CHARLES STURT
U N I V E R S I T Y

Negotiating academic discourses: Challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers

by

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Certificate of authorship

I, Dianne Frances Jonasson, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

When international students from non-English speaking backgrounds choose to study in an Australian university they come with hopes, expectations and understandings regarding their Australian experience in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts. Apart from wanting to graduate with a degree from a Western university and to experience 'Australian culture', one of the main reasons these students choose to study in an Australian university is that they want to improve their English language. Students also say that they do not want simply to *memorise* what they are studying, but want to *understand* the concepts being taught. A further aspiration, initially at least, is that students want to achieve high grades. Achieving these aspirations requires time and practice for students to learn new 'ways of knowing' and new 'ways of doing' in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts. It also requires students to learn how to negotiate the multiple and interrelated languages, contexts and practices – or *academic discourses* – in an Australian university. Learning to negotiate and use these *academic discourses* represents challenges for many students. For international students whose first language is not English, the challenges become even greater.

Challenges, however, also face teachers as they seek to accommodate the needs of students from many different countries. While most teachers recognise the advantages of having students from multicultural backgrounds in their classrooms, they contemplate, with varying degrees of comfort, the evolving role of the academic as one who mediates between student hopes, expectations and achievements, English language as the medium of instruction, and the increasingly diverse cultural, linguistic and academic backgrounds of their students. Tensions caused by mismatches between students' and teachers' hopes, expectations and understandings of each other, exacerbate the challenges students and teachers face.

In order to understand more about these challenges, a critical hermeneutic study was undertaken at Charles Sturt University in regional New South Wales, Australia. Seventy-four participants, including students, teachers and other staff members, were interviewed. Twenty-three countries were represented. This research sought to do four main things. Firstly, it sought to identify the challenges facing these students and their teachers. Secondly, it sought to understand more about the nature and complexities of *academic discourses* and to define and represent these in some way. Thirdly, it sought to understand more about the negotiation of *academic discourses* and to establish how

they are negotiated by students and teachers. Fourthly, by examining the challenges, the complexities of *academic discourses*, and the processes of their negotiation, this research sought to establish what they revealed about *institutionalisation* (such as *academic discourses* and *traditional* ways of doing things in the academy), and *diversification* (such as diversity, change and *creative* ways of doing things in the academy).

A number of findings arose which have implications for both theory and practice. At a theoretical level, this research emphasises the critical role of *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts, in the successful negotiation of *academic discourses* and in the achievement of aspirations in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts. At a practical level, the findings challenge common understandings and preconceptions about the nature of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds as learners. It also challenges the ways in which these students (and English speaking students) are commonly taught and assessed in tertiary contexts, including the use of the lecture as a means of transmitting information and the use of the academic essay as a means of assessing a student's understanding of this information. The study also presents a creative view of the academic essay based on Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspectives, as a means of stimulating dialogue and further research into the purpose and form of the academic essay. Additionally, the study promotes a fresh appraisal of the ways in which international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers, are supported in the process of teaching, learning and assessment and has focussed attention on the need for increased *dialogic practice spaces* where students and teachers can engage in meaningful *dialogue* about the broader practice of their professions.

Part A

Chapter 1: The research problem

> I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world … beginning with my assimilation of them … and ending with the assimilation of the wealth of human culture.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1986, p.143).

> A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.49).

Introduction

This thesis is about international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (INESB students) and their teachers, as these students undertake their studies in an Australian university. In particular, it is about the challenges which students and teachers face as they negotiate *academic discourses*, those languages, contexts and practices of teaching, learning and assessment which constitute a university. In order to gain an understanding of these challenges, a critical hermeneutic study was undertaken at Charles Sturt University in regional New South Wales, Australia.

Initially, this thesis began with an aim to find possible ways of addressing existing challenges facing students and teachers – evidence of which prompted this research – as well as identifying and examining any further challenges which might emerge from the study. As the research progressed, however, it became a different and creative way of understanding the encounters between students and teachers so we, as interlocutors in this field, might understand the outcomes of these encounters over time. These encounters which take place between students and teachers during the process of negotiating *academic discourses* occur *dialogically* through language by *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. In the context of this thesis, that language of negotiation is English. The complexities and incongruencies of these *dialogic* encounters for both students and teachers, and the *dialogic* process of negotiating the many diverse languages, contexts and practices in a Western university, are reflected in Wittgenstein's (1958, p.82) observations about language:

> Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.

This thesis, then, is an attempt to lead the reader through this labyrinth from the different sides as expressed by the students and teachers themselves. By the end of this thesis the reader should have become convinced that INESB students face many of the same challenges as their English speaking counterparts, and also that INESB students appear to learn in much the same ways, and have many of the same hopes and expectations, as their English speaking peers. Achieving what they hope to achieve, however, subsequently takes INESB students on a different journey from the one taken by local students from English speaking backgrounds (ESB students or local students). Some of the differences in this journey have been addressed by the literature as views of transmission and/or deficit, and/or explanations based on understandings about learners from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). In this thesis, however, the works of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) have been usefully drawn upon to understand and interpret these differences in other ways.

A highly distinctive *dialogic* concept of language lies at the heart of all Bakhtin's work (Emerson & Holquist, 1981, p.xviii; Holquist, 1990, p.14). Similarly, it is Bakhtin's (1986, p.60) philosophy of language and *dialogue*, his recognition that inherent struggles exist within and between languages and the humans who use them, together with Wittgenstein's (1958, p.5) concept of *language-games*, which lie at the heart of this thesis. These philosophies and concepts suggest that there are ways of understanding the experiences of INESB students and their teachers which provide more support for both students and teachers than that support generated from understandings about INESB students and their teaching and learning based on ideas and theories of transmission, deficit or Confucian Heritage Cultures. The contribution this thesis aims to make, then, is not so much about finding a hitherto 'unexplored continent', but rather about finding a new and creative way to look at an existing predicament – namely, how to respond to the needs of INESB students and their teachers – already evident in the 'continent' we are sharing.

Hopes, expectations and understandings

In the context of this study, it was revealed that, when international students from non-English speaking backgrounds choose to study in an Australian university, they come with hopes, expectations and understandings regarding their Australian experience, both in an *everyday* sense and in an *academic* sense. Many of their hopes and expectations are similar to those of local students. INESB students, however, have some hopes and expectations which differ from those of their Australian counterparts. These are related

to their primary reasons for choosing to study in Australia, namely, to graduate with a degree from a Western university, to improve their English language, and to experience 'Australian culture', usually as an example of the secular culture of the developed West. Their teachers, also, have hopes and expectations for these students although, in this study, these hopes and expectations are generally related to *academic* outcomes.

As far as *academic* outcomes are concerned, it appears that students and teachers generally hope for the same things, namely, that students will improve their English, understand the concepts being taught, and pass their subjects. This study revealed, however, that, while students and teachers hope for, or expect, similar outcomes, there are fundamental mismatches in the extent to which students and teachers hope for, or expect, these outcomes. There are also considerable mismatches in students' and teachers' understandings about how these outcomes might be achieved, including their understandings about each other's roles and responsibilities in the achievement of these outcomes. These mismatches create tensions which impact on the achievement of outcomes and aspirations for both students and teachers and exacerbate the challenges they face.

Characteristic challenges which emerged from the data revealed that they were directly related to the students' aspirations, namely wanting to learn English, wanting to understand the concepts, and wanting to achieve high grades.

These challenges have been categorised in the following way:

Aspirations to	Challenges relate to
learn English	*English language* (everyday and academic)
understand concepts	*understanding* (teaching and learning)
achieve high grades	*achievement* (assessment)

Table 1.1 – Categorisation of challenges

While students' aspirations and the related challenges may seem plain enough as presented here, the relationship between them emerged only after considerable immersion in the data as presented in *Chapter 3: English language*, *Chapter 4: Understanding* and *Chapter 5: Achievement* where these findings are justified. To foreshadow, these challenges will be discussed later in terms of the concepts of

languages, *spaces* and *games*, overarching concepts which are a critical part of the theoretical interpretation of the data offered in *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*.

The notion of 'challenge', however, is a subjective one, and the degree to which any situation is perceived as a challenge varies among individuals. As one student commented:

> *Challenge? Like do you mean, 'Oh, this is a challenge for me but it's good!' or do you mean like a challenge that it will be hard for me?* (Student 35F).

