethnic minority him/herself (only approximately 5% of the students in the seminars that were observed were visibly from an ethnic minority). When prompted to consider race, they denied it had any influence and fell silent. This might be because the challenging issues surrounding the relationship between minority and majority ethnic groups was largely outside their predominantly white, British experience. Tutors state that the language barrier is an issue for students with English as a second language and believe that these students generally choose to avoid the assessed seminars (Jo; Sacha; Frances). This gives some indication that general linguistic articulacy might be something that is a pre-requisite for a student to feel comfortable in the seminars. However, while acknowledging that this might well be the case, one of the disabled students observed had difficulty speaking fluently because of the nature of the disability and s/he appeared to take a full part in the seminars in so far as this was physically possible. This study is not focused on and is clearly not well-placed to explore the influence of the

specific issues associated with race and ethnicity and their influence on student learning. However, it is and will continue to be argued that the study as a whole indicates that students, whether they belong to a marginalised or dominant group of any kind, can be enabled to engage with other perspectives through a dialogic learning environment.

Tutors hold very different views on the diversity of their student groups. Sacha says there is a lack of cultural diversity pointing to the predominance of white, middle-class students, which Lesley notes 'is not something we're too happy about'. The limited number of racially diverse students was confirmed through observation. Pat argues that, compared with previous cohorts, 'increasingly we have quite a wide variety of backgrounds for our students, so we've got international students, who are, you know, white European, we have international students who are from the Far East, we have British students who are black, Asian, whatever'. A couple of tutors go on to point out the benefits associated with a diverse student body citing how these students bring a new perspective to the study of history (Jo; Frances).

This study's focus is not on the effect of single ideologies on how students learn, but on the effect of combining assessment, dialogue and peer leadership. However, one tutor makes a point that seems relevant not just to the topic of race, but to all ideologies, echoing some of Bakhtin's ideas on the beneficial effect of the dialogic process. This is the concept of self-balancing discursive systems. Pat is commenting on what happens when

potentially controversial issues are discussed in the classroom. S/he suggests that, if students discuss them insensitively or pejoratively,

> I don't think they're going to get out of the room alive to be honest [laughs]. […] Anybody with those kinds of [racist] views is going to be facing a pretty hostile audience from the start, you know, so I think there is that element of automatic self-control going on here, you know. […] We had discussions about terrorism with one of the students being a Muslim who was wearing a headscarf and she's patently somebody who is Muslim. There was not that sense of discomfort. It was genuinely an issue of discussing these issues in an open way. […] So, yeah, it's a difficult landscape to negotiate I think.

This paragraph contains several contradictions, which present dissension as both a positive and negative feature of classroom dialogue and as something that is an issue, as well as something that does not occur because students exercise 'automatic self-control'. However, overall there is a sense that hostility is countered and nullified and that generally and 'genuinely' the issues are discussed collaboratively and in 'an open way', indicating that, by one means or another, the ideological system in the seminars is self-balancing or self-policing in some way.

My own observations confirmed the general tenure of the participants' views. I did not witness any overt or implied racist behaviours and it appeared to be entirely possible to debate such issues fully and in a balanced and open manner. My observations of a third-year module probably provide the most explicit example. I witnessed students in two different seminars discussing matters directly related to race and also religious beliefs. On both occasions there was only one student from a visible ethnic minority in the room. On the first occasion s/he was in the group leading the session and the whole presentation was on a topic related to

ethnicity, class and beliefs. S/he undertook role-play as part of her activity and my field-notes record that 'There was an exchange of balanced dialogue when the student questioned the reporter and there was a short, thoughtful interchange'. In the second seminar the same student spoke on a matter which she clearly related to her religious beliefs. My field-notes comment that, during an extended whole-class debate on a contentious topic, 'There was counter-arguing by the student [from the ethnic minority]. This discussion flowed for 15mins and was sustained. The leader had to intervene to stop them. The vote was then taken'. This student was later interviewed and did not raise any issues about her experience of the seminar in relation to her ethnicity.

Participants were even more unforthcoming about issues related to age than they had been about issues of race and nationality, only commenting when prompted. It appears, confirmed through observation, that there is only a 'sprinkling' of mature students (according to tutors Frances, Lesley and Pat; and Sam, a 1st year mature student) (approximately 7% were observed to be mature). Two tutors (Lesley; Sacha) and one student (Billie, 1st year, mature student) did acknowledge the benefits that mature students bring to the seminars commenting on the way that they can raise the level of a mixed group through their commitment and by bringing in different perspectives.

But mature students were also seen by tutors as potentially problematic, because they could 'carry' younger students (Sacha) or because

they might be 'domineering' and potentially 'off-putting' to the tutor and other students (Frances; Sacha). This is corroborated by Sam, a first-year, mature student, who confidently says, 'As a mature student you find it much easier to dominate discussions'. S/he described him/herself as 'egocentric' and 'not a team player' whose 'thoughts tend to dominate my interaction with other people', causing her/him to 'take centre stage'. However, s/he notes that this became evident in 'Learning History' and 'I suppose, yeah, it's exemplified a problem to me and I should think I should be able to do something about that'. This adds further evidence to the emerging view that the participants in this study find the ideologies in the seminars to be in some ways self-balancing. Even this domineering, mature student has within the first year been brought to a place where s/he realises some of the limitations of his/her approach. Age-related ideologies have 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' force and the two work alongside each other unevenly, but overall in a self-balancing way.

The few comments on age present mixed views of its impact, but all agree it is not a major influence. Even less is said about the impact of class on the seminars. Lesley, a tutor, stresses the middle-class background of the student body, commenting that 'we have a rather narrow social […] mix', which the statistics indicate is true (Appendix 1). Pat argues strongly that 'I haven't really noticed any difference whatsoever, you know, I wouldn't be able to sit here and make some kind of crass generalisation' about how 'middle' and 'working class' students behave in a seminar. While a third tutor, Sacha, acknowledges that students with 'strong regional accents in the

first few weeks, […] have a bit of a shock in terms of how abnormal that is', because of the tendency for most students to have less pronounced regional accents and to adopt something closer to an everyday form of received pronunciation[101]. However, the effect of the course (not necessarily the seminars) is once again to correct any ideological imbalances, whether one views this as for good or ill, so that by the third year the difference noticed by Sacha appears much less. This was confirmed by my own observations. Evidence is growing through these empirical chapters that because of the dialogic nature of interaction, all students are engaged in the learning environment regardless of their socio-cultural background.

Like class, society's attitude to disability is also widely perceived to be another cross-cutting ideology that affects social interaction. I observed several students drawing on the support of a note-taker and I noticed that one was in a wheelchair (2% of those observed had a visible disability), but tutors and students appeared oblivious to these factors, ignoring note-takers, interacting with the students in a normal manner and not commenting on the matter in their interviews even when prompted. Pat volunteered the following, 'I don't think disability is an issue either, I think it's personality'. In response to the following question from me, 'What affects who has confidence, who "holds the floor" and who is disempowered in a group?' Charlie (2nd year) commented that it was 'personal attributes'. 'Personality' was typically seen by the students to have more influence on social

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[101] Received pronunciation was originally that of the upper class of south east England and was adopted as 'standard' by the upper-class, public schools and, at one time, by the British broadcasting media.

behaviours than ideologies, though Vološinov's (1986: 90) definition of personality indicates that it is not an essential trait that humans are born with but 'a product of social interrelations'.

When prompted to consider ideological influence, Billie (1st year) says very positively, 'We have, like, different social backgrounds and it's worked really'. Bakhtin (1986: 7) believes that the meeting of different cultures is invaluable in enriching understanding:

> A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us new aspects and new semantic depths. […] Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin's italics)

This sense of experiencing other perspectives is what the students and tutors are endorsing as the vital ingredient of dialogue. Sam (1st year) says that it helps if there is 'a definite contrast of characters in our group' and, according to Billie (1st year), they will all then develop different 'perceptions of events' in a way that is likely to trigger Bakhtin's (1986: 7) 'creative understanding'. The participants value different perspectives and 'foreign cultures', yet they do not see the particular ideologies of gender, race and so forth, to be particularly influential *per se* in this liberal, but relatively regulated context. Where they do make themselves felt, they are simply part of the diverse mix of views and perspectives in the group.

Given that this was just a brief consideration of the effect of some of the major cross-cutting ideologies, caution needs to be exercised in how applicable these findings are beyond this particular case given the demographic of the student body in this department. Nonetheless, the views of the tutors and students, coupled with the observations, have provided evidence, limited and case specific as it is, that the seminars enable students who have different ideological perspectives to engage with each other's ideas and build bridges of communication between them. This case study does not look at the material conditions of the students' lives and how this impacts on their experience of higher education. It does not look at their experience of dialogue outside the seminar classroom and in the wider world. Nor does it consider the insights a psychological theoretical approach can offer. Its focus is on the socio-linguistic dimension of learning in this particular context. The tutors and students who were interviewed state clearly that they value the socio-cultural diversity that they encounter in the seminars, even though they acknowledge some of the issues associated with ideological imbalance. The next section draws on Bakhtinian theory to explore further why a diverse mix of ideological discourses is perceived as so positive by the tutors and students and makes a case that the 'living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41) can actively aid learning.

8.3.7 The effect of the 'constant struggle of accents'

The tutors and students are in general agreement that, despite having different backgrounds and potentially conflicting views, 'It does sort of seem to work okay in the end' (Billie, 1st year). However, Billie acknowledges that 'there's no sort of concrete rule that says it should really'. The process that leads to a successful seminar experience can feel like a rocky road. Toni (3rd year) highlights a potentially important tension:

> It does tend to be pretty much every man for himself, you sort of, yeah, I mean it can be quite tough trying to make everyone make points. […] But if the group is quite balanced, well you need some loud people otherwise nothing will get said, but you know [tails off].

Note the student does not say 'but if the group is quite *quiet*' nothing will get said. S/he choose the word 'balanced' to set against the word 'loud' implying the need for people to speak up with different views each jostling for pre-eminence. Another third year, Sandy, echoes similar views:

> If you actually really get into a topic then spend an hour discussing and getting into depth, have a big debate and whatever […] you tend to get a lot more out of it that way.

For the student to 'get into a topic', it is not enough to be different, nor simply to hold different views, the group actually has to express those views with energy and argue the different positions. The emerging sense that different ideologies balance each other out is clearly not because there is an even or representative number of individuals from each group. Instead, it is something to do with the dialogic movement or jostling of discourses as they interact.

The Bakhtinian school's concept of speech as a 'living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41) is not a comfortable, convergent form of communication, it is 'a constant struggle of accents' (Vološinov 1986: 106). This view of language as a struggle offers an explanation of why this jostling of different perspectives is so important. For Bakhtin, speech is always a mixture of convergent and divergent forces and is cut through with 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces. It is always an assertion of the speaker's views and an acceptance or acknowledgement of the diverse range of perspectives held by the listeners (Bakhtin 1981: 272). This is aligned to the emerging sense that the dialogue in the seminars is both competitive and collaborative, that the individuals are pushing their own interests forward, but are also embracing and assimilating the views and interests of others. This sense of struggling with and experiencing other perspectives is what the students are endorsing as the vital ingredient of dialogue. 'Centripetal' force, which reduces multiplicity to singularity, can, in the educational context, have the beneficial effect of pulling the students into a discipline community, but it also means that from time to time 'domineering' individuals will overpower the dialogic dynamic. The 'centrifugal' forces of all the other ideological discourses present in the socio-linguistic context mean that, theoretically, this dominance should not be sustained in a dialogic, group situation across a period of time unless 'authoritative' discourse forces its way into the situation.

This premise is supported by three accounts of occasions when the seminar interaction got out of kilter and one student dominated. One was

the self-proclaimed, dominant, mature student cited above. This student's peers attributed this dominant behaviour to the fact that s/he was older than the majority of the group. According to the account of the mature student, it seemed that this unwanted dominance was in the process of resolving itself as the student learned how to fit in with the group less assertively. Interestingly, this mature student was praised by a peer because s/he admired the way the mature student could express clear opinions articulately. S/he adds, 'S/he's really, really opinionated, really good' (Ali, 2nd year).

The other references to dominating behaviours do not attribute dominance to any particular ideology. One is a second-year student, Ali, who declares her/himself to be a 'control freak', but the implication is that s/he is simply very conscientious or maybe academically ambitious and the group s/he worked with appeared happy to harness his/her drive.   We hear about a third student from a tutor, Pat, who describes a 'very ill-informed, very dominant' student. Pat argued that it was 'the assessed seminar group's job to sort this guy out in terms of getting him to contribute properly', but that 'at the end of the module […] it was really up to me to say look okay this is a problem that's continued and you need to sort this out for future modules'. As a result of the course it appears to be 'that he did do that afterwards, that it actually did have an effect' (Pat).