The types of challenge and how a challenge is experienced by individuals in various situations, impact on the strategies chosen to overcome the perceived challenge. The range of situations occurring within the context of a university constitutes challenges of varying degrees for students and teachers. Additionally, within the Anglophonic society of an Australian university, there exist academic cultures, languages and discourses, which vary among faculties and disciplines (Elbow, 1998; Reid, 1996; Zamel & Spack, 1998). Many students have difficulty negotiating these discourses (Lawrence, 2002; Lovejoy, 2001; Singh, 2002). As Wertsch (cited in Gee, 1996, p.55) pointed out over 20 years ago, a student "is involved in learning a set of complex role relationships, general cognitive techniques, ways of approaching problems, different genres of talk and interaction, and an intricate set of values concerned with communication, interaction, and society as a whole …". Students entering universities today are involved in similar learning processes. For international students whose first language is not English, the negotiation process becomes even more of a challenge (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Ramsay, Barker & Jones, 1999).

It is not only the students, however, who face challenges. Universities also face challenges concerning INESB students, regarding pedagogical, cultural, social, political and economic issues. Universities seek to balance the internationalisation of curriculum with quality assurance measures (Kell, 2003; Lankshear, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Reid, 1996; Roberts, 1999). Additionally, there has been a sharpening global focus amongst many education providers on the importance of catering appropriately and effectively for an increasingly diverse student population. This, in itself, poses considerable challenges to the institutions.

Background to the research problem

The global demand for international education has increased substantially over the past ten years and is forecast to intensify (IDP Education Australia, 2002). This demand, together with its income-generating potential, has resulted in international education becoming a lucrative, highly competitive, and rapidly expanding industry (Bottery, 2000; Jolley, 1997; Kalantzis & Cope, 2002; Kell & Singh, 2000; Singh, 2002; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001). This trend has also been reflected in Australia where international education remains Australia's largest services export industry, contributing more than $AUD14.2 billion in export income to the Australian economy in 2007-2008[1], an increase of 23.4% from the previous financial year (Australian Education International, 2008a). Like any service industry which depends on its clients, higher education is dependent on its students. Its students, particularly full-fee paying students, generate significant funds for Australian universities which have enjoyed burgeoning growth in international student enrolments over the past decade. The international education market, however, is highly dynamic and any one country's share cannot be taken for granted (Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs, 2003).

More recently, global shifts in the patterns of international student enrolments have threatened the future growth of the industry in Australia. A number of factors have contributed to this shift including increased competition from countries which have traditionally been the source of significant numbers of students such as China, where international student enrolments increased by 42% in the two years to 2006; Singapore, which has launched an initiative to make it a 'global schoolhouse'; and English language countries, which are implementing highly focussed and strategic marketing policies (Australian Education International, 2007).

The credibility of Australian higher education has also been challenged with allegations that Australian universities have become little more than "Degree Factories" who regard their international students as "cash cows" (Fullerton, 2005). These and other factors, such as cultural issues and racism, are echoed by many students who participated in this research, who also confided other concerns about their experiences of living and studying at an Australian university. While these are serious concerns in terms of the income generated by these students, far more critical are the social, cultural and humanitarian implications of these concerns both for the students, their families and

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[1] Sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' publication *International Trade in Services, by Country, by State and by Detailed Services Category, Financial Year, 2007-08* (ABS Catalogue no. 5368.0.55.003).

societies, and for Australian universities given their avowed commitment to the educational, social and cultural benefits of student exchange and international students' contributions to Australian higher education and its students.

Possibilities of cultural exchange

Despite a decline in enrolments from countries which have traditionally been the source of significant numbers of students, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, enrolments of international students in Australian universities have shown an overall annual increase of 4.5% as at September 2008 over the same period in 2007 (Australian Education International, 2008b) (see Figure 1.1). This increase reflects interest from a wider range of countries, adding to the diverse profile of international students enrolled in Australian universities.
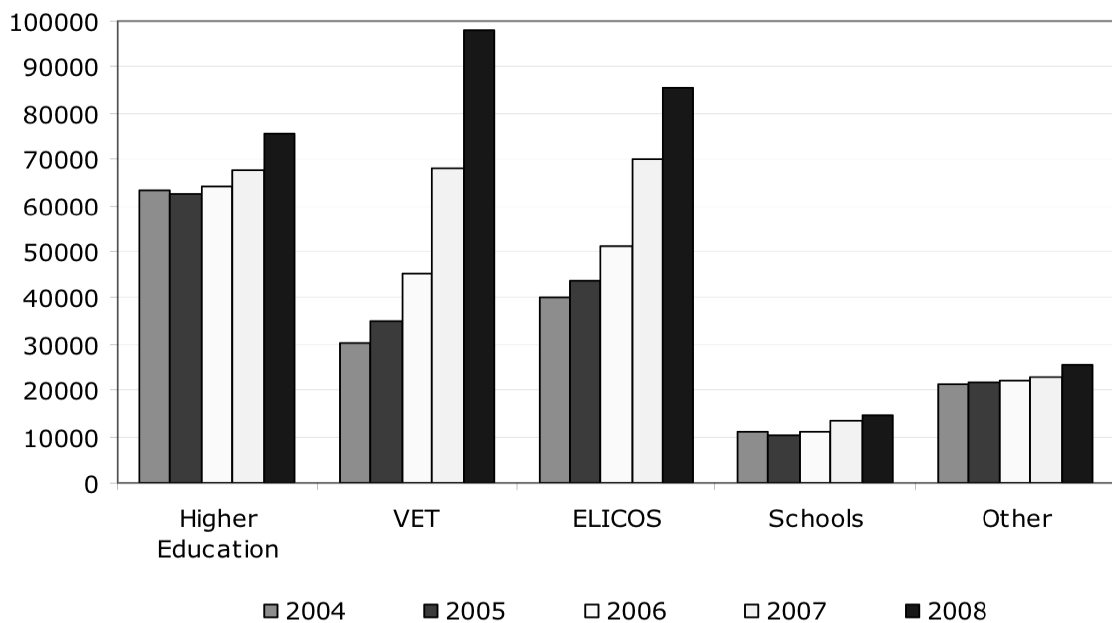
Figure 1.1 – International Student Commencements by sector (AEI, 2008)

As at October 2008, 180,351 international students were represented at on-shore campuses of universities and private higher education providers across Australia (Australian Education International, 2008c). Such diversity – to be discussed later using the concept of *outsideness* – offers significant potential for rich and mutually beneficial, cultural exchange. Indeed, one of the teachers participating in this research referred to the international students as "our learning arc" (Teacher 26M), which stretches across and links the many countries represented in his classroom. This cultural diversity, as Calhoun (cited in Smith, 2001, p.242) suggests, can lead to "reflective self-awareness" and "creativity" which, in turn, "can create a better world". Despite the potential

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benefits of cultural exchange, however, and while many educators recognise the advantages of multicultural diversity within their institutions, seeking to accommodate the needs of such a diverse body of students presents formidable challenges, not only for the institution, but also for the individual teachers and students inhabiting the institution. Teachers debate how to provide culturally appropriate pedagogies, while ensuring rigorous, yet equitable and meaningful, assessment methods for an increasingly diverse student body. Teachers question how much time is fair and ethical to spend with INESB students in comparison to their English speaking peers to ensure they develop those graduate attributes and generic skills prescribed in university policies (King, Hill & Hemmings, 2000; Lubber & Dale, 2005; Morris & Hudson, 1995; Pennycook, 1994; Singh, 2002; Zamel & Spack, 1998). Teachers contemplate, with varying degrees of comfort, the evolving role of the academic as the one who mediates between student expectations and achievements, English language as the medium of instruction, and the increasingly diverse linguistic and academic backgrounds of their students. Furthermore, contestation exists within the academy over whose responsibility it is to support INESB students with their academic endeavours. While some academics consider that it is their responsibility as educators to help students develop academic English and study skills, others feel that this task is best left to those who specialise in the area, such as Learning Skills Advisors and other support staff.

Common strategies to support INESB students

As a means of screening out students who institutions believe will not be able to meet the linguistic challenges of study in Australia (thus, by implication setting the bar above which they believe students *should* be able to meet the challenges), students are required to undertake a pre-enrolment English language proficiency test in accordance with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), a requirement which is discussed more fully in *Chapter 7: Languages.* Despite this test, however, many students arrive at university with levels of English language proficiency which are inadequate for the task ahead of them.

Recognising that poor English language skills exacerbate the challenges facing students, most universities provide INESB students with 'generic skills' support, usually in the form of academic writing workshops or supplementary instruction programs. As Hirst (2002) points out, however, this tendency not only discounts the diversity of situated literacy practices within tertiary institutions, but also tends "to discount the diverse literacy practices that students bring to these institutions" (Reid, cited in Hirst, 2002,

p.2). Not only that, where literacy issues are concerned, "ethnic, national or linguistic backgrounds may not always be the most important differentiating factors" but rather, the emphasis falls on comparisons between academic disciplinary 'cultures' (Candlin & Plum, 1998, p.xi). Furthermore, Scollon and Scollon (2001, p.266) claim that cross-cultural misunderstandings "are often ones of communication across the lines of different discourse systems, not situations of cultural differences at all".

Rationale

Many cultural differences and backgrounds are represented among the participants in this study, reflecting the diversity of students and staff at the University. Nevertheless, within these cultural differences, there exist "dimensions of culture" and "dimensions of difference" (Hofstede, 2001, p.29) in which similarities can be identified. By speaking with students and staff from as many different cultural backgrounds as possible, common challenges could be identified among students and teachers as individuals, not – in a potentially stereotyping way – as members of ethnic groups. This was a critical consideration and avoided the categorisation of participants according to their country of origin which, according to Hofstede (2001) is one of the first pitfalls of cultural research. It was hypothesised that, if challenges for both students and teachers could be identified, then it would be possible to identify similarities in those challenges. Arguably, identifying and considering the *similarities of the challenges* within the dimensions of difference, rather than focusing entirely on the *challenges of the differences*, offers greater guidance for the design of pedagogical and support practices that are potentially effective for a greater number of stakeholders. The following research questions were generated with this rationale in mind.

Research questions

This research sought to answer the following question, namely:

1. What are the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (INESB students), and their teachers, as they negotiate *academic discourses* in an Australian regional university?

This question generated two further questions, namely:

2. What are *academic discourses*? and
3. How are *academic discourses* negotiated?

If these questions were answered successfully, then a further question may also be answered, namely:

4.   What do these challenges and negotiation processes reveal about institutionalisation (such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) and diversification (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy)?

Major bodies of theory

Negotiating and interpreting the complexities of relationships among the topics explored in this study required recourse to sophisticated theories of culture, language and discourse. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's (1895-1975) philosophy of language and the *dialogic* nature of language, together with his notions of *heteroglossia* (multiple languages, voices and discourses), *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*, form a substantial part of the theoretical framework for this thesis and provide many of the conceptual lenses through which the data have been interpreted.

Bakhtin was fascinated with diverse and multiple foci. According to Clark and Holquist (1984, p.1), "Few thinkers have been as fascinated by the plentitude of differences in the world as Mikhail Bakhtin." His writings, too, speak different ideological languages or, as Clark and Holquist (1984, p.1) suggest, "different Bakhtins emerge in the texts themselves". Nevertheless, central to all Bakhtin's work is language, the ways in which humans use language, and the critical importance of *dialogue* in human interaction and communication. It is Bakhtin's interest in variety, diversity, and the multiplicity of foci, as well as the unbounded nature of his concepts and their susceptibility to misinterpretation, that make his theories appropriate for this study. Not only do these characteristics reflect the diversity and *outsideness* of the culturally diverse participants, but they also reflect the multi-dimensional languages and learning experiences of INESB students and teachers within the academy. To foreshadow three critical points which Bakhtin makes about language and which will be made with greater clarity later:

1.   *language* is always *languages*, (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.140);
2.   *dialogue* is the starting point of language (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50); and,
3.   only *dialogue* reveals potentials (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.55).

The philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), particularly those regarding *language-games* and his notion of *going on*, have also been drawn upon to investigate and interpret the phenomena being studied. Wittgenstein's propositions add practical dimensions to Bakhtin's theoretical framework and are used, not so much "to hunt out new facts" but, rather, "to *understand* something that is already in plain view" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.42) (author's emphasis). This study is directed, as Wittgenstein (1958, p.42) suggests, "not towards phenomena, but ... towards the *'possibilities'* of phenomena". Together with Bakhtin's notions, the *'possibilities'* of understanding the phenomena are extended by using the concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*.

Theory as a way of interpreting

While the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein have been used extensively to frame this thesis, it is not about Bakhtin or Wittgenstein. Drawing on their ideas and concepts, however, has made it possible for the data to be interpreted in particular ways. Bakhtinian terms used in this thesis have been adapted from glossaries by Emerson and Holquist (1981, in *The dialogic imagination by M. M. Bakhtin*, pp.423-434), Morris (1994, in *The Bakhtin reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, pp.245-252), from Bakhtin's writings, and the literature. Key theoretical terms and concepts have been interpreted and presented as an extended glossary in *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*. As noted by Morris (1994, p.245), "this glossary will inevitably contain what Bakhtin himself referred to as 'loopholes'."[2]

It should also be noted that works by Gary Saul Morson, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist have been used extensively in this thesis. There are two reasons for what may appear to be an over-reliance on these authors. Firstly, I wanted to work as closely as possible with original Bakhtinian texts. Many of Bakhtin's works, however, were not available to me except in Morson and Emerson's (1990) monumental work, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*, which is the first book in any language to offer a comprehensive study of all Bakhtin's major works and concepts. Secondly, Morson, Emerson and Holquist are not only leading Bakhtinian scholars, but are also translators of Bakhtin's works. Their translations, therefore, provided the means of working as closely as possible with Bakhtin's original texts. I will also refer to other authors who

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[2]The glossary in *The Bakhtin Reader* (Morris, 1994), was compiled by Graham Roberts, Lecturer in Russian, University of Strathclyde.

have used Bakhtin to interpret further questions. These authors, however, like myself, are working with their own and others' interpretations of Bakhtin's work. While I draw on these authors to support my claims, to rely too heavily on their interpretations would add another layer of interpretation to this thesis which I wanted to avoid. Similarly, while I have cited other scholars who, in turn, have cited Wittgenstein, I have mostly drawn on the primary works of Wittgenstein (and predominantly, *Philosophical investigations*, 1958) to illustrate, substantiate and interpret evidence throughout this thesis. One of Wittgenstein's particular notions, as highlighted by Shotter (1993, p.58), is his "metaphor of language-games" as a means of "breaking away from the way of theory".

Aims and objectives of the research

The first national study in Australia to examine the first year university student experience in detail was carried out in 1994. In a report on this study, *First year on campus*, McInnis and James (cited in McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000, p.1) found that the transition to university represented "a challenging hurdle" for some students and "an intimidating gulf" for others. The report concluded that the challenge for universities, even then, was how to "induct large numbers of students into the world of higher learning while meeting a range of student needs" (McInnis & James, cited in McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000, p.1). Since McInnis and James undertook this study in 1994, the "range of student needs" has become increasingly diverse, a fact which has increased the challenges facing institutions and the teachers and students who make up those institutions.

Based on evidence of these challenges within the University – challenges which appeared to exist between the need for the University and its teachers to accommodate an increasingly diverse student population, and the diversity of the needs of the students themselves – this research sought to do four main things. Firstly, it sought to identify the challenges facing INESB students and their teachers, as they strove to negotiate *academic discourses* in an Australian university. Secondly, it sought to understand more about the nature and complexities of *academic discourses* and to define and represent these in some way. Thirdly, it sought to understand more about the negotiation of *academic discourses* and to establish how *academic discourses* are negotiated by students and teachers. Fourthly, by examining the challenges, the complexities of *academic discourses*, and the processes of their negotiation by students and teachers, the research sought to establish what they together revealed about *institutionalisation*

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(such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) on the one hand, and *diversification* (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy) on the other.

If these aims were achieved, the research might inform educational theory, and pedagogical and support practices, in ways which might enhance the experience for both students and teachers and result in mutually positive (or, at least, improved) outcomes – academically, culturally, and socially – for all stakeholders. A further aim of this research was to consider the experiences of individual students and teachers within the institutional context of an Australian regional university. Achieving this aim might suggest ways to heighten cultural awareness and understanding among teachers and students in this setting and, possibly, in other similar settings.

Justification for the research

This research is important on several theoretical and practical grounds. Firstly, there was a relative neglect of the specific research problem, particularly studies involving participants from multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Secondly, as indicated earlier when reported on the background to this research and the latest statistics released by Australian Education International and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, this research has significance for informing theories, policies and practices of international education in a highly competitive industry which is currently contributing in excess of $AUS14 billion to the Australian economy. Batorowicz (1999, p.37) suggests that the generation of "formal policy on internationalisation or multiculturalism would benefit students from different cultures – and ourselves as well". In reality, however, such policies can be difficult to implement. Additionally, attempts to address these 'problems' through the formulation of policy and 'culturally appropriate' curriculum may be merely tokenistic if they do not acknowledge the deeper issues of racism and discrimination found in Australia and seek to address them via attitudinal changes in students and teachers. As Morris and Hudson (1995, p.70) argue, "… international education is not only an important source of national income or an exotic dimension of the work of Australian universities. It is also a learning process with valuable implications for all Australian university students." And, as argued in this thesis, this is so for the teachers of those students also. Thirdly, there was a relative neglect of the research's methodology, that is, the research process which became *The Hermeneutic Helix*, as explained in *Chapter 2: The research process*.