This is something that another tutor, Lyndsey, echoed in relation to a student with the opposite problem to dominance. Allen and Lloyd-Jones (1998: 9-11) discuss the problem of the 'free-rider' suggesting peer-

assessment is one way to address the issue. Lyndsey's comments do not focus on peer assessment, but do suggest that the solution lies with the students rather than the tutors. The 'free-rider' in question was either absent or passive, but Lyndsey says

> I noticed that he did turn up eventually for the presentation and I did ask them in that case - you know, one of the more responsible ones - I'd say, 'Did he really work, you know, did he turn up and do the work?' 'Oh yes, he was very quiet at first, but we got him going in the end'. So it's amazing what groups can do. […] So they've got to cope with that person otherwise they know that he'll let the project down.

The student (as paraphrased by the tutor) attributes success to making the student take part. What the student said or did appears to be less important than the fact that s/he now, at least, did and said something. As long as the students are active, there is a sense that, while not every seminar will hit the right mark, 'Next time it happens, that you sort of do gain a balance' (Sandy, 3rd year).

Several students speak of the importance of choosing a path through different kinds of activities and behaviours, each of which are not, in themselves, inherently the key to success, but when assembled into a varied seminar enable an effective learning experience for the class. In Bakhtinian terms varied forms of interaction allow 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces to exert different kinds of influence on the learning environment. Varied activities act as alternative frameworks, each of which allows the 'living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41) to be played out in a way that enables different discourses to come to the fore at different times.

Speaking of the range of activities that s/he has experienced in the seminars, Charlie (2nd year) stresses the importance of 'striking the balance between a lot of poles really'. S/he goes on to say that seminars must be 'interesting, but at the same time you can't trivialise the subject'; it has got to be 'fairly in-depth and well researched,' but also 'fun'. A good seminar 'keeps you interested and keeps you participating'. Charlie goes on to cite one effective activity:

> That was very good, because it was quite fun, but at the same time it was basically history. But there was a group that followed I thought, you know, went a bit too far and trivialised it by making us put together a jigsaw puzzle, which, you know, has very little to do with historical debate.

It seems that some activities work well and others miss the mark, as far as this student is concerned, even if they are light-hearted and ostensibly fun, something that my own observation of the jigsaw activity endorsed (2nd year seminar). The 'constant struggle of accents' (Vološinov 1986: 106) is in this case between the impulse to entertain and the drive to educate.

Another second-year student, Jac, this time describing an unassessed seminar, cites two similar examples of where different activities are used to greater and lesser effect. Firstly s/he describes a seminar with a varied structure that works well:

> There's one time that we debate, two people debating and then like, you know, took answers from the floor. And then another week […] everyone had to say one point, […] another time it was just one person giving like a mini little lecture and then taking questions from the floor. It's quite varied.

Then Jac goes on to compare this to the 'worst non-assessed seminar' where

> The tutor just says this is the way it's going to be done, like you'll give […] a ten minute talk and then we'll just like go through some stuff. And […] I hadn't, didn't learn anything.

The tutors echo the same sentiments as Jac, that a varied discursive dynamic with different activities is much better for learning than presentational modes of teaching. Sacha praises the variety of assessment encouraged in the benchmark statement (QAA 2000b) because this is in itself 'a good thing.' While Pat speaks of a group who have

> a lot of imagination, a lot of intellectual ability who really push the boundaries of what is possible in terms of, you know, role plays, performances, quizzes, you know, even props,[…] photographs, images, all sorts of different issues that I hadn't raised in the questions that I set in the seminar list. So they really kind of went beyond anything that I'd suggested to them and they really took complete ownership of that, ownership which you simply don't get when you just say, 'Okay, give a ten minute presentation'. […] It's not just, 'Oh let's have fun in the seminar'. They get much more out of it. And numerous of the students have come back afterwards and said this was something that they felt was really very positive for them and that they got a lot more out of the special subject as a result.

I did observe the seminar described here and certainly the variety, pace and challenge created a lively, learning environment where everyone appeared engaged and focused on the material and activities in hand. The students 'went beyond' the starting point provided by the tutor and took 'complete ownership'. In doing this the students engaged with and internalised the material they were discussing, developing Bakhtin's (1981: 282) 'active understanding' of different viewpoints.

However, the same tutor notes that not all groups engage in the same way. S/he attributes it to 'a lack of kind of energy [… to] push possibilities for that seminar, despite being a seminar that was potentially very exciting'

(Pat). Sometimes there is 'a real problem with motivation' (Pat). This might

be the kind of group that the student above was describing when they were

talking about a group that was too 'balanced' and insufficiently 'loud' (Toni,

3rd year). Another tutor, Jo, has noticed the same effect and describes

> a little ploy that I use if I find that they can't really express themselves.
> I'll say, 'Have a pub argument', so that no holds are barred and you're
> allowed to say, 'Oh that's stupid, why are you saying that?'

The suggested mild insult is a way of injecting the necessary edginess into the

discussion to highlight the dialogic tension, make the 'centrifugal' forces

more audible and bring to the surface a 'constant struggle of accents'

(Vološinov 1986: 106), so that the speakers can engage with the different

perspectives and arguments more directly.

Abercrombie (1989: 75), discussing the issue of dominating students,

also noticed the self-balancing dynamic observed here and attributes it, as

supported by the evidence above, to the variety of topics covered and to the

range of different roles the students play within the discussions. However,

Bakhtin's (1984a: 202) ideas suggest that the fundamental reason for this

self-balancing effect is because dialogic interaction is an 'eternally mobile,

eternally fickle medium […]. It never gravitates toward a single

consciousness or a single voice'. Constructing the seminar activities so that

they cover a variety of topics and forms helps the ebb and flow of different

ideologies, ensuring that the 'constant struggle of accents' (Vološinov 1986:

106) and ever-changing power dynamics of the seminars will not, on balance,

be a problem, but a benefit to the students' learning, as Zamel and Spack

(1998: *ix*) suggest is possible.

8.3.8 Role-play and debate: 'carnival' and parody

Some of the activities that the students above were praising took on a strongly performative dimension and these have the potential to play a particular part in balancing the power dynamics of the seminars. Bakhtin's (1984a: 123) ideas on 'carnival' and parody are used in this section to show how role-play and debate can enable 'People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers [to] enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square'. Performance-based activities can undermine established power relations and offer students the opportunity to take ownership of the classroom environment in potentially transformative ways. This is because, as Vološinov (1986: 90) argues, 'The personality of the speaker, taken from within, so to speak, turns out to be wholly a product of social interrelations'. Bakthin's theory of 'carnival', along with more recent 'performance theories' (for example, Butler 2001; Salih 2004: 344-6) point to some of the strategies that might be particularly powerful at changing classroom and group-work behaviours, enabling students to become more fully involved in group activities and drawing them into a full and committed contribution to the seminars.

For Bakhtin (1984a: 123) 'carnivalesque' behaviours are historically, literally and metaphorically at the heart of 'heteroglossic' dialogic encounters:

> Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-

hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. The behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (Bakhtin's italics)

For Bakhtin, 'carnival' is very 'concrete' and real in one sense because the behaviours occur and are felt and lived, but they are not real in another, since they only occur in the culturally ordained but strictly limited 'carnival' time. Bhabha and Gilman (2001: 8) talk about the 'performance of the conversation' and how this is remembered long after the content is forgotten. If the performative dimension of dialogue is so potentially powerful, understanding its impact, for good or ill, is important to those designing teaching and learning strategies. It may be that the temporary environment of a student-led seminar offers an opportunity, validated by the controlling authoritative power, to break free of established behaviours, including those which might be defined by gender, ethnic or class norms, as well as the behaviours the student has learned to adopt in the tutor-centred classroom.

This would only be possible in certain types of seminar, where a diverse range of activities is undertaken, where behaviour, gesture and discourse have the potential to be changed for a particular pedagogic purpose. In these seminars 'carnivalesque' activities took the form of role-play of various kinds, involving dressing up, talk-show performances, interviewing people in role, use of visual aids, balloon debates and dramatic extracts. Performative behaviours are temporary and short-lived, as are these kinds of activity within a seminar. In 'carnival' there is rapid change from serious to comic, from refined to grotesque, from laughter to fear, from a

formal public role to private, self-indulgent activities. In the seminar classroom this can potentially be mirrored by the rapid switching from formal to informal modes of discourse and behaviour, from scripted presentations behind lecterns to raucous whole-group participation in balloon debates, from small-group, problem-solving, consensual gobbet-exercises to whole-class Jerry-Springer-style combative audience participation. The rapidly changing behaviours and socio-linguistic modes of communication (formal/informal, public/private, adversarial/co-operative) have the potential to destabilise normal behaviours and discourse to open up new ways of thinking and acting.

I frequently observed and heard from the interviewees that role-play and debate were effective at stimulating dynamic engagement. Ali (2nd year) enthusiastically told me all the details of one role-play activity declaring it to be 'fun'. She emphasised the importance of 'discussion' and moving around the classroom sharing ideas. Terri (2nd year) says that 'people will be prepared to […] be more obliged to do it', if role-play is involved, implying that this is the kind of activity that can overcome normal hesitancy and reluctance.

This might be because role-play and debate both require and enable students to make use of a wider repertoire of 'speech genres' which in turn introduce new perspectives on the issue in hand. Bakhtin (1986: 80) argues that the more skilfully we are able to draw on these 'speech genres' 'the more perfectly we implement our free speech plan'. In free discussion, speakers constantly choose which 'speech genre' to use and, if the students

are unable or unwilling to try out different ways of speaking and thinking,

the seminar activities have the potential to help them. Sandy (3rd year) lists a

range of different activities from buzz groups to debates and suggests that

collectively they 'stimulate your mind to think in different ways', make you

'use a variety of skills' and prompt you to think how you can

> out smart your opponent or, you know, counter arguments and stuff
> like that, and actually that gets you stimulated to working that much
> harder and again just being interested in it, if you have to work in a
> range of ways your mind is occupied in that sense.

The student uses energy-laden words such as 'out smart' 'arguments'

'stimulated' and 'occupied' capturing the same sense of the importance of

language as a 'living interaction' (Vološinov 1986: 41) as Vološinov and

Bakhtin.

Charlie (2nd year) stresses the concreteness of role-play activities,

echoing Bakhtin's (1981: 356) own reference to abstract and concrete

language:

> The good thing about role-play is you're seeing someone arguing
> from a certain position and, yeah, it does help your understanding […]
> not just someone standing and just speaking about something quite
> abstract.

The emphasis is again on 'arguing from a certain position' and this is set

against a presentational mode of communication, 'just standing and just

speaking', which is negatively referred to as 'abstract'. It seems that the

impact of powerful ideologies is needed to enliven and engage students with

the topic.

Charlie goes on to identify another mode of communication valued by Bakhtin (1981: 360), 'double-voiced', ironic discourse: 'When our group did that sort of thing [role-play] we will sort of do it very tongue in cheek'. This sense of speaking both as oneself and as another, saying words that are at once serious and also parodic creates the kind of 'double-voiced' discourse that Bakhtin (1984a: 185) says 'inevitably arises under conditions of dialogic interaction'. In 'double-voiced' speech

> An author may utilize the speech act of another in pursuit of his own aims and in such a way as to impose a new intention on the utterance, which nevertheless retains its own proper referential intention. Under these circumstances and in keeping with the author's purpose, such an utterance must be recognized as originating from another addresser. Thus, within a single utterance, there may occur two intentions, two voices. (Vološinov 1986: 197)

In the observed seminars this 'tongue-in-cheek' quality was supportive of the original intention, simply being used as a way 'which made it a bit easier'. Otherwise, as Charlie comments,

> Obviously, you'd feel rather silly and you'd want to acknowledge that. But no, other than that, it [role-play] is a very good learning tool and, when people are doing it sort of seriously, it's quite effective.

This sense of being both 'tongue-in-cheek' and 'serious', not 'silly', and of role-play being a 'good learning tool' captures clearly the complex emotions and intentions of students participating in these varied and dynamic seminars. It does not matter whether the 'second voice' of the student endorses (stylization - unidirectional) or clashes with (parody - varidirectional) the voice of the part being spoken (Titunik 1986: 197). In the seminars observed some of the performance activities were more parodic than others. Each shows the participant engaging with the alternative perspective in a dialogic manner.