Practical significance of the research

This research is significant for the following four, and possibly other, reasons. Firstly, if Australia is to sustain and strengthen its share of the international education market, it must ensure that INESB students experience positive outcomes, academically, socially and culturally. Secondly, if these students are to experience positive outcomes, then it is critical that they learn, or be assisted to learn, how to negotiate successfully the *academic discourses* within an Australian university. Thirdly, if academics are to facilitate this learning, they must employ or develop effective pedagogical and support practices, or be assisted to develop and use such practices. Finally, if all stakeholders can learn more about the potential of cultural differences, then this may promote more positive *dialogue* between students, teachers and universities, and thus assist all involved to negotiate the complexities of intercultural discourse on a broader, perhaps global, scale.

Contributions

Answering the research questions has contributed to theory and practice in a number of ways. Firstly, the identification and exploration of challenges facing INESB students and their teachers has allowed practical suggestions to be made which may alleviate some of these challenges in practice. Secondly, the research has contributed a new model and definition of *academic discourses* which encompasses the complexities of their nature and of their negotiation through *dialogue*. This visual interpretation and definition of *academic discourses* is now available for further interpretation and use by others in the field. Thirdly, the research process, which became *The Hermeneutic Helix* and which incorporates this thesis's five underlying concepts as presented in the following chapter, has contributed a methodological resource which may be used by others and applied to both research and learning processes. This research has also contributed to existing knowledge about the evolving nature of languages, teaching, learning and assessment in the context of an Australian regional university particularly with regard to international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Additionally, it has contributed two specific suggestions for theory and several other practical suggestions regarding curricula, pedagogies, modes of assessment and modes of support offered to INESB students and their teachers. These contributions are presented in *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice* and summarised in *Chapter 11: The unfinalisability of conclusions.*

This research proposes the use of *dialogic practice spaces* of various sorts where English (*language*), the teaching and learning of concepts (*understanding*), and assessment (*achievement*) can be practised through discursive, dialogic and dialectic (Wasser & Bressler, 1996) relationships between reflective practitioners, namely teachers and students. This thesis also proposes that such *dialogic practice spaces* may allow time and space for *creative understandings* through *outsideness*, revealing dimensions of *language*, *understanding* and *achievement*, all of which contribute to the *unfinalisable* process of *becoming*, not only for teachers and students as individuals and professionals, but also for languages, pedagogic practices, ways of knowing and ways of doing in the academy.

Context

The setting

Charles Sturt University (the University) is a large regional Australian university. In addition to five campuses in regional New South Wales, the University operates in metropolitan centres both nationally and internationally. When this study was undertaken, the University ranked third among Australian universities in its number of international students, with 75 countries represented in off-shore programs. Also at the time of the study, the University was Australia's largest provider of distance education programs, offering a wide range of off-campus and mixed-mode[3] courses to local and international students. On-campus enrolment, however, continues to be the most popular mode of study. It was because of students' preference for on-campus enrolment that this study focussed on international students studying on-campus in Australia. At the time of interviews for the study, 51 countries were represented on-campus.

The participants

Participants of both genders from a wide variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds included undergraduate and postgraduate students (Students), academic staff members (Teachers), and general staff members (Others). General staff members represented various divisions and centres of the University, including Administration, Student Services, the International Office, the English Language Centre, and the Centre for Enhanced Learning and Teaching. Students and teachers represented the University's five faculties including: Arts, Commerce, Education, Health, and Science and

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[3] Mixed-mode courses involve external, off-campus study together with attendance at on-campus residential schools.

Agriculture.[4] This allowed the exploration of *academic discourses* across and within faculties and disciplines.

Data collection

Data collection, predominantly via semi-structured, in-depth interviews, was confined to the two largest regional campuses where the collection of significant data was both feasible and sufficient to generate a thorough database of the phenomena being explored (Kemper, Stringfield & Teddlie, 2003). Eighty-five (85) interviews were conducted. Twenty-three (23) countries were represented. De-identified details of all participants appear in Appendix 1.

Philosophy behind the methodology

When investigating foreign cultures, Bakhtin argues that "one should be content neither with the gathering of new factual material nor even with the reconstruction of a foreign point of view" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.54). He considers that "Both these kinds of anthropology are merely preliminary to the more important task of revealing 'new *semantic* depths' in other cultures – and in our own" (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.54) (Bakhtin's emphasis). As Bakhtin points out, "There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.6-7). While this step is necessary, if it is viewed as a goal, then research becomes merely "duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching" for either side (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7).

A certain 'entering in' through *dialogue*, however, was necessary in order to begin to understand the challenges facing the participants. What is presented here could not have been observed if the sole access to the views was via a questionnaire, which would inevitably privilege the views of the author of the questionnaire, arraying such differences as might appear between participants' perspectives only in relation to the observation points offered by the questionnaire.

This thesis is strongly data driven. It is, in fact, a *dialogue* which starts early with what Bakhtin calls 'the event' – in this case, the voices of students and teachers. Bakhtin (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50) claims that "we cannot break out into the

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[4]While this study was being conducted, the University underwent a restructure, resulting in the following four faculties: Arts, Business, Education, and Science.

world of events from *within* the theoretical world" but, rather, "One must start with the act itself, and not with its theoretical transcription." In this thesis, theory has been generated from an interpretation of the conversational interviews as *dialogue*. It should be pointed out, however, that no direct *dialogue* between teachers and students was collected as data. Rather, the *dialogue* was generated between each participant and myself as interviewer. Initially through the voices of the students and teachers, and then through analysis and interpretation, the data have been presented as a 'quasi-*dialogue'* with and between participants.

In order to allow the voices of as many participants as possible to enter the *dialogue*, many other voices – those of authors, texts and resources of multiple kinds – have not been cited in this thesis. These other voices, however, have informed and influenced my thinking and my approach to this work and this needs to be acknowledged. In order to do this, a bibliography – in addition to a reference list – has been included as an appendix (see Appendix 10, pp.278-292). The bibliography not only represents, in a way, my education into Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspectives, but also reflects my growing understandings of the research process, the research phenomena, and the experiences of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. It would, of course, be possible to find points throughout this thesis at which to cite each of these authors and/or resources if one wanted to demonstrate this material. My strategy, by contrast, was to try to keep the argument of this thesis as modest and limited as possible, to refer only to those works crucial to acknowledge at any particular point in the thesis and, to the greatest extent possible, to allow the voices of the participants to speak for themselves rather than through the baffles of literature. The alternative – that is, ploughing all references into the argument of the thesis as it now stands – would be a showy, rather than a substantive, scholarship.

A constructivist stance has been taken in what began as a critical ethnographic study, which became increasingly hermeneutic as the research progressed. The emerging perspective from these combined paradigms facilitated an understanding of "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118) through an interpretation of the data as *dialogue*. This perspective also accommodated my own *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability* (Bakhtin, 1986; Wittgenstein, 1958), concepts which influenced every aspect of this study and which are discussed in *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses*: *An interpretive framework*.

Clarifications

The following brief list is used as a means of clarifying – as opposed to defining – a number of key terms in this thesis. Major overarching and underlying theoretical concepts together with clarifications of how they are used, appear as an extended glossary in *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*. As discussed further in that chapter, both Bakhtin (1986) and Wittgenstein (1958) oppose the notion of 'definition', an opposition which reflects their ideas about the 'unboundedness' of words and the interpretive nature of meaning.

Negotiation

For the purpose of this research, the word 'negotiate' and its derivatives has one, or more than one, of the following meanings, depending on the context in which it is used, namely:

1. The process, undertaken by students, of making meaning as they learn to traverse the complexities of disciplinary cultures, languages and contexts which constitute *academic discourses* in Australian universities.

2. The process, undertaken by teachers, of facilitating, understanding and assessing the meaning made by students.

3. The process, undertaken by participants through spoken, written, or thought utterances, of making meaning when *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* or *writing*.

4. The process of giving and taking, undertaken by interlocutors, in order to reach the point where both parties know how to go on from that point.

Assignments and assessment tasks

The terms 'assignments' and 'assessment tasks' are interchangeable. Students and teachers in this study most commonly refer to 'assignments'.

Everyday and academic

The use of *everyday* refers to general languages and contexts, as opposed to specifically *academic* languages and contexts.

'Common sense'

This term was used by a student in this study as he tried to describe his 'common, general or local knowledge and understanding' about a particular discipline or topic. The term 'common sense' has been used throughout the thesis to refer to this sense of common, general or local knowledge and understanding.