It seems then that these activities have the potential to be much more than simply a way of making the seminars interesting and fun for the students, though a number of students (Charlie, 2nd year; Jac, 2nd year; Ali, 2nd year; Sandy, 3rd year) and tutors (Jo; Pat; Lyndsey) see them in that way. Indeed, some of the tutors worry that style may unfortunately triumph over substance in these activities and that some tutors may inadvertently mark the performance highly, rather than the issues that are being raised through it. While this may certainly be a danger, from Bakhtin's perspective, the performative activity appears to be inherently positive in the way it deepens understanding and engagement with the issues. Certainly these performative activities were often spoken of by the participants and they took many and varied forms.

Some of the seminars used this approach more than others. One third-year seminar saw a parade of bizarre 1960s-style clothes loosely linked to the material being discussed (including a cleaner in a flowery, bright apron; a policeman with a toy helmet; a prostitute with a short skirt and thigh length boots; a vicar in black with a pink headband speaking with a fake American accent; a sheriff wearing his badge and so forth). These characters formed themselves into a Jerry-Springer-style chat-show, which presented larger-than-life historical figures from the 1960s. Parini (2005: 65) suggests that adopting a metaphorical mask is helpful to a tutor because it provides something to 'speak through' and it may be that these more literal 'masks' and disguises are having the same effect for the student leaders. Like Parini (2005: 66), it may make the students 'more conscious of their

behaviour', help them 'to consider the effects of various masks' and enable them 'to listen to the ways they [the masks] altered, or helped to embody' their voices. Source work later in the seminar was equally stimulating where three groups were each given a written source (controversial e.g. *The Joy of Sex,* academic, pop lyrics, biological research, facts, literature), pictures from the 1960s and objects (handcuffs, a vibrator and a burned bra). The texture of the seminar was fast moving, provocative, serious and parodic. Several of the audience were called upon to adopt roles (semi-prepared) and underwent hot-seating by other members of the group. Genuine debate erupted in an unstructured manner in whole-class feedback sessions and everyone was apparently successfully involved in a detailed examination of the issues (3rd year seminar).

This might have been an unusually well-developed and powerful seminar partly because the group leading it were unusually able and confident and partly because this was in the final semester of their third year. Progression was clearly visible across the three years, as one would expect, and it is influenced not only by the general knowledge and skill level of the students, but also by the fact that they have the opportunity to develop seminar skills across the three years. The observations I undertook ranged across several seminars at each level and while the difference across the levels was evident in terms of confidence and subject knowledge, the effect of the performance activities was marked when seen in relation to sessions observed without the activities. Thus the third-year, unassessed, student-led seminar that I observed, when compared with an assessed, student-led seminar at the

same level, was operating at the same intellectual level. However, the small range of activities within it meant that the way in which students were engaging with the material was more limited. They were, for example, only using one or two of Burbules' categories of dialogue.

In lower-level, assessed student-led seminars the level of knowledge and skills might have been less advanced, but the range of activities was equally as varied as in the higher-level assessed, student-led seminars, albeit in a less well-developed form. In the first year, I witnessed a couple of failed attempts, where the intention was there along with some of the elements present to carry off an imaginative exploration of the issues, but overall the concept did not engage the audience. One first-year group attempted to explore the Vietnam war in a variety of ways: projecting powerful images (the classic photograph of the child running naked down the road behind the soldiers; an image of a beaming happy Vietnamese family); showing a clip of *Forest Gump*; one of the males getting into role as an 'All American Boy' (using a wry self-conscious smile to give it that 'double-voiced' quality); and one of the females taking on the role of a Vietnamese woman (complete with stereo-typical hat). Despite the attempt, the result was not fully convincing and the field-notes record, 'The audience seemed to have particular trouble concentrating on this'. Afterwards the tutor advised clearly how the students could bring these attempts at interaction to fruition by more improvisation and less reading, using more visual material, slowing down and reducing the volume of information, but s/he also praised the use of role-play, the video clip and the general thrust of the presentation.

By year two there were several examples that the students were developing their confidence, gaining experience in initiating different kinds of performance activity and building their knowledge and understanding of the history. Students praised role-play activities. Ali (2nd year) was pleased when his/her group took on the parts of different types of women in a certain historical environment. Terri (2nd year) spoke positively of taking on the role of a warrior. Another seminar saw a 'Pope Idol' session. Different popes spoke in favour of the contribution their reign had made with their presentations being surrounded by TV style Pop Idol structures and discourse: voting, razamataz, 'phone lines are closing in 2 minutes' and prizes.   Later in the seminar there was a semi-formal, three-way debate between the Papacy, the preaching Clergy and the Military orders drawing on advance reading that appeared to have been done and which enabled an informed debate to occur (2nd year seminar). Another second-year seminar saw an 'exciting' balloon debate with mock deaths from the balloon as individuals were voted out.

Through role-play, whether this is the performance of an American-style chat show, a balloon debate or students dressed in a diverse collection of costumes falling in and out of role as ability and occasion prompted, the students turn the hierarchically structured, formal and authoritative university classroom into a 'carnival'. 'Carnival' is temporary, like the student-led seminars. The seminars offer a topsy-turvy world, not so much where masters become subordinates, but where 'slaves' can act out the role of the master and students can become the tutor, telling others what to do, when

to speak and when to be silent. Costumes support the artifice, laughter and mockery accompany proceedings. Bizarre juxtapositions of characters and events occur as participants walk in the shoes of those they will never become. All this is sanctified, blessed and encouraged by the authority figures, who sit quietly on one side observing, confident that in the morning order will return.

By taking part in this kind of performative activity, different 'speech genres' are practised and received opinion is rehearsed and debated. Together this has a powerful effect on the individual's development:

> The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of the individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. (Bakhtin 1981: 348)

Whether students are discussing and debating matters with like-minded peers or students whom they consider to be different in either a positive or negative way, they are engaging with other discourses and refining their own views in the light of them.

8.4   Conclusion

There are many discourses present in any given seminar and the evidence has shown that it is all too easy for the tutor to dominate, even if they try not to. Ideally, tutors would create a classroom culture of 'mutual obligation' (Readings 1996: 189), where they listen to and value the

perspectives of their students, but the actual reality of the classroom is more complex than this. Ideologies jostle for position and power in 'the living interaction of social forces' (Vološinov 1986: 41). They are at the least an influence on the seminars and sometimes have a significant effect. No 'alternative forms of assessment' are '*necessarily* empowering for students' or 'inherently "emancipatory" ' (Walker and Warhurst 2000: 46). There can be a struggle or collaboration between tutor and students. The physical structures can help or hinder. Specific cross-cutting ideologies can be more or less explicitly evident in the dialogic encounters. However, I would argue that across the board, across the years, across the tutors, across the modules and across the student groups, the imbalances balance out, if the learning environment is dialogic. In addition, it seems that the excesses of any imbalances are policed or regulated by the groups themselves.

However, this is to miss the important benefit of the clash of different discourses. Language is by its nature full of discursive difference, which can never be nullified. Bakhtin's ideas explain why this is not a problem but a positive asset for the student learning experience. The constant struggle between the 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces of language, its 'double-voicedness', the presence of the 'superaddressee' in whatever manifestation it takes, the impact of 'authoritative' discourse and the sense that every now and again 'carnival' breaks out, collectively mean that students engage in active, 'deep' learning not in spite of, but because of the powerful ebb and flow of ideological discourses in the seminars.

Chapter 9 - Assessment, dialogue and student-leadership: 'the whole aggregate of conditions'

9.1 Introduction

Although each of the elements discussed so far, assessment, dialogue and student-leadership, has its own particular effect on the learning environment, the students do not experience each in isolation. Rather it is 'the whole aggregate of conditions' (Vološinov 1986: 93) that constitutes their experience of the seminars. Therefore, although this chapter is brief, I believe it is important to consider the inter-relationship between these three characteristics and make a case that they collectively aid dialogic learning. Finally, I argue that dialogic learning is more than a set of practices, it is rather what Bakhtin calls a 'new mode of interrelationship' (Bakhtin 1984a: 123) that allows students to develop the 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) that is central to powerful learning.

9.2 Combining assessment, dialogue and student-leadership

There is clearly no 'magic bullet' that guarantees effective student learning because it is a messy, holistic process affected, from the students' perspective, by a 'jumble of detail which combines to help or hinder learning' (Drew 2001: 327). Three key influences on the complex learning environment experienced by the students are assessment, dialogue and student leadership.

Assessment appears to serve a useful purpose by directing and amplifying student effort. This is not so much because failing to take the seminars seriously will in any immediate way lead to the students' expulsion from their course, the marks count for too little for this, but because assessment is perceived by the students as an 'authoritative' discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 342) which coerces them into certain behaviours. It prompts them to prepare well and to make the effort to join in, even if they have to make a conscious effort to overcome perceived personal barriers (shyness, tiredness, lack of self-confidence, limited articulacy).

However, both scholars of assessment and Bakhtin agree that authority alone leads to surface, temporary, or strategic behaviours and is not conducive to deeper learning strategies or the 'assimilation' of the ideas of others. It prompts learning behaviour which does not endure once the individual leaves the direct influence of the authority, because it demands a given response from the students, rather than persuading them to engage willingly with the issues. Bakhtin's concept of 'internally persuasive' (1981: 342) discourse suggests how students can be engaged in a deeper, more enduring way and both students and tutors spoke positively of the effect of such discourses, including those associated with employability and disciplinarity.

'Internally persuasive' discourse is the material of dialogic interaction and wherever there is dialogic interaction, there is 'internally persuasive' discourse. It is because 'internally persuasive' discourse reaches out from the

speaker to the listener and attempts to bridge any gap in understanding by anticipating the listener's response, that it has such a powerful effect on learning. If it is 'internally persuasive', any form of dialogue has the potential to be dialogic whether divergent or convergent, critical or inclusive. The kind of inclusive-divergent dialogue favoured by pedagogues building on Dewey's (1916) tradition, appears to be valuable, but not exclusively so. Each form of dialogue facilitates the development of different kinds of insight and each is valuable. Bakhtin (1981: 348) does not discuss these forms of dialogue, but simply stresses 'The importance of struggling with another's discourse,' which he argues has an enormous 'influence in the history of the individual's coming to ideological consciousness'. This 'struggling' is facilitated when there is 'maximal interaction' (Bakhtin 1981: 346). So, from this perspective, there is no reason to assume that any one form of dialogue is more effective than any other. Whether the speaker is seeking to find a middle ground, trounce the opposition's argument, or solve a problem, the speakers still have to struggle with and take account of the perspective of their addressees.

I would argue, therefore, that, when students are given the opportunity to take part in a diverse range of dialogic activities, they are more likely to 'assimilate' the ideas of others. Bakhtin (1981: 282) equates assimilation with 'understanding', a concept that is frequently used in higher education, but one which also remains an abstract, fairly nebulous and under-researched concept. Bakhtin's theory of dialogics helps shed light on, what he calls 'every concrete act of understanding' (1981: 282), which is the

result, he argues, of dialogic interaction. The analytic chapters of this thesis also indicate that taking part in discursive rather than presentational seminar activities enables students to develop an 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) of the issues under discussion.

The beneficial dynamic of discursive seminar activities can, however, be overturned all too easily by the heavy-handed intervention of the 'authoritative' figure of the tutor, as chapter eight discussed. 'De-throning' (Doran *et al.* 2000: 200) the tutor and using peer teaching mitigates against any one voice maintaining dominance and increases the presence of diverse 'internally persuasive' discourses. This, in turn, facilitates understanding and aids individual development. Simply placing students at the front of the classroom does not, in itself, guarantee this shift to dialogic learning. For example, according to the participants and my research observations, the 'dialogic feeling' did not necessarily follow from students giving a presentation and answering questions. The prompt for dialogic learning appears to be related more to a whole set of conditions that could be better described as student-centred, rather than student-led learning. Student-centred education according to this study, and endorsed by Andersen *et al.* (1999: 364), encourages participation. Having students leading the seminar was one feature that helped create a student-centred classroom environment, but others were needed alongside this and some, while not necessary, were shown to be helpful in some circumstances, such as the use of what Bakhtin calls the 'chronotope' of 'carnival' (1984a: 123).

Carnival, like dialogue, is not a set of activities, but a mode of interaction. It is 'half-real and half-play-acted' and temporarily dismantles traditional hierarchical relationships (Bakhtin 1984a: 123). During specific 'carnivalesque' activities such as role-play, as well as through the more general use of irony, parody, social banter, teasing and self-mockery, students were able to make the most of this 'new mode of interrelationship' (Bakhtin 1984a: 123) and to engage dialogically with each other. The 'carnival chronotope' off-sets the tendency for the tutor to be inadvertently drawn back into an authoritative position, even if the students are officially at the front of the class in a teaching role. There was, for example, a lack of a 'carnivalesque' mode of interaction in the unassessed, third-year, student-led seminar I observed, with the tutor playing a much more active role in the class.

It is clear, therefore, that assessment, dialogic interaction and student-leadership inter-relate in the case study presented in this thesis to create the conditions that enable dialogic learning to occur. Bakhtin's theory of dialogics is holistic. Where there is dialogic interaction, there is 'heteroglossia' and where there is 'heteroglossia' there is the push and pull of 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces. Where there is an 'authoritative' discourse, there are 'internally persuasive' discourses and, whenever there is speech, there are always multiple addressees. 'Active understanding' is associated with 'assimilation' both of which occur when speech becomes dialogic. It is impossible to say what comes first in this inter-connected,

linguistic tug-of-war. The same is true of the socio-linguistic dynamics of the programme of seminars studied here.

The force of the 'authoritative' discourse of assessment might, by itself, fail to engage students in what have been called 'deep' approaches to learning and which is here described as dialogic interaction. Both the discursive and student-led dimensions of the seminars counter this tendency, exposing the students to 'internally persuasive' discourse which enables them to assimilate the ideas of others. Discursive pedagogies have the potential to engage students' minds, but without the framework of assessment to stop them opting out, they may not put in the work necessary for a rich learning experience. In addition, if the tutor is not removed from the dynamic, there remains a real risk that the power dynamics of the classroom will prevent the involvement of all students. Student-led teaching avoids this problem, but lacks the requirement of assessment and is frequently presentational rather than discursive in form. However, it seems that when assessment, discursive modes of interaction and student-led learning are combined, they form 'the whole aggregate of conditions' (Vološinov 1986: 93) which promote 'dialogic learning'.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion: 'wresting new answers' to the nature of higher education pedagogy

10.1   Introduction

There are only a strictly limited number of full-length, empirical studies on oral assessment and none, as far as I am aware, that use Bakhtin's theory of dialogics to look at assessed, student-led seminar interaction in higher education. Presentations and viva-style discussion has attracted some research interest, as noted in chapter one, because they are relatively common and are more straightforward both to assess and research, but this study has stepped into the altogether messier field of discussion and oral interaction in its many different forms. Throughout this thesis Bakhtin's ideas have been shown to reveal new insights on student learning, and this final chapter synthesises these into some concluding thoughts on the nature of higher education pedagogy. Readers are encouraged to take these thoughts and, in Bakhtin's (1981: 346) words, to 'wrest new answers' from them and apply them to their own situations.

Through my use of Bakhtin, I have been able to reveal some of the underlying socio-linguistic structures that make seminar learning so effective. This descriptive approach is markedly different from some other recent initiatives, such as the *Speak-Write* (2001) project, which attempts to understand and address the development of oral skills. My approach is distinct in that it does not focus on dialogue as a set of competencies, but as

a mode of learning. It is also distinct from others who discuss dialogue in education (Bridges 1979; Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Burbules 1993), in that it has an in-depth empirical study of situated practice at its heart, rather than being an overview of theory or of general practice which the authors are promoting. My own study has been able to explore the socio-linguistic structures and dialogic dynamic of classroom interaction to reveal more about how learning occurs in this kind of higher education seminar.

Before beginning on these conclusions, I need to acknowledge that generalisations are always difficult from a case study. Indeed every research perspective and methodology has its limitations. If, for example, I had focused more on the linguistic dimension of the seminar interaction and had undertaken a 'conversational analysis' of particular exchanges in the seminars, more would have been revealed about the precise way that meaning is made through linguistic structures in those situations. However, I would not have been able to take into account the wider context and the socio-ideological issues which the Bakhtinian approach has enabled me to study. Equally, I could have focused more on individual students, exploring their backgrounds and wider experience of learning on their course, but this would have meant that the study was unable to explore how linguistic structures help or hinder learning. Nonetheless, while remaining mindful of the effect that the theoretical perspective and research methodology will have had on the findings and the conclusions drawn from them, I believe that helpful observations can still be made about higher education practice and policy.

10.2   Implications for practice

Bakhtin was not, of course, writing about higher education pedagogy, yet his theory of dialogics can be applied to all forms of interaction including that in the classroom in any sector of education. As I have discussed, the ideal of learning through dialogue has long been set against a transaction or 'banking' (Freire 1996) model of learning, because it engages the learner in independent thinking. In dialogic learning, students interact with the ideas of others, while in transactional learning they are passive recipients. However, the application of Bakhtin's (1981: 342) ideas on 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourse suggests that the simple opposition between active and passive needs qualifying.

Any form of interaction is dialogic in nature to a greater or lesser extent, if it is 'internally persuasive'. 'Authoritative' discourse has to be accepted wholesale in an unquestioning manner by the listener, but 'internally persuasive' discourse is intrinsically dialogic, because it prompts all participants in the speech event to take account of the views of others. When speakers and listeners do this, there is what Readings (1996: 189) calls a pedagogy of 'mutual obligation', though tutors can very easily, albeit inadvertently, dominate and disrupt this balance. In student-led environments this balance of obligations can more easily be maintained and through dialogue students can develop an 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282), which might be called the process of 'dialogic learning'. Dialogic learning will take place wherever there is 'internally persuasive discourse'.

Drawing attention to the central role in learning of 'internally persuasive' discourse, rather than to dialogue as a form of communication, begins to explain why dialogue appears to be efficacious not only in the learning process, but also in the acculturation of students into their discipline and into higher education more generally. My own experiences teaching a diverse student demographic in a small university college setting, together with my observation of the case study from an 'elite' (Palfreyman and Tapper 2009) university with its narrower, socio-economic range demonstrate that seminar interaction can work equally well in both contexts. Any argument that highly articulate, confident learners, used to debating and discussing abstract issues, are exclusively able to engage in fruitful dialogic learning in the classroom is called into question by Bakhtin's ideas, because successful oral communication is shown not to be a matter of rhetorical dexterity or intellectual superiority. Instead, the dialogic structure of interaction and the nature of 'internally persuasive' discourse suggest that engagement with new ideas happens with any form of 'living interaction' (Vološinov 1986: 41). The students and tutors in the study have attested to their belief that those students, who begin with low confidence in their oral skills, rapidly gain this confidence and ability, if repeatedly placed in situations where the expectation is that they will participate.

Bakhtin's ideas also indicate why the findings of this case study indicate that dialogic interaction will be effective in any discipline setting, not just history. Clearly, some disciplines favour discursive learning environments more than others, but wherever there is the opportunity for

the student to experience sustained dialogic interaction, the findings of this study indicate that a deeper learning experience will ensue in the sense that the student will be drawn into 'an active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) of the issues. The study calls, therefore, for practitioners to reflect on and seek to maximise the opportunities that their own discipline-based curriculum offers for discursive, student-centred interaction particularly where it can be supported and enhanced by an 'authoritative discourse' such as assessment.

In countries influenced by UK and Australian higher education pedagogic research much advice on teaching and learning across the last two decades has focused on how students can be enabled to take a 'deep approach to learning', as chapter five discussed. This study does not attempt to evaluate directly the merits of these ideas. Instead, its focus is on seminar interaction. However, I am in dialogue with these ideas and believe that the findings of my own study contribute to the debate on 'deep' learning. Although 'approach to learning' and Bakhtinian theories have different orientations and epistemological bases, Bakhtin's (1981: 282) emphasis on developing an 'active understanding' resonates in many ways with ideas associated with 'deep' approaches to learning. As such, this study offers an alternative account of why ideas about promoting 'deep' approaches to learning might be efficacious and provides an additional source of empirical evidence which Haggis (2003: 89; 2006: 11; 2008: 2-3) notes is needed.

The idea of 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning resonates with Bakhtin's concepts of 'internally persuasive' and 'authoritative' discourse respectively. Dialogic interaction in the classroom can be aligned with a 'deep' approach to learning, because students are not just acquiring knowledge in order to pass examinations, but, through dialogue, are required actively to seek to understand the ideas of others, even if it is with the overt intention of persuading their listeners that they are misguided. The students work to create 'a bridge' (Vološinov 1986: 86) between themselves and others in order to reach out and engage with their listeners. Whatever their conception of knowledge, their perception of the learning environment or their general approach to learning, if students participate in dialogue, they will inevitably be drawn, at least for its duration, into what is often described as a 'deep' approach to learning or what Mann (2001: 8) calls an 'engaged' rather than an 'alienated' experience of learning. In short, dialogic interaction is associated with a thoughtful, deeper and more engaged approach to learning.

While those advocating 'approaches to learning' acknowledge that students' previous experiences shape how they will perceive the learning environment, Malcolm and Zukas (2001: 38) argue that there is an ' "absence" of the learner as a social being' in such theories, an argument supported by Haggis (2003: 98). The social identity and previous experiences of the students certainly shape their conceptions of learning, but this study argues, as do those discussing 'approaches to learning', that the importance of the students' perception of the immediate context should not be down

played. The immediate addressees heavily influence speech behaviour and individual differences are only part of what influences learning behaviour. Both the empirical analysis and Bakhtin's ideas indicate that students do need to be 'academically literate', but his ideas also suggest that being 'academically literate' is neither a set of practices nor skills, rather it is the product of dialogic interaction, as Lillis (1999: 144) suggests.

Those publishing on 'academic literacy' tend to focus on student writing, overlooking the central role that oral interaction can play in enabling a diverse student body to become academically literate. Through dialogic interaction students can become acculturated into what Lave and Wenger (1991) call a 'community of practice,' which in this case is a hybrid community whose practices are shaped by the norms of higher education, disciplinary and departmental cultures. This study confirms Applebee's (1996: vii) argument that students learn to engage with 'cultural traditions of knowing and doing' through conversation and conversational structures embedded in their curricula.

These rather more general points about pedagogic theory, do not translate neatly into 'a set of professional rules for practice,' which, like Malcolm and Zukas (2001: 33 and 36-37), I believe would be inappropriately simple and reductive given the complexity of student learning. Nonetheless, the findings do point to certain factors which seem to enable a more successful discussion to take place in these seminars.

If students prepare well and have a secure knowledge-base, something that is prompted by assessing the seminars, then they have ideas and evidence to bring to the discussion table. Dialogue enables knowledge to be shared and re-conceptualised to deepen understanding, but it needs some material to work with. If a discussion is to further the students' understanding of history, for example, it clearly needs to be rooted in a secure knowledge of relevant historical content. To some extent, the greater the amount of knowledge, the more possibilities there are that the discussion will lead to richer insights for all participants in the dialogue. If knowledge and preparation are limited then there is less raw-material, on which the discussion can draw.

The importance of the quality and nature of planning and leading the seminars has also been highlighted during the analysis. The leader of a seminar needs to incorporate a range of activities, particularly those which involve discussion. During discussions, the facilitator ought to intervene only enough to prompt and support thought and exploration of the issues by the class and not so much that they impose their ideas on the group. Learning is supported when there is a facilitator who provides a clear general structure that allows for a range of different activities and modes of dialogue to occur. Facilitation is a complex art requiring knowledge, understanding of the issues and interpersonal skills and this poses the question of how students learn to plan and facilitate effective seminars of this kind. The case study indicated that, if they see other effectively-led seminars which demonstrate the kinds of activity that contribute to successful discussions and get the chance to try

out both leading and participating in different types of discussion, the students' own contributions to later seminars are better all round. This is helped by coaching throughout the course from their tutors, who intervene in the interactive, supportive manner advocated by Schön (1987), and reinforced by clear written advice in the study-skills guide and module booklets.

The benefits of student-led classes have emerged clearly during the discussion about the socio-linguistic dynamics of the seminars. The evidence does not suggest that all tutor-led lecturers and seminars should be stopped, as they too clearly have their place, but it does offer reassurance for those who worry that student-led activities tend to lead to a superficial emphasis on spectacle rather than substance. Bakhtin's (1981: 342) ideas offer an alternative account of why student-led activities have a positive effect on learning. This is because student-led activities counter the 'authoritative word […] of teachers' and bring more 'internally persuasive' discourses into the classroom. In addition, because the utterance is half the speaker's and half the addressee's (Bakhtin 1981: 345), student leaders are well-placed to be able to anticipate their peer group's response and explain their ideas in a way that will lead their listeners to understand. A tutor, fully acculturated in academic discourse will use this without a great deal of irony or parody, but placing students in the tutor's role creates an immediate tension between their status as a student and their role as the 'tutor', leading them to use double-voiced discourse as a way of mediating the two addressees.