Footnotes

Extensive use has been made of footnotes. It is hoped that the reader will not find these too distracting. Footnotes, however, serve several purposes in this thesis. They have been used to raise related but less significant issues and to link core data and theoretical interpretations between chapters. Also, apart from alerting the reader to additional information, the use of footnotes mimics *dialogue* by allowing other voices to enter the conversation at diverse points. Additionally, footnotes are used to reflect, in some way, the refracted thought processes of a person thinking in more than one language.

Caveats

✗ Despite reference to income generated by international education, this thesis is not an economic analysis with a primary purpose of increasing INESB enrolments in Australian universities, although increased INESB enrolments in Australian universities could be an unintended outcome of the research reported here.

✗ While enrolments of international students had plateaued or declined at some Australian universities when the research commenced, this thesis does not examine this trend. The data collected for this study, however, may shed light on why this occurred.

✗ Despite reference to the moral and ethical responsibilities of universities to ensure students develop the Graduate Attributes advertised in marketing material, this thesis is not an examination of the extent to which students do, or do not, develop such attributes.

✗ Although this thesis deals with languages, literacies and their evolving and multiple natures, electronic or digital literacy is not a focus of the thesis.

✗ This research does not argue for the primacy of English language or for the primacy of the students' own languages.

✗ Although this thesis focuses on English language, it is not a political, cultural or ethical debate about the use of English as an academic language.[5] Whether or not this is desirable, this stance is based on the fact that all students who participated in this research said they wanted to improve their English language. That is, there was no discussion by the students as to the retention of their own language or their assimilation into mainstream education.

✗ Statements about students, teachers and other participants refer only to those who participated in this study. The statements may or may not be generalisable to

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[5] For further reading, see Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.

students, teachers or others in other contexts. They may, however, 'ring true' for readers apropos other people or contexts.

✗ While participants in this research represent many different ethnic backgrounds, and a major focus of this thesis is cultural diversity, it is not a study of culture or ethnicity.

✗ While some issues relating to gender are mentioned and the gender of participants is identified, gender is not a focus of this thesis.

✗ This thesis does not investigate the differences in challenges between undergraduate and postgraduate students, although some observations are made.

✗ Although this thesis is about students' aspirations with regard to their study experience in an Australian university, it does not examine the extent to which students did or did not achieve their aspirations.

✗ This thesis is not about the experiences of English speaking Australian (local) students although, perhaps to an uncomfortable extent, it may also be about them.

A trajectory of learning

A revelation, for me, occurred during the writing up of the methodology, when I realised that the research process, which became *The Hermeneutic Helix* (after Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.344), is also self-referential. Not only that, but the trajectory of my learning, which *became* the research process, reflects the same process and learning journey that every student in this study also undertook. *The Hermeneutic Helix*, as explained in the next chapter, not only reflects the research process, but also reflects the nature of learning. In this sense it also suggests a kind of experiential validity about a general experience of *dialogue* that I share with those I am researching, both students and teachers. Mattsson and Kemmis (2007)[6] list several types of validity, one or more of which might be apposite.

Having arrived at this understanding, however, I do not want to enter into a technical explanation about methodology, although the research process is explained in detail in the next chapter. What I do want to say, however, is that the research process is not a matter of technique but, rather, a matter of *understanding* and, in this case, what Bakhtin calls *creative understanding*. This implies that it does not rely upon a correspondence theory of truth, nor accepts that any method can be a neutral, non-reactive procedure that somehow guarantees the meaning or value of the findings

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[6] Mattson, M. & Kemmis, S. (2007). Praxis-related research: Serving two masters? *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*. *15*(2), 185-214.

produced. Gadamer, who developed hermeneutics as the theory and practice of interpretation, was at pains to critique the notion of method as employed in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.121).

Voice as a way of interpreting

As a qualitative researcher, I became acutely aware of my role of observer in the observation, interpreter in the interpretation, and author in the writing of this thesis. For this thesis to be written from a strictly formal and traditional academic 'third person' perspective might be read as denying what the thesis is about, namely, *dialogue*. It is inevitable that the reader will understand me as someone who also travels into this territory, who encounters the academic *game* of 'doing a PhD' and, in the process of becoming a member of an academic discourse community, begins to speak authoritatively and clearly about my learning. The parallels between myself and the learners about whom this thesis is written are so powerful as to be unavoidable. To minimise the possibility of my voice speaking for others, however, first person will be used as little as possible. Where an author has emphasised some aspect of his or her text, this is indicated as (author's emphasis). Where the emphasis is mine, this is indicated as (my emphasis).

In various parts of the thesis – in Chapter 6, for example, where theory is introduced – I have avoided using phrases such as "according to Bakhtin" or "according to" other theorists, especially in the definition of concepts which are presented as an extended glossary. This has resulted in many declarative sentences that are asserting certain things, such as, "a space is …", or "a game is …". These interpretations, however, are critical to the thesis, though they may not be as others interpret them. That is to say, the sentences imply a bracketed claim that "I believe this to be true" or, "This is how it is interpreted in this study." Readers will be able to draw their own conclusions about the appropriateness or acceptability of these interpreted assertions in three ways; firstly, that they are not contradicted by what I say elsewhere in the thesis; secondly, that they are in accord with Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian scholarship; and, thirdly, that they are in accord with other scholars cited in this thesis. In writing in this manner I am hoping to invite a direct response to my views – to initiate a *dialogue* – rather than to invite acquiescence to the meaning intended on the basis of an appeal to academic authority, that is, on the basis of deference to Bakhtin, Wittgenstein, or one of their interpreters.

Overview of thesis

The thesis has four parts and 11 chapters. Literature appears throughout the thesis in *dialogue* with the voices of the participants, the philosophers, and myself.

Part A – An Introduction – has two chapters.

Chapter 1: The research problem introduces and contextualises the study.

Chapter 2: The research process explains how the research was done.

Part B – Challenges Facing Students and Teachers – has three chapters which present challenges which emerged from the data. In all three chapters the participants' voices present the challenges.

Chapter 3: English language presents predominantly language-related challenges facing students in *everyday* and *academic* contexts.

Chapter 4: Understanding presents challenges facing students and teachers regarding teaching and learning in *academic* contexts.

Chapter 5: Achievement presents challenges facing students and teachers regarding assessment in *academic* contexts.

Part C – Theorising and Interpreting the Challenges – has four chapters. One chapter theorises *academic discourses* and three chapters then interpret and discuss the challenges raised by participants in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework acts as a 'hinge' which links Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to Chapters 7, 8 and 9. It presents a theory and model of *academic discourses* and provides an interpretive framework for the data.

Chapter 7: Languages interprets and discusses the language-related challenges facing students in *everyday* and *academic* contexts (principally, but not only, the data presented in Chapter 3).

Chapter 8: Spaces interprets and discusses the challenges facing students and teachers regarding teaching and learning in *academic* contexts (principally, but not only, the data presented in Chapter 4).

Chapter 9: Games interprets and discusses the challenges facing students and teachers regarding assessment, especially the academic essay (principally, but not only, the data presented in Chapter 5).

Part D – Negotiating Conclusions – has two chapters which consolidate and conclude the thesis.

Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice discusses the implications for theory in practice. It considers how theory informs practice and presents practical suggestions for addressing the challenges.

Chapter 11: The unfinalisability of conclusions summarises the major findings, suggests topics for further research, and opens the *space* for further *dialogue.*