The study draws attention to the way role-play activities can enable dialogic interaction. In my experience, role-play and carnivalesque spectacle is not common in the university classroom, where traditional academic culture has, in many disciplines, eschewed such activity as superficial show. It can be viewed as light entertainment or an enjoyable but unnecessary luxury in the crowded modern curriculum and it can be used as an incentive to sweeten the real hard work. However, advocates tend to praise its use because they believe it facilitates learning (Yardley-Matwiejczuk 1997), going as far as to suggest that it is more effective than traditional learning techniques (McCarthy and Anderson 2000). The case has been made that it motivates students, builds confidence (Struder-Hill 2009), and develops problem-solving (Kern 2000) and oral skills (Poon Teng Fatt 1991). These are similar to the findings of this study, which suggests, like DeNeve and Heppner (1997), that it aids active learning and is therefore 'an effective teaching technique' (DeNeve and Heppner 1997). Bakhtinian theory, coupled with the evidence of the case study, offers an account of why carnivalesque and double-voiced modes of interaction can aid not only intrapersonal and interpersonal skills development, but also the development of understanding, as students take on the perspective of others and try out new ways of speaking.

Higher education teaching and learning advice literature often includes suggestions on how to manage the common problem of excessively dominant or quiet students and this study contributes insights on this topic. This case study's findings, together with Bakhtin's (1981: 272) concept of

'heteroglossia', suggest that student-led learning, if given full and free rein and accompanied by a diverse set of activities that allow 'maximal interaction' (Bakhtin 1981: 346), has a self-balancing tendency that means different individuals and perspectives all find their voice. Bakhtin (1981: 278) argues that language use in the modern world is like a 'Tower-of-Babel' with discourses jostling and competing for attention. Each might have dominance for a brief while, but then the dialogic nature of all interaction means that every utterance, even from a dominant student,

> enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group. (Bakhtin 1981: 276)

The case study provides evidence that over time the contribution of different students becomes self-balancing. Yes, of course, some students are more extrovert than others, but through the range of different dialogic activities on offer, the constant shift from one form of interaction to another and the 'heteroglossic' nature of dialogised language, no one discourse could sustain dominance unless it was 'authoritative' in the Bakhtinian sense.

The case study makes clear not only the benefits of discussion, but also the quite different and, in the view of the students, limited effect of presentation, even when given by students. It has been particularly noticeable, whether during the library-based or empirical stage of the research, that most tutors equate presentation with discussion without realising that there is a significant difference between these modes of interaction. While acknowledging that presentations have their benefits,

notably for the presenting student who has been in dialogue with the sources and material being studied, they do not appear to engage students in the audience in a way that leads them to form an 'active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) of the issues in the same way that discursive forms of interaction can.

However, inserting discussion and other group activities into standard seminars will not automatically lead to success, because, as Davies *et al.* (2000: 122) argue, such activities need to have a purpose. Booth (2000: 44) echoes these thoughts commenting that

> Creating teaching contexts which motivate, which cultivate an intrinsic interest in learning the subject and encourage students to adopt deep approaches to learning is a task demanding considerable skill. It requires critical reflection, open dialogue, careful planning and creative design, alongside a willingness to experiment. Most important of all, however, it requires an approach whose focus of attention is always on the student as learner.

The dialogic activities of these seminars cannot, therefore, simply be transported into other contexts and expected to work straight away.

This is, firstly, because in the case study there is a particular set of inter-dependent practices, notably, assessment, dialogue and peer-leadership, which work symbiotically. Even if all these three characteristics are replicated in other seminar rooms, they will need time to bed down and evolve to suit the particular circumstances of their new environment, as they have done in the case study. Seminar programmes are dependent to some extent on the wider academic experience of the students: other forms of assessment that they do, such as examinations and essays; other forms of

interaction they experience, such as lectures, tutorials and on-line encounters; and other domains where they encounter peer-influence, such as planning meetings, post-class discussion and social interaction. In extreme situations, students might have such a limited opportunity to engage in seminar interaction and/or oral forms of assessment on their course that their inexperience might create a substantial barrier to their active participation when they are only briefly exposed to an opportunity for dialogic learning.

My own research (Bentley 2003) indicated that students needed to have repeat experiences of assessed discussions across the course in order to gain confidence and develop the necessary skills. In particular, the first time that the students undertake an assessed seminar or discussion needs to be treated as an induction process. This philosophy is shared by the tutors in the case study, who value what 'Learning History' brings to the students' skills development and notice a steady development in students' ability to perform in the environment of assessed seminars across the course (Lesley; Lyndsey; Robin; Sacha). With these *caveats* about the importance of the wider learning environment, I am happy to conclude that assessed, student-led seminars are a powerful recipe for effective student learning and, as such, they can be used by different tutors and students in new situations to good effect. As with all recipes, when they are followed by different cooks, at different times and in different places, the results are often not quite the same and the recipe needs to be adapted and practiced before it works well in its new environment.

10.3   Implications for policy

The contribution of this thesis to the existing body of knowledge does not lie in the proposition of a new model for student learning, not least, as Wegerif (2006: 59) notes, because dialogic learning is not 'a mechanical process'. Nor is it a list of advice, as Allen and Lloyd-Jones offer (1998: 21), or rules for practice, as Malcolm and Zukas comment is common (2001: 33 and 36-37). Instead, its contribution lies principally in the empirical evidence-base it offers for those theorising and thinking about aspects of student learning in higher education, including policy makers. Haggis (2008: 3) points out the limited number of studies triangulating the seminal research on which much current policy rests (Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Marton and Säljö 1976; Marton *et al.* 1984; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Trigwell *et al.* 1999). Haggis (2008: 3) calls for studies that attempt, 'to document different types of dynamic interaction and process through time in relation to "learning" situations in HE' and this study provides one such example.

Building on Hannan and Silver's (2000) account of pedagogic 'innovations' in higher education, this case study could be of use to policy makers because it evaluates, from a specific perspective, 'innovative' practice which has been given the opportunity to develop and become embedded over a twenty-year period. During this period the sector has embraced the political imperative of mass higher education and a theoretical/policy paradigm shift away from traditional approaches to teaching and learning to ones which have had to respond to the demands and needs of a diversifying

student body and the culture of quality assurance and enhancement. Governments fund much 'innovation', but it is rarely sustainable and is often piecemeal and local, as Knight and Yorke (2003: 173) note in relation to assessment. This programme of seminars is the result of a fully-worked through teaching and assessment strategy, which has allowed some of the peculiar factors associated with innovative practice to be eliminated and for the full impact of this approach to teaching and learning to be revealed.

Although the current emphasis of the HEA Leadership Foundation[102] is that change should be initiated by senior managers and implemented through the activities of middle-management (HEA 2007), or through a model of 'distributed leadership' (Petrov *et al.* 2006: 8), this case offers an example of the success of more traditional, bottom-up, slower-paced change. At a time when opportunities for such change are few because of the outcome and target-driven, contemporary, higher-education environment, this study provides a timely reminder that traditional approaches to change can yield positive results given time. The place of the practitioner-innovator remains an important one, but innovation needs to spread across the culture of a department or programme before it becomes sustainable. Even in this study, it is not clear what would happen to the seminars without the continued advocacy of the change agent, Robin, and his/her committed colleague. It does seem clear, though, that the practice has benefitted from a series of funding initiatives that have raised its profile; helped the course developers understand more about why the seminars were proving to be so

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[102] The Leadership Foundation (2009) supports the development of Higher Education leaders by providing advice, events and courses related to leadership, governance and management.

effective; shown them how they could be enhanced further; and enabled them to explain to other less enthusiastic stakeholders why the seminars were beneficial.

The implicit reasoning behind the change to the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme is supported by this study. In 2007 it extended its focus from the support and celebration of lone innovators, to encourage existing NTFS award holders to work with teams to embed and sustain their practice across larger teams[103]. The practice in the case study echoes this two-stage process of implementing change. It began with individual pioneers, but needed the willing coalescence of a team of committed practitioners, led by a peer expert and change agent, to become fully embedded and sustainable. Any application of the case study's findings needs to take account of this process of change and to recognise that embedding practice takes time, a leader and change agent, and the commitment of a team of academics who rapidly come to believe in and gain at least some understanding of the pedagogic theory underpinning the activity.

Policy makers are concerned with widening participation in higher education and this brings with it challenges for students whose backgrounds have not prepared them for academic culture (Archer *et al.* 2003; Bowl 2003;

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[103] The project strand provides funding for institutions to build on the expertise of existing National Teaching Fellows. It provides £200,000 of funding to teams who 'bring significant and meaningful benefits to the students' learning experiences' (HEA 2009a).

Reay 2003; Reay *et al.* 2005). There is encouragement in this study that diverse students can be engaged in effective learning during seminars through thoughtfully aligned teaching and assessment strategies. The process is not as tidy as Biggs' (1999: 31) theory of 'constructive alignment' indicates and success, according to the tutors and students in this study, lies neither in detailed learning outcomes, nor in carefully articulated assessment criteria. Instead, it indicates that engagement lies in giving students a clear framework, within which they have the flexibility to take ownership of a collaborative learning experience. Being required to take part in collaborative, discipline-based discursive learning across an extended period of time helps students develop elements of the 'academic literacy' (Lea and Stierer 2000a; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 2003), which they need for successful, higher-level learning. This study has identified the dialogic linguistic structures which lie at the heart of successful acculturation, thus adding to the understanding of apprenticeship models of student learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) and articulating why Applebee's conversational approach to learning is effective.

10.4   Areas for further development

All the questions one might ask even about this case study have not been exhausted. There are a number of aspects I have chosen not to examine. I have opted not to look closely at 'quality' issues, such as the rigour and robustness of the assessment process. Nor have I examined the relationship between the seminars and the students' other assessed work. I

have not tracked individual students longitudinally through the three years of their course, looking at their progression and development in detail. I have not made comparisons with other departments or institutions within or beyond the same discipline. Nor have I focused on the teaching of subject knowledge and the particular influence of discipline-specific practices. All of these would reveal more about the effect of the programme of seminars on student learning, but spreading the scope of the study would have sacrificed breadth for depth or, at least changed its focus. It would have meant that this study's particular contribution to the understanding of the effect of socio-linguistic practices on student learning would have been lost.

Using Bakhtinian theory in the way that I have in this study has been productive and has provided a unique insight on student learning. Bakhtin's theory of dialogics could helpfully be applied to other aspects of higher education pedagogy. It would shed light on more presentational forms of teaching, such as the lecture, student presentations, or resources posted on-line to aid student preparation. Dialogic learning as a concept could be explored wherever students meet, whether in the tutor-led classroom environment, on-line, or socially. Bakhtin's ideas could be applied to other forms of assessment, whether the essay, portfolio, performance, exhibition or examination.

Although this study has focused on a particular example of practice in some depth, Bakhtin's (1981: 346-47) description of 'internally persuasive

discourse' indicates that readers will be able to elicit more from this study than I have been able to articulate:

> We have not yet learned from it [internally persuasive discourse] all it might tell us; we can take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning, and even wrest from it new words of its *own* (since another's discourse, if productive, gives birth to a new word from us in response). (Bakhtin's italics)

As a result, I encourage readers to reflect on the findings and, if the thesis is helpful, to engage in dialogue with and about its ideas, so that they can 'wrest new answers' to their personal questions about higher education pedagogy. For me, this study has shown that assessed, dialogic, student-led activities of this kind are powerful structures for the support of student learning. The case studied here has evolved over many years and is a particularly well-developed and coherent programme of study that embraces all aspects of course design and implementation. The case study has shown that linking assessment to student-led learning through a discursive medium is an effective recipe for student learning. When the conditions come together students see a 'light flash' (Bakhtin 1986: 162) and gain a 'dialogic feeling for the world' (Bakhtin 1984a: 265) which can transform their understanding and build their confidence in an enduring manner.

Afterword

This afterword locates the thesis in the current higher education environment considering some of the potential constraints that the contemporary climate places on dialogic approaches to teaching and learning. While it acknowledges the difficulties, it does suggest that there remains both physical and discursive space for the dialogic pedagogies articulated in the thesis, albeit in spite of rather than because of the current environment.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, higher education in Britain changed from a two-tier system of universities and polytechnics to a mass and perceived as differentiated sector, where employers' needs are served, students have become consumers and 'quality', as defined by government agencies (the QAA and HEA), has become the judge of 'excellence' in teaching (Di Napoli and Barnett 2008; Morley 2003; Readings 1996; Scott 1995). Delanty (2001: 59) argues that successive governments have called upon the university sector to engage in a 'social' rather than a 'cultural' project. However, whether these aims were ever in neat opposition and, if they were, whether the change from 'finishing school' to 'service station' (Duke 1992: 62) is either appropriate or accomplished, has been a matter of vigorous debate (Allen 1988: 157; Barnett 1990, 1997 and 2000; Evans 2004; Graham 2008; Jacob 2000: 141; Readings 1996; Robins and Webster 2002; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Walker and Nixon 2004).

Calls for changes to the purpose and character of higher education have been enacted with a raft of new policies that have been announced and refined over the last few decades. Peter Mandelson (2009: 1-4), the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, recently summed up the current government's approach to higher education as 'demand-led' with the function of higher education being seen as 'building human capacity and higher skills' in order to deliver 'economic impact'. This market-driven approach has been enacted in part through the control and targeting of funding[104]. Currently, the sector is also being affected by widespread cuts to its budget as a result of the on-going economic situation,[105] which will bring about further major changes. At the same time, there is more control and regulation than there has ever been with the audit culture having an active and often perceived as detrimental influence on teaching and learning[106] (Abbas and McLean 2007; Findlow 2008: 313; Morley 2003; Reid 2009: 591). Higher education is being forced to adopt a more 'managerialist' approach with institutions being run as businesses serving a market (Barnett and Di Napoli 2008: 5 Churchman and King 2009: 509; Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007: 6; McLean 2008: 48; McNay 1995: 107; Morley 2003: 47; Reid 2009: 590). It has been argued that the result is that 'Deregulation and "marketization" '

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[104] Such as through the targeted allocation of student numbers, funding for widening participation agenda, premiums for foundation degrees and initiatives to support STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

[105] Major cuts have already been made to both the main teaching grant and a range of ring-fenced funding, with £180 million more cuts planned for 2010-11 and £600 million for 2011-13 (Darling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'Pre-Budget report', 9th December 2009).

[106] In addition to the quality assurance audits that involve academic staff more directly, there are also the HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) return, HESES (Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey), the annual monitoring statement, financial forecasts and the corporate planning statement.

now co-exists with 'state regulation and funding' (McLean 2008: 55) to create a 'techno-bureaucratic university' (Readings 1996: 14) that is left with its traditional mission to educate, in the broader sense, under threat and with little room for manoeuvre.

It is perhaps no surprise then that some scholars have suggested that the University is, to use Readings' (1996) metaphor, in 'ruins' and that the idea of a liberal education has been 'betrayed' in the government's new conception of it as a service provider to students and business (Maskell and Robinson 2002: 3). The language used in these discussions is emotive and speaks of 'the abyss', 'crises' (Stern 2009: 271), 'infection' (Coffield and Williamson 1997: 2), and 'death' (Barnett 2000: 11; Evans 2004). However, many scholars are trying to be more positive and to describe 'a new University, both as idea and as a set of practices' (Barnett 2000: 2) which is fit for the rapidly changing world, but which remains distinctive in its sense of purpose and collective values (Brennan, Fedrowitz, Huber and Shah 1999; Coffield and Williamson 1997; Delanty 2001; Duke 1992; Evans 2004; Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion 2009; Rowland 2006; Schuller 1995; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Stern 2009).

Academic pedagogies, whether 'traditional' or 'innovative', are inevitably affected by this changing environment. Academics are being required to teach more students (who often have diverse and extensive support needs) more efficiently, while simultaneously being pushed to deliver more and higher quality research to given deadlines and criteria.

'Traditional' pedagogic practices (Ball 1989: 2) continue to dominate, including a strong loyalty to single discipline-based approaches (Becher and Trowler 2001), lectures, tutor-led seminars/tutorials and assessment by examination. These traditional pedagogies have come under 'scrutiny' through the audit culture, while the discourse of 'innovation' and 'educational development' has called their validity into question. However, 'innovative' pedagogies have also been influenced by the changes affecting the sector.

Whether it would be as easy now to introduce a programme of dialogic teaching, as it was when both I and Robin began to develop our practice during the 1990s, is a moot point. Molesworth *et al.* (2009: 281-282) suggest that the government's idea of 'having' a 'good' education is fundamentally at odds with the literature on 'deep' learning and with the idea of 'being' a learner. Quality systems define what counts as effective pedagogy (Abbas and McLean 2007: 725). In addition, as Findlow suggests, the current 'economic-bureaucratic' (2008: 313) model of higher education sees pedagogic innovation as inherently risky and, therefore, to be avoided (2008: 320). Funding from bodies such as the Higher Education Academy can help, but the tight-timescales within which new practice has to be developed and the requirement for outputs that can be quantified and disseminated limits what can count as 'successful' and, therefore, what is attempted (Findlow 2008: 322). This is as true of dialogic pedagogies as it is of any form of pedagogic innovation.

Nonetheless, this afterword suggests that some space must and can still be found for dialogic education. Although he keeps his argument wide ranging and does not focus on pedagogic practice, Stern (2009: 280) makes the case that only '[d]ialogic higher education will be able to understand its context and reach beyond itself' to survive in the 'abyss' of the current environment. Rowland and Savin-Baden have recently developed the related ideas of an 'enquiry' (Rowland 2006) or 'learning' space (Savin-Baden 2008), arguing how such dialogic spaces can enable academics and students alike to counter the disengaging effect of the 'techno-bureaucratic' university (Readings 1996: 14). I argue that dialogic pedagogies form part of this space, but I also want to acknowledge that creating and developing such new dialogic approaches in teams where there is no previous experience, and in the conditions outlined above, will be more difficult than simply preserving and encouraging existing practice. This is not because dialogic pedagogies are inherently more problematic than any other pedagogic innovation, but simply because the development of most new professional practice demands more time, effort and resource than simply re-running established activities, all of which are unlikely to be available in the strained higher education environment of today. That said, I suggest that there remains a space that can be occupied by dialogic pedagogies for those who understand the benefits and are determined to find a way of realising them. This space has both a physical and a discursive dimension.

In the physical world, classes still have to be taught and while the seminar might be under pressure from the more efficient mass lecture and

the medium of e-learning, where seminars do occur assessed, student-led seminars are no more time-intensive to run than unassessed, tutor-led seminars. The practical demands of quality assurance can be assuaged by videoing seminars if they are the sole medium for a significant component in the module.   Alternatively, risks to 'quality' can be minimised by ensuring some related, written, assessed component is available for external examiners or by keeping the percentage of marks allocated to the seminars relatively low. Finally, locating this kind of student-led seminar in smaller, single-tutor modules minimises the machinery of organisation that needs to be mustered when dealing with larger cohorts.

Advocates of dialogic teaching can also harness other current discourses and 'canonize' (Bakhtin 1981: 418) them to add weight to their own arguments. Dialogic teaching of this kind resonates with traditional disciplinary discourses which value critical dialogue and debate. It finds an echo in the discourses used by students when they call for a more personalised model of education where the student voice is heard and individual needs are met. The discourse of academic or educational development advocates the 'active', 'deep' or 'engaged' approaches to studying that are hallmarks of dialogic learning.

Individual academics can and do also use government discourses - with varying degrees of irony according to their personal views - to persuade others to allow them or reward them (with attention, funding or awards) for engaging in dialogic pedagogies. The discourse of 'innovation' can be harnessed to those wishing to develop personal practice in specific directions.

The discourses of widening participation and diversity are in line with those wishing to develop dialogic pedagogies, because such approaches make a point of giving voice to all learners in the classroom. Employability discourses value the communicative skills developed through discursive approaches to teaching and learning. Drawing on the discourse of quality enhancement, departmental heads introducing a system of assessed, student-led seminars can demonstrate that they are taking a 'deliberate step' to 'enhance' their teaching and learning strategy.

Thus physical spaces can still be found and discursive space can be created by drawing on the discourses already present in the academic environment. Such a pragmatic approach is not alien to Bakhtin who was writing in the turbulent world of Stalinist Russia describing indirectly through his study of literature how oppressive monological, governmental discourse is countered by the heteroglossic voice of the people. His theory advocates ' "Dialogue" instead of "difference", "both/and" rather than "either/or" ' (Waugh 2006: 228). If this principle is applied to dialogic pedagogies, it is possible to see how academics can act pragmatically and draw on academic, student and government discourse, 'sidestepping and subverting a constraining system [and] enabling individuals to continue to work largely on their own terms' (Findlow 2008: 326). While such an approach does not remove the challenges of the contemporary higher education environment, it does enable academics to find a space to undertake dialogic pedagogies in spite of them.

Appendices

Appendix 1   Comparative statistics from the case study and my own institution

Appendix 2   Details of seminars observed

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Appendix 15   Summary of typical assessment components in modules

Appendix 1 - Comparative statistics from the case study and my own institution										
Statistics from HESA by institution		Available from: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1166/141/					Accessed 12th February 2009			
		T1a	T1a	T1a	T3a	T3a	DLHE			
		% of young entrants from state schools	% from NS-SEC Classes 4 to 7	% from low participation neighbourhoods	% of non-continuation rate of FT first degree students	% of FT first degree entrants expected to gain a degree	% in employment and further study			
National average		87	29	9	7	77	94			
Case study - a large Russell Group university		67	17	5	4	92	96			
My institution - a small university college		100	43	18	6	92	97			
League tables and other statistics by subject										
		UCAS	Reputable	NSS	No of	% of RAE submissions by class - 2008				
		points	league table*		staff		4*	3*	2*	1*	Unclassified
		achieved 2008	2008	2007**	entered in RAE 2008					
Case study - History		345	29th	42nd	25.2	15	35	45	5	0
My own department - English		Below 150	21st	1st	3	0	0	75	10	15
* Precise source witheld to aid anonymity; table compiled based on data gathered between 2007 and 2008										
** NSS data not available for 2008 for my own department; insuffient participants										

Appendix 2 – Details of seminars observed

Code	Year/Semester	Student/Tutor-led	Assessed/Unassessed	Tutor	Module	Class type	Week within module	Date/Time	Total number of students	Males	Females	Ethnic Minority	Disability	Mature	Absent	Erasmus
1.A.T1.M1.S1	Y1 S1	Stud-ent	Asses	Jo	Learning History - 10 credits	1 hour Individual presenta-tions	7	Nov 2004 4pm	8	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
1.A.T1.M1.S2	Y1 S2	Stud-ent	Unass	Jo	Learning History - 10 credits	1 hour Choosing a topic for Group Presenta-tions	2	Jan 2005 3pm	10	6	4	1	0	2	2	0

Appendix 2 – Details of seminars observed (cont.)

Code	Year/Semester	Student/Tutor-led	Assessed/Unassessed	Tutor	Module	Class type	Week within module	Date/Time	Total number of students	Males	Females	Ethnic Minority	Disability	Mature	Absent	Erasmus
1.A.T1.M1.S3	Y1 S2	Tutor	Unass	Jo	Learning History - 10 credits	1 hour Interpreting Primary Sources & Prep for Group Presentations	5	Feb 2005 3pm	10	6	4	1	0	2	2	0
1.A.T1.M1 S4	Y1 S2	Stud-ent	Asses s	Jo	Learning History - 10 credits	2 hour Group Presentations	10	April 2005 1pm	9	5	4	1	0	0	1	0
1.U.M 2.S1	Y1 S1	Tutor	Unass	Jo	Content -based module – 20 credits	1 hour seminar	11	Dec 2005 3pm	14	4	10	0	0	0	4	0

Appendix 2 – Details of seminars observed (cont.)

Code	Year/Semester	Student/ Tutor-led	Assessed/ Unassessed	Tutor	Module	Class type	Week within module	Date/Time	Total number of students	Males	Females	Ethnic Minority	Disability	Mature	Absent	Erasmus
1.U.M 2.S2	Y1 S1	Tut-or	Unass	Jo	Content-based module – 20 credits	1 hour seminar	11	Dec 2005 4pm	6	3	3	1	0	0	5	0
1.U.M 2.S3	Y1 S1	Tut-or	Unass	Jo	Content-based module – 20 credits	1 hour seminar Class	3	Oct 2005 4pm	7	2	5	0	0	0	2	2
2.A.M 3.S1	Y2 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Lesley	Content-based module – 20 credits	2 hour seminar	6	Mar 2005 2pm	19	12	7	0	1	0	1	0
2.A.M 3.S2	Y2 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Lesley	Content-based module – 20 credits	2 hour seminar	7	Mar 2005 2pm	12	8	4	1	1	0	4	0

Appendix 2 – Details of seminars observed (cont.)

Code	Year/Semester	Student/Tutor-led	Assessed/Unassessed	Tutor	Module	Class type	Week within module	Date/Time	Total number of students	Males	Females	Ethnic Minority	Disability	Mature	Absent	Erasmus
2.A.M4.S1	Y2 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Sacha	Content-based module – 20 credits	2 hour seminar	7	Mar 2005 3pm	18	11	7	1	0	1	0	2
2.A.M4.S2	Y2 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Sacha	Content-based module – 20 credits	2 hour seminar	9	April 2005 3pm	13	7	6	1	0	1	6	2
3.A.M5.S1	Y3 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Pat	Special paper – 40 credits	2 hour seminar	16 (6)	Mar 2005 10am	19	6	12	1	0	2	1	0
3.A.M5.S2	Y3 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Pat	Special paper – 40 credits	2 hour seminar	17 (7)	Mar 2005 10am	14	5	9	1	0	1	1	0

Appendix 2 – Details of seminars observed (cont.)