An overview of the thesis structure is presented in Figure 1.2.
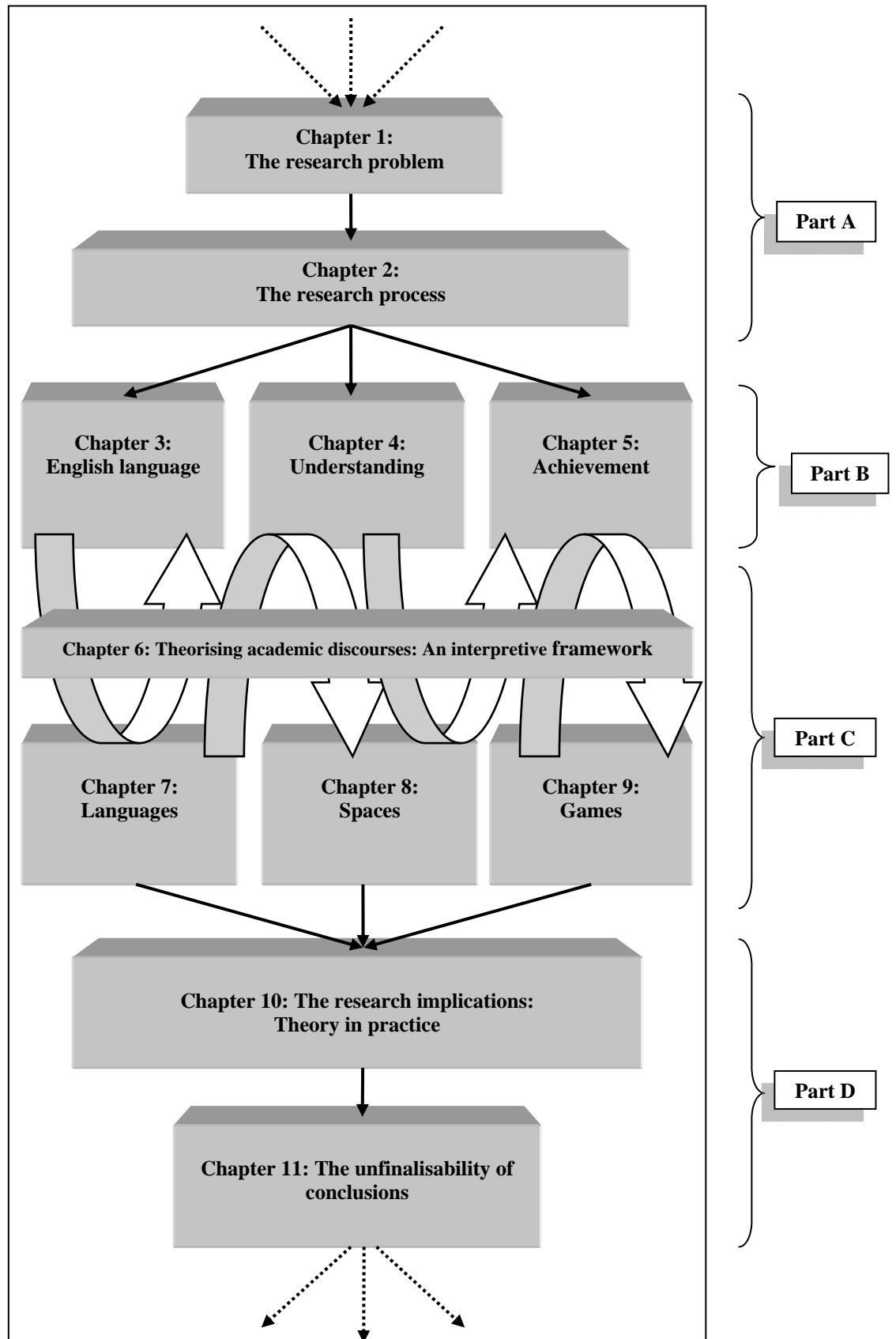
Figure 1.2 - Overview of thesis structure

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Summary and transition

International students from non-English speaking backgrounds choose to come to an Australian university for a number of reasons. Generally, they want to graduate with a degree from a Western university, they want to improve their English language, and they want to experience 'Australian culture'. Additionally, in *academic* contexts, students say they want to understand the concepts they are learning, and they want to achieve high grades. Students come with hopes, expectations, and understandings about their Australian cultural experience, both in an *everyday* sense and an *academic* sense. Their teachers, also, have hopes, expectations and understandings for and of these students which, in some ways, overlap with the students', particularly with respect to students improving their English, understanding the concepts they are being taught, and passing their subjects. There are, however, significant differences in what students and teachers mean by these things. And more critically, there is a mismatch between what students and teachers expect, and what they understand about how these outcomes might be achieved. The tensions caused by this mismatch exacerbate the challenges facing students and teachers as they negotiate *academic discourses*. The philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein have been juxtaposed to provide a theoretical framework which allows the multi-dimensionality of these phenomena to be explored in depth. The complexities of the challenges and of the negotiation of *academic discourses* also required a methodology which would facilitate the complex exploration of the phenomena. The next chapter, *Chapter 2: The research process*, explains how this was done.

Part A

Chapter 2: The research process

> A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252).

> For this reason the word 'methodology' has a double meaning. Not only a physical investigation, but also a conceptual one, can be called 'methodological investigation'.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.225).

Introduction

Initially, this research was to be a critical ethnography using both qualitative and quantitative methods. As the study progressed, however, it became evident that the data gathered through interviews, observations and diaries were deeply subjective in nature and that quantitative methods would not facilitate an exploration of the issues involved. As the *dialogic* encounters with participants unfolded, I accumulated significant, rich data of the lived experiences of the students and teachers, and of the challenges they faced in negotiating the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of *everyday* and *academic* life. The interviews not only rendered questionnaires superfluous but, more particularly, they found me encountering the individualness – or *outsideness* in Bakhtinian terms – of each participant. As I read more about Bakhtin, and hermeneutics as an interpretive method, I wanted to explore this *outsideness* in the context of encountering a world in English – especially in the context of *academic discourses* – from an English (these students' English) not yet sufficient for the task. The *dialogical* and interpretive process through which the stories emerged, links profoundly with the theoretical and methodological perspective taken in the thesis. While I have maintained a critical stance, the methodological approach became increasingly interpretivist and hermeneutic, reflecting the *dialogic* nature of the data collection process, the interpretation of the data, and the emergence of students' and teachers' stories. Thus, the methodological framework supporting this research became a sort of 'fusion' of a critical ethnography and a hermeneutic study (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.339). Also, in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm, the research was "principally concerned with matters of knowing and being, not method per se" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118).

Research design

Qualitative approach

There were compelling reasons for choosing qualitative methods in the design of this research. Firstly, the study aimed to identify and explore the challenges facing INESB students and their teachers, as they negotiated the complexities of *academic discourses*. The nature of the research topic suggests a qualitative interpretive study because of the focus on students' and teachers' lived experiences (Grant & Giddings, 2002) and the subjective nature of research involving multiple cultures and discourses (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Secondly, qualitative methods allowed the topic to be explored in detail while observing the individual participants in their everyday contexts of an academic setting (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Thirdly, qualitative methods allowed the multiple realities, voices and perspectives (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003) of the participants to be presented in a way which reflects the deeply *dialogic* process of the entire research process, from interview to completed thesis. Fourthly, a qualitative approach facilitated my role as an active learner who, also in the process of *becoming* and *unfinalisability*, would interpret the participants' stories as an interlocutor and fellow-traveller. Finally, and perhaps most compelling, was the overarching theme of *language* and *dialogue* and their critical role in the process of communicative negotiation, not only by students and teachers in their negotiation of *academic discourses*, but also in the collection of data during the interview process when the meaning and significance of an understanding of students' and teachers' experiences were negotiated through *dialogue*.

Grounded theory – limits of method

One methodology which was considered and rejected was the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With grounded theory, empirical indicators from the data (actions, experiences and words of participants, for example) are compared for similarities and differences from which categories and concepts are coded. Concepts are compared with one another and with additional empirical indicators in order to "sharpen the definition of the concept and to define its properties" (Schwandt, 1997, pp.60-61). Tentative theories based on "plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts" are then proposed and tested by theoretical sampling in a continuous process until theoretical saturation is reached (Schwandt, 1997, pp.60-61). While an aim of this study was to identify similarities and differences in the challenges facing students and teachers, a grounded theory approach was considered too restrictive and would have resulted in too rigid a description of the process of collection and analysis of data (Tesch, 1990, p.140). The study did adopt certain features of grounded theory, however,

such as its openness to discovering new concepts rather than simply testing existing theory, and its commitment to the generation of theory as one of the major research outcomes.

An emerging Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian research process

This research was prompted by evidence of challenges facing INESB students and their teachers as these students undertook their studies in an Australian university. A critical interpretivist ethnographic approach allowed questions to continue to be asked and answered after considerable background data were gathered (Thomas, 1993, p.35). My previously held beliefs and theories were reconsidered and modified, and continued to evolve as data were interpreted and reflected upon. As data collection progressed, further questions were generated. The research focus became clearer and critical themes of the research began to conceptualise (Thomas, 1993, p.42). This process was to become "a hermeneutic spiral" (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.344) which is explained later in this chapter.

During this process, works by Habermas, Bourdieu, Bakhtin and Wittgenstein were drawn upon as resources for understanding more about these challenges. As I became deeply involved with the interactive, *dialogic* and interpretive process of data collection and reflected on the theoretical implications, the philosophical positions of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein took precedence in framing the study. The initial research idea, which began with wanting to understand more about the challenges facing INESB students and their teachers, was reconceptualised, refined and refocused as an overarching and powerful idea about *language* and *dialogue*. The complexities of languages, cultures and the negotiation of *academic discourses* which I sought to understand, increasingly seemed to me to have at their centre issues of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which were evolving through ongoing contestation and struggle. A Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective reflected more closely my emerging sense of how the challenges might be interpreted and represented. Whereas Habermas, as Gardiner (2004, p.30) points out, "seeks to delineate sharply between particular realms of social activity and forms of discourse ... Bakhtin problematizes such demarcations, sees them as fluid, permeable and always contested, and alerts us to the power relations that are involved in any such exercise of boundary-maintenance".