Code	Year/Semester	Student/Tutor-led	Assessed/Unassessed	Tutor	Module	Class type	Week within module	Date/Time	Total number of students	Males	Females	Ethnic Minority	Disability	Mature	Absent	Erasmus
3.A.M 5.S3	Y3 S2	Stud-ent	Assess	Pat	Special paper – 40 credits	2 hour seminar	1 (3)	Feb 2005 10am	19	6	12	1	0	2	1	0
3.U.M 6.S1	Y3 S1	Stud-ent	Unass	Frances	Special paper – 40 credits	2 hour seminar	12	Dec 2005 3pm	6	3	3	0	1	0	0	0
									184 Stud-ents	91%	91%	10%	3%	12%	30%	6%

Appendix 3 – Details of student sample

Pseudonym	Year when interviewed and observed	Module being studied when class was observed	Observed leading a seminar?	Special notes
Sam	Y1 student in 04-05	Learning History	Yes	Mature, male, non-traditional entrant.
Billie	Y1 student in 04-05	Learning History	Yes	Mature, male, non-traditional entrant.
Charlie	Y2 student in 04-05	Assessed Y2 seminar	No	Male, straight from school, done both assessed and unassessed seminars.
Jac	Y2 student in 04-05	Assessed Y2 seminar	No	Male, straight from school, withdrew from a previous degree in a different discipline.
Ali	Y2 student in 04-05	Assessed Y2 seminar	No	Female, straight from school.
Terri	Y2 student in 04-05	Assessed Y2 seminar	Yes	Male, straight from school.
Toni	Y3 student in 04-05	Unassessed Y3 seminar	Yes	Female, joint-honours with Classical Studies.
Sandy	Y3 student in 04-05	Assessed Y3 seminar	Yes	Female, minority ethnic background, UK nationality, joint-honours with Politics.

Appendix 4 – Details of tutor sample

Pseudonym	Status	Date interviewed	Observed sessions	Notes
Robin	Tutor	2005	None; not teaching at present.	Male, change agent, 3 interviews, noted not transcribed.
Jo	Tutor	2005	3 unassessed Y1 seminars from semester 1; 2 assessed Y1 Learning History seminars, 1 from semester 1 and semester 2; 2 unassessed Y1 Learning History seminars from semester 2.	Female, has only taught in this institution.
Sacha	Tutor	2005	2 assessed Y2 seminars from semester 2.	Female, undertook small-scale practitioner research on the seminars, has only taught in this institution.
Lesley	Tutor	2005	2 assessed Y2 seminars from semester 2.	Male, long-standing member of dept., has taught in other institutions.
Frances	Tutor	2006	1 unassessed Y3 seminar from semester 1.	Male, does not use assessed seminars, has taught in other institutions.
Pat	Tutor	2005	3 assessed Y3 seminars from semester 2 special paper and 1 unassessed seminar.	Male.
Lyndsey	Tutor	2006	No observations, but tutor does use assessed seminars.	Female, has only taught in this institution.

Appendix 5 - Template for field-notes (Stage 1)

Institution[107]	
Department	
Module	
Tutor	
Tutor's role e.g. Head of Dept.	
Date	
Week of semester	
Time	
Duration of class	
Year/Level of Group	
Group size	
Gender balance	
No. of mature students	
No. of disabled students	
No. from BME groups	
Topic of class	
Resources e.g. handouts	
Layout of room	
Consent/briefing issues	
Location of observer	
Form of assessment and assessment-related issues including, criteria, timing and moderation	
Detailed descriptive notes on session observed	
Notes against themes and identified issues:	
Teaching and learning philosophy	
Type of dialogue	
Skills related issues	
Epistemological issues	
Comments by the tutor before or after the session	
Comments on ideologies	
Concluding the session	
Other post-field-work comments	

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[107] Codes rather than names were used in the field-notes to preserve anonymity

Appendix 6 - Extract from field notes (Stage 3)

These notes were recorded under the template heading 'Detailed descriptive notes of session observed'.

Section 4[108]
Presentation on [… historical figure 2].
Swift change to Male leader 2, no buzz group or activity in between.
This male read in a very similar way to Male 1, clear strong voice, a little fast, not looking up much. He cites the odd critic and refers in general to theory. Clearly structured and argued.   No oral language, no improvisation. Another quite long presentation – 8 mins.
Class taking fewer notes, now, looking tired.

Section 5
Activity - Source work
Female leader 3 gave brief introduction, then 'We're going to do some source work now'. Leaders went to groups, sources given out. They were given 5 mins to read them. Silence fell.
Female leader 3 put questions on whiteboard: 'What can be inferred from this source about a) [… the historical figure's] character b) the extent of [… the historical figure's] power?
All students had the same source.
Leaders stood rather than sat with groups. They answered questions, but also focused the group by asking them questions.
Volume level rises as chatter gets going. Tutor flits about.
Discussion in groups very even and all-inclusive.

Section 6
Activity - Feedback from source work
Female leader 1 had trouble interrupting the chatter, she didn't appear to be able to raise her voice. One of the male leaders came to the rescue.
Feedback from numbered groups:
Male 4 gave full answer;
Male 3 added to it;
Female 1 added a comment, revealing how she had changed her mind in discussion; Male 2 and Male 1 added a comment with humour
Tutor pointed to the source's similarity with another one from earlier in the seminar – brief and succinct, a confirmation of Male 2 and Male 1's points.
Female 3, 'On the one hand … on the other' revealing her thought process; Male 4 responds, followed by Male 1 and Male 3.
All addressed the Female leader 3 who said 'Okay' and nothing else. No interaction, no IRF pattern, no development of ideas.
Wrapped up quickly by Female leader 1.

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[108] For the purpose of organising the notes to aid readability, I divided the seminars up into sections, where a natural break in the action occurred.

Section 7
Break in the class – 10mins, more time than usual
Tutor gave out peer evaluation forms.
Tutor to me in informal conversation, 'We explain quite heavily that they're not used in the marking process, but only to help the leaders write their reports.'
Tutor said the balance between presentation and buzz groups was normal.
She said the Female leader 3's introduction was weak if that was to be her sole presentation, it wasn't clear.

Section 8
Activity - DVD extract.
Female leader 2 introduced DVD.
Tutor said, 'Let's gather round'.
Male leader 3 checked with her how historically accurate it was.
Student: 'It is relevant, honest, you'll see, quite a few of the lay elite are in it.'
All watched DVD of historical drama extract in rapt attention.
Tutor said, 'Exciting'.
Laughter.
Female leader 2, 'Does anyone want to say anything about what they've seen?'
Jokey response.
There was no focus either before or after the extract, why did they watch it?

Section 9
Presentation by Male leader 3 on [… historical figure 3].
More confident, more interactive, more improvised, less read – though still at lectern with a paper. Colloquial language, but showing good subject knowledge. He was critical of some arguments and sources. He has made the knowledge his own.
Students are starting to look tired. Some are still taking notes.

Section 10
Presentation by Male leader 4 on [… historical event 4].
He has emailed people his speech so they don't have to take notes. Filled with the word 'like'. Put 2 maps on OHP. Delivery like the first two, clearly read, verbatim, hand in pockets, mostly looking down, token glance up, speed better but quite hard to follow. Quite serious. Quite long.
A lot of linking phrases/conjunctions: however, nonetheless, moreover, after all, also, nevertheless – almost every sentence begins with one.
Students not obviously listening, no note taking, little engagement.

Section 11
Activity – Balloon debate
Male leader 4 introduced the balloon debate. Each group had one of the crusaders to present on.
2 mins in groups to think of reasons why their character should stay in the balloon. 'Be positive, you can be negative about the others in later rounds and have a good slanging match.'

Tutor to me, 'This group really don't need any prompting to get going on discussion.'
Discussion did flow easily.
Leaders were amongst the groups and were talking, but were not dominating.
Groups sometimes had a couple of discussions going on.
Lots of smiles.
There was a note taker.
The Leaders were enjoying this.
Quite a lot of listening and thinking gestures evident.
Feedback speakers used notes (no flipchart paper).
Plenty of reasons marshalled and delivered succinctly.
Not in role, 'He was very …'
Speakers all similar in ability, short simple sentences emphasised facts.
Voting was treated as fun with a lot of tactical voting.

Appendix 7 – Example of preliminary questions used in interviews

Questions for interviews with students
(Approved 14.3.05)

General information and background
Explain project, ensure briefing sheet has been received, ensure ethical policy is clear, ensure consent form has been signed. Turn on tape recorder.

1. Tell me a bit about how you come to be a student here?

Questions about assessed seminars in History Department
2. What kind of assessed seminars and other oral assessment have you done on the course so far?
• Tease out assessed seminars, general oral contributions, presentations, other, how many, when on the course, what group size, what tutors.

3. How do you feel about the balance between oral and written assessments
• Tease out views on the structure of the course, the deployment of the assessment, the affect oral assessment has on their final degree classification, what essays and exams test that oral assessment doesn't.

4. Can you tell me about the Year 1 'Learning History' modules? (If relevant)
• Tease out how they felt about it, its strengths and weaknesses, what they gained, student-led seminars, group presentation, bring and share sessions, group tutorials, other.

5. Are you doing any modules where some or all of the seminars are assessed? (If relevant)
• Tease out motivation/ownership, quality of input/learning, engagement, preference for some or all student-led seminars, whether it helps with learning, future employment, general confidence and articulacy.

6. Does the *process* of assessing the seminars work well from your point of view?
• Consider: group allocation, topic selection, task allocation, agenda writing, rehearsing, advance reading, structuring and activity selection, on the day, timing, dependency on the group as a whole, self-peer evaluation, report, using the topic in the exam.

7. Have you been continually assessed on your oral contributions (maybe worth 5% of marks)? What are your views on this practice?
• Tease out motivation, criteria, fairness, effort to reward ratio, engagement.

8. How have you found the marking process? Refer to specific examples.
• Tease out issues related to knowledge and understanding of the process, what do they think is being assessed, relative value of components,

fairness/objectivity, criteria/validity, moderation/reliability, feedback/feedforward, formative/summative.

9. What support has been available while you were preparing for the oral assessment?
• Prompts: in-class advice, departmental study guides, tutorials, module booklet, peer advice

10. How have you found the group work in the assessed seminars/group presentations?
• Tease out strengths and weaknesses of group work, how well their group got on, dispute resolution, evenness of contribution, mixed ability issues, planning, meeting, writing shared reports, individual v group mark, feedback on team skills, desirability of working individually, optimum group size, gender mix, self or tutor selected.

11. How have you found the self-evaluation and peer evaluation?
• Tease out its effectiveness as a developmental tool, the students' response to comments on their own work, the kinds of comment they made about other people's work, the proportion of marks allocated.

12. Does the approach on the History modules differ from that on other programmes in your direct experience? (If relevant)
• Tease out how other programmes differ, what affect this has on relationships, learning, marks, motivation.

General questions about discussion
13. What makes a good seminar?
• Prompts: pace, challenge, content/product, skills/processes, length, balance between input/discussion, activities and aids (role-play, props, debates), entertainment, a positive learning environment

14. What makes a good discussion?
• Prompts:
    a. Whole-group, small-group, paired, with resources, in role, through a student leader/tutor/no leader, length of contributions, humour, tone, someone to ask the right kind of questions
    b. problem-solving, testing ideas, open-minded conversation, debate, recitation, exchange of equals
    c. sharing of values and exploration of personal realisation, democratic ethos, radical/controversial, postmodern open-ended mix of ideas, developmental, liberal humanistic

15. What skills do you need in order to be successful in discussions?
• Prompts:
    a. How aware are they of the precise linguistic strategies people use to get and keep the floor?
    b. Other skills needed: confidence, articulacy, knowledge/intelligence, a friendly environment, a commitment

by others to giving everyone a turn, someone to ask the right kind of questions, to have prepared beforehand, to use high level language, lateral thinking, facilitation skills, interest in others' views, interest in the subject, ability to think on your feet.

16. Thinking of your whole course, how do you think you learn most effectively?
• Tease out: effect of lectures, seminars, assessment practices, what is learning for the interviewee (banking or knowledge-in-action), what is their view of knowledge and authority, what is their learning style?

17. Are you aware of any power dynamics or values that interfere with or support discussion in a seminar context?
• Tease out perceptions about gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, political views, social class, authority figures (e.g. tutor), intelligence,

Concluding remarks
18. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

19. Ensure data on name, degree course, year group, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, family background are gathered.

20. Are you enjoying and successful in your course?
• Tease out general issues on the standard of the student's work, their commitment to the course and any factors which might significantly affect their judgements.

20. Remind student of my contact details and ethical approach. Check if they want to receive the project's outcomes and obtain their long-term contact details if so.

Appendix 8 – Example of thematic headings (Stage 3)

This is an example of the thematic headings that emerged during the analysis of the interviews (Stage 3).

		Emerging issues	
Origins	1	The development of the Y1 'Learning History' module	
	2	The development of Level 2 & 3 modules	
	3	The development of staff and external examiner attitudes	
Process	4	Verbal in class briefing and advice	
	5	Written guidance	
	6	Time for study	
	7	Timing	Time of day
	8	Room/layout/equipment	
	9	Group selection	
	10	Agenda	
	11	Activities	Presentation
			Debate
			Other activities
			Handouts
	12	Student-evaluation	Self-evaluation
			Peer-evaluation
			Tutor de-brief
	13	Report	
	14	Marking	
	15	Moderation	
	16	Feedback	General
			Written report sheets
			Re-sits
Individual	17	Preparation	
			Topic selection
	18	Personality	
	19	-isms & -ologies	
	20	Motivation	
	21	View of education	
Group	22	Peer teaching/ Learning	
	23	Group dynamic	
	24	Particular relationships – good and bad	

Challenge & learning	25	Easy/hard	
	26	Level of study	
	27	Compared to other types of assessment	
	28	Compared to other courses	
Y1 'Learning History' module	29	Old and new versions	
	30	Strengths and weaknesses	
	31	Impact	
Ideologies, discourse and theories	32	Educational theories	
	33	Cultural theories	Gender
			Age
			Race
			Class
			Disability
			Mixture of above
	34	Linguistic theories	
	35	Researcher/researched issues	BG informs case study HEI
			Case study HEI informs BG
			SB informs HEI about itself

Appendix 9 – Example of interview data gathered under themed headings (Stage 3)

This is an example of the third stage of analysis, which clustered sections of text together on given themes. These sections come from the interviews.

7	Timing		
	Timing within module	2.3.1	Interviewer: Do you think that fortnightly works quite well? Tutor: I think it really depends on the subject matter because I think it works in the module that I do because of the topics, they're applicable to wherever they are in terms of the rest of the module, there's always material that's relevant. But I know some people run the assessed seminars more towards the end because they need to have a grounding in specific kinds of ways of looking at things, needing to understand specific schools of thought before they really go into that stage of the seminar. So I think that's going to depend on the subject matter to a large extent. But I do always say to them that, you know, remember that I'm aware that you've only been doing the module for two weeks and other people have been doing it for say seven or eight weeks when I mark them in terms of what they get out of it, so that they don't feel disadvantaged particularly. Hopefully they don't feel disadvantaged by going earlier or later or things like having their seminar at a week when there's an essay due, you know that's difficult for them. But I do bear that in mind I think when I'm awarding the marks. But, yeah, I mean, I think different people time the seminars differently because of the nature of the module primarily so, yeah, it doesn't surprise me that there's quite a diverse practice there.
	Timing across year	2.4.1	Tutor: Well, obviously the idea is they do try out things and they come and they argue their corner and so on. Sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't, but I think on the whole, as they get better at it, they're more confident. I mean in some ways the second year in the second semester are an awful lot better than the first semester, when they're pretty shy and restrained and so on, but in the third year they have a go at each other.

Appendix 10 – Example of data from field-notes gathered under thematic headings (Stage 3)

This is an example of the third stage of analysis which clustered sections of text together on given themes. These sections come from the field-notes.

Divergent/convergent
Inclusive- divergent
Section 5 Source work 'What can be inferred from this source about a) [… the historical figure's] character b) the extent of [… the historical figure's] power? All students had the same source. Leaders stood rather than sat with groups. They answered questions, but also focused the group by asking them questions. Volume level rises as chatter gets going. Tutor flits about. Discussion in groups very even and all-inclusive. (2.A.M4.S1)
Feedback from source work Female had trouble interrupting the chatter, she didn't appear to be able to raise her voice. One of the male leaders came to the rescue. Female 1 added, revealing how she had changed her mind in discussion Female 3 'on the one hand … on the other' again revealing her thought process (2.A.M4.S1)
[….]
Critical-divergent
Balloon debate Discussion did flow easily. Leaders were amongst the groups and were talking, but were not dominating. Groups sometimes had a couple of discussions going on. Lots of smiles. There was a note taker. The Leaders were enjoying this. Quite a lot of listening and thinking gestures evident. Feedback speakers used notes (no sugar paper). Plenty of reasons marshalled and delivered succinctly. (2.A.M4.S1)

Appendix 11 – Headings relating to discursive tensions (Stage 4)

These are the headings used in the fourth stage of the analysis which revealed discursive tensions in the interview data. The headings emerged from the analytic process and were not prepared in advance.

1		Learning experience and assessment
2		Critical and democratic
3		Convergent and divergent
4		Accessible and challenging/Easy and hard
5		Individual and group
6		Independence and conformity
7		Impossible and possible to mark
8		Academic and employability outcomes
9		Knowledge and skills
10		Passivity and activity
11		Perspiration and inspiration
12		Justice and unfairness
13		Confidence and shyness
14		Loquacity and quietness
15		Usefulness and uselessness
16		Entertaining and informative
17		Assessed and unassessed
18		Pure history and other disciplines
19		Tutors teach and students teach
20		Structured and unstructured
21		Marks motivate and marks don't count for enough
22		Commitment and lack of commitment
23		Liberal and traditional educational ideology
24		Learning and outcomes

Appendix 12 – Example of interview data revealing discursive tensions (Stage 4)

This is an example of the fourth stage of analysis, which identified discursive tensions. These sections come from the interviews.

1		**Learning experience and assessment**
	2.6.1	*Critical v democratic* Tutor: I mean, you know, now we do have discussions where, you know, I talk a lot but it's genuinely about, 'Okay, well what do you think of this?' and they'll ask me about something and it'll be, you know, 'Let's, kind of, discuss this on the board'. And we'll, kind of, go through part by part and work through ideas. So it is an interchange of ideas, but obviously I'm better informed than they are, so there is that that worry of dominating, there is that worry of dominating things but it's less of a kind of, of a problem as a result of that group dynamic.
	2.3.1	*Academic and employability outcomes* Tutor: One reason why the School does them is because there are so many transferable skills there. I mean, I like to kind of stick out on a limb and say I'm not actually that interested in the employability skills. I wouldn't do that if nobody was looking after them in that respect, but, I mean, I'm someone who likes to kind of say it's interesting in its own sake, isn't it, being able to communicate ideas and take on other people's ideas seriously and discuss them. These are important skills in their own right and I think it's you know for the sake of good learning and the sake of communication. I think that's why I do it and I think that student-led seminars enable them to, just to communicate and deal with ideas in a more interesting way and in a sort of greater variety of arena, really, and media. So I think that, yeah, they're valuable in their own sense, because of their variety, not just in a kind of transferable way.

Appendix 13 – Example of information sheet given to candidates

Research Project into Assessing Discussion in Higher Education
General Information for Participants:
Head of Department and General Contacts

I am undertaking MPhil research in the University of ***'s Education Dept. on the assessment of discussion in higher education (supervisor Prof. Roger Murphy) and would be glad of your help and support.

I would like to better understand the issues involved in this form of assessment and hope to undertake a detailed description of a range of different types of seminar (assessed and unassessed). Having been impressed with the well-developed and innovative programme of assessed seminars in the University of ***'s History Department and, having received encouragement from those involved, I am beginning my study here. My research will not lead to an evaluation or judgement about the department, tutors or students, but will be an insightful description of the way the assessed seminars are carried out.

I know that time is precious to all concerned and would wish to go about the data collection in as efficient and minimal way as possible. Ideally my research will involve:
- Observation of around six assessed student-led seminars in different modules at different levels and three tutor-led, unassessed seminars
- One-off individual interviews of 30mins each with around two students from each of the observed classes.
- One-off individual interviews of 30mins with around six key staff, including tutors of the observed classes and the general contact.
- Possibly a questionnaire of all History students.
- Examination of internal course documentation – student booklets and guides, assessment information, PDPs, recruitment information, careers information etc.
- Examination of other externally available documentation – TQA audit, External Examiner reports.

The interviews will be tape-recorded to facilitate analysis. All participants will be rendered anonymous in the thesis and any later publications, however, you should be aware that it may be possible to deduce the identity of those involved by using contextual information. All data will be stored securely in line with the provisions of the Data Protection Act.

For your information, I myself am Head of English and also Head of Arts and Humanities at Bishop Grosseteste HE College in Lincoln. I have recently led two research projects on oral assessment funded respectively by the LTSN: English Subject Centre and the TTA and have decided to consolidate my

interest in the topic with a post-graduate qualification in the area of educational research.

Thank you for your help

Sally Bentley

Contact details:

Research Student	Supervisor
Sally Bentley	Prof. Roger Murphy
Head of Arts and Humanities	Direc. xxx
The English Centre	School of Education,
Bishop Grosseteste College	University of xxx
Newport	xxx
Lincoln	xxx
LN1 3DY	xxx xxx
s.a.bentley@bgc.ac.uk	xxx.xxx@xxx.ac.uk
01522 527347	xxx xxx

Appendix 14 – Research Consent Form

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Research Project Consent Form</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Title</td><td colspan="2">Assessing Discussion in Higher Education</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Researcher and contact details</td><td colspan="2">Sally Bentley, Head of Arts and Humanities
Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln
01522 527347 <u>s.a.bentley@bgc.ac.uk</u></td></tr>
<tr><td>Supervisor and contact details</td><td colspan="2">Prof. Roger Murphy, xxx
School of Education, University of xxx
Address: xxx
Tel: xxx
Email: xxx</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Please tick as appropriate. If you wish to discuss any aspect of the project in further details, please do not hesitate to contact Sally Bentley.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1. I have read the project outline.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">2. I have received enough information about the project and my involvement in it in order to decide whether to take part.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. I understand that I do not have to take part and that I may withdraw from the project at any time.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">4. I have read the Statement of Research Ethics for this project. I consent to interviews being audio-taped.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">5. I understand that all information coming from the study will be treated as confidential and will be anonymised as far as is practical, though it may be possible to recognise in the thesis or in a future publication the identity of some individuals by using contextual factors.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">6. I agree to take part in the project</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Signature:</td><td>Date:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Name in block letters:</td><td>Position:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Email:</td><td>Tel:</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 15 - Summary of typical assessment components in modules				Deadline		Weighting	
Component				within		within	
Year 1				semester		module	
Learning History I	10 credits						
Multiple tasks:							
Whole class debate				Week 10		25%	
5mins individual presentation				Week 11		25%	
1500 word essay				Week 12		35%	
200 word self-assessment				Week 12		15%	
Learning History II	10 credits						
Group project comprising:							
Annotated bibliography and plan				Week 8		15%	
Oral presentation and associated evaluative report				Week 10		25%	
5000 word project report incl. minutes of meetings				Week 12		50%	
Self-assessment of module as a whole				Week 12		10%	
No other first-year modules have oral assessment							
Year 2							
Typical assessment for approximately half the year 2, 20 credit modules is as follows:							
Assessed seminar in group of 3-5				Varied		Together with the report 15%	
1000 word report in three sections a) conclusions, b) process of organising seminar, c) what went well/what could have been improved. Report to refer to the comments in the peer assessment undertaken by the group as a whole. Criteria: Research and Analysis; Presentation and Management				Within 3 days of the seminar			
3000 word essay (choice of c10 titles)				Week 11		40%	
2 hour exam (answer 2 questions from a list of 8 or 9)				After week 12		40%	
Self-assessment of: a) attendance at and preparation for the seminars; b) quality of your input; c) receptiveness to ideas of others; d) facilitating the group's cohesion and encouraging others to contribute				Week 20 – after final seminar		5%	

Year 3									
Typical assessment for approximately half the year 3, 40 credit special papers is as follows:									
Assessed seminar in group of 3-5					Varied		Together with the report 15%		
1000 word report in three sections a) conclusions, b) process of organising seminar c) what went well, what could have been improved. Report to refer to the comments in the peer assessment undertaken by the group as a whole. Criteria: Research and Analysis; Presentation and Management					Within 3 days of the seminar				
3000 word essay					Week 10		20%		
3000 word essay/document analysis					Week 17		20%		
3 hour exam					After week 20		40%		
Self-assessment (of own contributions): a) attendance at and preparation for the seminars; b) quality of your input; c) receptiveness to ideas of others; d) facilitating the group's cohesion and encouraging others to contribute					Week 20 – after final seminar		5%		

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