Bourdieu's writings were also considered less useful, even though aspects of his work are pertinent to this thesis. In *The weight of the world: social suffering in contemporary*

society (1999), for example, Bourdieu alerts qualitative researchers to the need to protect participants from the "dangers of misinterpretation" (p.1) and highlights the challenges of interpreting transcribed interviews, suggesting that "everything ... is at once hidden and disclosed, not only in the transcribed discussion but also in the pronunciation and intonation, everything transcription eradicates, from body language, gestures, demeanor, mimicry and looks, to silences, innuendoes, and slips of the tongue" (p.2). Also, together with Passeron and de Saint Martin in *Academic discourse: Linguistic misunderstanding and professorial power* (1994), Bourdieu raises issues which support and reinforce particular aspects of this study. This work of Bourdieu is a translation of a work which originally appeared in French in 1965 under the title *Rapport pédagogique et communication*. The study, based on research carried out in French universities in the early 1960s, is concerned primarily with the role of language and linguistic misunderstanding in the education process. It was suggested in the translated edition that, despite the passage of time, "the main findings and central arguments of the study ... retain their significance today" (Bourdieu, Passeron & de Saint Martin, 1994). Similarly, the following comments from that study are reflected – and at times contested – to varying degrees in aspects of this thesis, as will become evident in coming chapters:

> The output of an academic system ... is determined by the absolute or relative quantity of information transmitted through language. For there are few activities which consist so exclusively as teaching in the manipulation of words. Testing students on the words actually used in lectures shows that it is the nature of university language and how it is applied which are the most critical, but least cited, causes of the breakdown in the teaching relationship (Bourdieu, Passeron & de Saint Martin, 1994, pp.3-4).

> Many university students are unable to cope with the technical and scholastic demands made on their use of language as students. They cannot define the terms which they hear in lectures or which they themselves use. They are remarkably tolerant of words lifted from the language of ideas but applied inappropriately or irrelevantly, and they accept sloppiness and incorrectness with resigned indifference. The lexis and syntax of examination scripts and essays written during the year offer a still more unchallengeable test of linguistic misunderstanding. ... Constrained to write in a badly understood and poorly mastered language, many students are condemned to using a *rhetoric of despair* whose logic lies in the reassurance that it offers. Through a kind of incantatory or sacrificial rite, they try to call up and reinstate the tropes, schemas or words which to them distinguish professorial language. Irrationally and irrelevantly, with an obstinacy that we might too easily mistake for servility, they seek to reproduce this discourse in a way which recalls the simplifications, corruptions and logical re-workings that linguists encounter in 'creolized' languages (Bourdieu, Passeron & de Saint Martin, 1994, p.4).

Despite some relevance of aspects of Bourdieu's work to this thesis, however, his style

and manner of writing represents the type of academic discourse which caused major challenges for many students in this study. In principle, then, it seemed inappropriate to consider his philosophies for this study, not because of the philosophies themselves, but because of their inaccessibility.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, particularly in *Philosophical investigations* (1958) but also in his earlier work *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1922), presents his propositions in short, numbered paragraphs. This 'genre', which illustrates how deeply reflective and philosophical aphorisms can be presented in concise, practical and accessible ways, seemed to me to hold potential for how other forms of academic writing might be presented in similarly concise and accessible ways. Thus I entered into a *dialogue* with Bakhtin and Wittgenstein which became a powerful methodological and interpretive framework useful both in the collection of data and their analysis and, later, in articulating this research's contribution to wider communities of discourse about theory and practice.[1]

Critical ethnography

Doing critical ethnography, according to Thomas (1993, p.47) "begins with a value-laden project that directs attention to things that are not quite right in our culture". Here "our culture" is interpreted to mean 'the University' and its ways of doing and being in the world, that is, its "cultural meanings" (Thomas, 1993, p.13). Lynd (cited in Thomas, 1993, p.13) believes that "these cultural meanings and their forms of transmission are conservative to the extent that they possess an inertia that preserves established characteristics resistant to change". From a Bakhtinian perspective, however, such cultural meanings are not 'inert' – though some *are* more resistant to change – but evolve in an environment of constant *heteroglossic* struggles between competing stronger *centrifugal* forces which seek to accommodate change and diversity, and *centripetal* forces which seek unity by keeping things the same. It is within such environments, or *spaces*, that students and teachers meet, their challenges exacerbated by these *heteroglossic* tensions. The reason for maintaining a critical stance, therefore, is that I want this research to contribute more than an 'insightful description' of the challenges facing students and teachers in this 'culture'. Rather, though "more difficult and riskier" (Thomas, 1993, p.68), I want to raise the critical implications of the

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[1] For further reading in support of the claim that the philosophies of Habermas and Bourdieu are less appropriate for this study, see Nigel Pleasants (1999) *Wittgenstein and the idea of a critical social theory: A critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*, and Theodore Schatzki (1997) *Practices and actions: A Wittgensteinian critique of Bourdieu and Giddens.*

descriptions (Thomas, 1993, p.5) in order to challenge some of the "established characteristics", "cultural meanings and their forms of transmission" in "the culture", that is, the culture and practices of the University. This aim is reflected in Thomas's (1993, p.20) explanation of critical thinking:

> Critical thinking begins with the recognition that ideas possess a dual-edged capacity to both control and liberate, and adherents pursue knowledge by challenging conventional, taken-for-granted conceptions about the world and about how we think about it in order to move beyond "what is" to a state of "what could be."

Again, as Wittgenstein (1958, p.42) suggests, this study is directed "not towards phenomena, but ... towards the *'possibilities'* of phenomena" (author's emphasis).

Hermeneutics

Gadamer developed and extended hermeneutics as the theory and practice of interpretation as a means of illuminating the conditions of *possibility* of understanding (Gallagher, cited in Bresler, 2001, p.4) (my emphasis). Gadamer "sees interpretation as a virtual dialogue" (Mautner, 2000, p.215). Thomas (1993, p.70) also says that hermeneutic science "aims to understand the world interpretively by deciphering meanings". Paterson and Higgs (2005, pp.339 & 354), in their article *Using hermeneutics as a qualitative research approach in professional practice*, promote hermeneutics as "a stimulating and deeply interpretive research approach which can examine complex human phenomena from multiple perspectives to produce rich theoretical and experiential interpretations of these phenomena".

Following Paterson and Higgs (2005, pp.339-357), but still with an implicit critical perspective, hermeneutics was adopted as a "credible, rigorous, and creative strategy" (p.339) which allowed me to investigate and interpret the complexities of the phenomena in ways which other research methods would not have allowed. The research was conducted in an interpretivist paradigm which not only facilitated the analysis and interpretation of the data as *dialogue*, but also allowed the theoretical perspectives of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein which underpin the research to be illustrated in the research process. These theoretical perspectives are also reflected in the following three philosophical assumptions that inform hermeneutics as a strategy for knowledge creation (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, pp.342-343):

1. Hermeneutics refers to the shared understandings that we already have with each other (Koch, 1999) and this sharing occurs through language. This view is translated into the Gadamerian metaphor of *fusion of horizons* whereby different

interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation [in this case the negotiation of *academic discourses*] are brought together through dialogue to produce shared understanding.

2. Knowledge is constructed through dialogue: meaning emerges through a dialogue or hermeneutic conversation between the text and the inquirer (Koch, 1999). A 'unique characteristic of hermeneutics is its openly dialogic nature: the returning to the object of inquiry again and again, each time with an increased understanding and a more complete interpretive account' (Packer, 1985, p.1091). Gadamer equated 'the metaphor of dialogue with the logic of question and answer' (Koch, 1996, p.176).

3. Gadamer used Heidegger's metaphor of the hermeneutic circle 'to describe the experience of moving dialectically between the parts of the whole' (Koch, 1996, p.176). The researcher becomes part of this circle moving repeatedly between interpretations of parts of the text [in this case the *dialogic* data predominantly from interviews] and interpretations of the whole text [in this case the emerging model of the negotiation of *academic discourses*], representing an emerging understanding of the phenomenon. (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.343).

This cyclical research process allowed a theoretical framework to be progressively created, considered, and re-created. An outcome of this hermeneutic process was the identification and interpretation of challenges facing students and teachers through the conceptual lenses of *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. This led to the design of a model of *academic discourses* which will be discussed fully in *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*. A further outcome, as a result of the ongoing cyclical process of hermeneutics, was the re-interpretation of the data through the conceptual lenses of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*, concepts which are also discussed in Chapter 6. This re-interpretation facilitated an understanding of the ways in which students and teachers negotiate *academic discourses*.

Paterson and Higgs's (2005, p.344) concept of a hermeneutic spiral has been adapted to reflect the research process. It was only upon deeper reflection on the research process, however, that it became evident that this process also mirrored the five concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability* that became central to the *substantive* (not methodological) claims and focal concepts of the thesis. These concepts have been incorporated into *The Hermeneutic Helix* (see Figure 2.1) which not only reflects the research process as it unfolded in practice – that of the 'interpreter' linked with the 'interpreted' – but also traces my own learning journey unfolding in theory and interpretation and, at the end, revealed by my reflexive reconstruction of the path of my own practices of observation, *dialogue* and interpretation as I wrote successive drafts of the chapters of the thesis.

Figure 2.1 - The Hermeneutic Helix

Spiral 1 (which I could, by the end of the process, understand in terms of the notions of *outsideness* and *creative understanding*)

My initial understanding of the phenomena

⇨ reviewing literature for others' understandings of phenomena
⇨ seeking others' definitions/interpretations of *academic discourses*
⇨ reflecting on and understanding horizons of others in field
    ⇨ constructing texts from literature (*reading* and *writing*)
    ⇨ constructing texts from *dialogue* (*listening* and *speaking*)

Spiral 2 (which I could, by the end of the process, understand in terms of the notions of *creative understanding* and *going on*)

Generating research questions

⇨ reading more deeply into literature and theories
⇨ interpreting and considering others' understandings and theories
⇨ creating interpretative model of *academic discourses*
    ⇨ emerging understandings of *academic discourses*
    ⇨ emerging understandings of phenomena

Spiral 3 (which I could, by the end of the process, understand in terms of the notions of *going on* and *becoming*)

Interviewing participants (collecting data)

⇨ negotiating Students', Teachers' and Others' meanings through *dialogue*
⇨ interpreting horizons of participants' experiences
⇨ seeking understandings of *challenges* facing participants
    ⇨ developing understandings of *challenges*
    ⇨ developing understandings of *academic discourses*

Spiral 4 (which I could, by the end of the process, understand in terms of the notions of *becoming* and *unfinalisability*)

Answering research questions

⇨ ongoing *dialogue* with participants' texts (transcripts)
⇨ presenting emerging interpretations to colleagues in the field
⇨ recreating interpretive model of *academic discourses*
    ⇨ deepening understanding of dimensions of *challenges*
    ⇨ deepening understanding of negotiation of *academic discourses*

Spiral 5 (which I could, by the end of the process, understand in terms of the notions of *unfinalisability* and *outsideness*)

Presenting findings (interpretations)

⇨ revisiting, revisiting, and revisiting data
⇨ justifying and validating interpretations with data
⇨ refining concepts and model of *academic discourses*
    ⇨ opening *dialogue* through presentation/publication
    ⇨ continuing *dialogue* through others' evaluations of interpretations ⇨
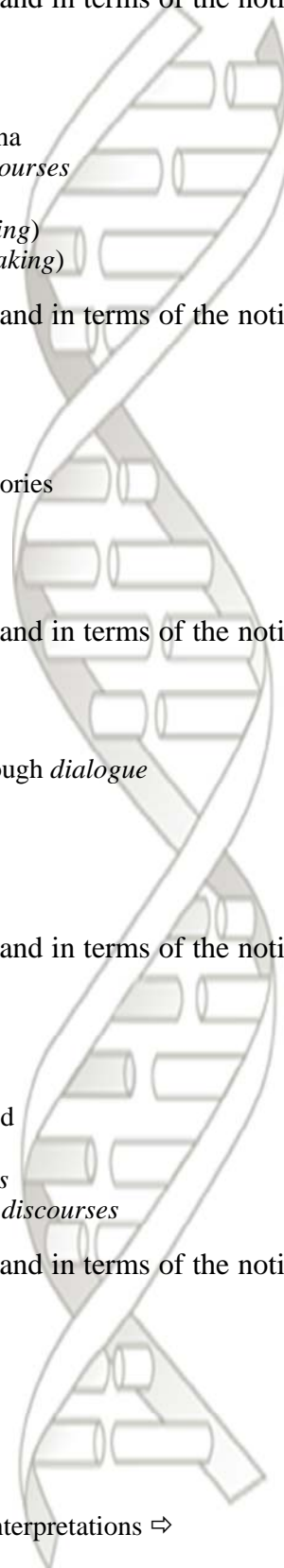
Epistemological position

Epistemology[2] raises and aims to answer questions about the nature of knowledge. It is about ways of knowing and the possibility of knowledge. This thesis adopts an epistemology of *dialogism*, that is, that "knowledge is constructed through dialogue" (Koch, cited in Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.343). This position also holds that "knowledge is by definition plural and uncertain and the best we can do is make a stand on the basis of (admittably fallible) human judgement" (Schwandt, 1997, p.40). As Schwandt (1997, p.40) points out, this response "abandons Epistemology with a capital 'E' – the search for foundations or essences of knowledge – but retains the idea of epistemology with a lower-case 'e' – reflection of various kinds about what it means to know". This epistemology of *dialogism*, and of hermeneutics, provides much of the justification for the research process undertaken here, including the aim, function and assumptions of method (Schwandt, 1997, p.39).

Ontological assumptions

Ontology raises and aims to answer questions about the nature of reality. From the critical perspective the ontological assumption is that "there is something else there that will take us beneath the surface world of accepted appearances" (Thomas, 1993, p.34). From a hermeneutical perspective, and in keeping with an interpretivist paradigm aligned with the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Taylor (Schwandt, 1994, p.121), the ontological assumptions underpinning this study go beyond the realist ontology that "relies on the native's point of view, as filtered through the data collector's interpretative framework" (Thomas, 1993, p.34). It also goes beyond "discriminating between emic and etic perspectives" (Schwandt, 1994, p.121). Rather, it goes to the interpretive nature of *any* grasp on reality (no matter how tenuous or fallible, or how coherent), and the 'unfinalisable' conclusions which ensue. As Taylor (cited in Schwandt, 1994, p.121) claims:

> If our interpretations seem implausible or if they are not understood by our interlocutors, 'there is no verification procedure we can fall back on. We can only continue to offer interpretations; we are in an interpretative circle'.

Thus, from a hermeneutical perspective, the ontological assumptions reflect an understanding that reality can only ever be an interpretation or, in reality, so many interpretations.

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[2]Bakhtin is highly critical of what he calls "epistemologism" because of its tendency to "a unitary and unique consciousness" (Smith, 1999, p.18) which, therefore, is contradictory to the notion of *dialogism* which depends on *otherness* and *outsideness* for consciousness. The concepts of *dialogism* and *outsideness* are clarified in Chapter 6.

Ethical considerations

This ontological assumption that reality can only be 'so many interpretations' did not preclude me from any ethical obligation to make responsible decisions, to give good reasons for my actions, to be rational and to exercise judgement in making an interpretation (Schwandt, 1994, p.122). Here, a critical perspective helped balance any tendency to slip into solipsism through slap-happy interpretation. A critical perspective, for example, ensured that interpretations were based on demonstrable evidence (Thomas, 1993, p.64), that interpretations were "illustrated" rather than "asserted" (Thomas, 1993, p.65), and that interpretations were based on a strong theoretical framework. There were other considerations also, which will be discussed under the heading 'Validity and reliability'.

More practical ethical considerations revolved around issues of fully informed consent, the right to privacy, avoidance of deception, and protecting participants from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Another issue which needed consideration was that of the power relationship between the interviewer (myself) and the interviewee. Apart from influencing the participant's responses, this power relationship extended to my analysis of the data and presentation of the findings. Transparency in all aspects of the research was not only imperative ethically, but was essential to ensure the quality, that is, the credibility, of the research (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p.723).

The participants

In order to gain an understanding of the challenges facing INESB students and their teachers, 85 semi-structured interviews were conducted over a 19 month period (13/02/04 to 24/09/05) with 74 participants, including 43 (M=16; F=27) undergraduate and postgraduate students (Students), 22 (M=16; F=6) academic staff members (Teachers), and 9 (M=1; F=8) general staff members (Others) at one Australian university, namely Charles Sturt University (the University). Six female students, three male students, one female teacher and one male teacher were interviewed twice each. A number of students, teachers and others made contact after interviews to pass on additional information which they thought may be useful to the study. The different ethnic backgrounds represented among participants not only reflected the University's student/staff profile but also allowed the investigation of whether common challenges existed for participants regardless of country of origin or ethnic background. To avoid the possibility of stereotyping, countries of origin, generally, are not identified within

the text of this thesis. In some instances, however, where identification of country was considered relevant to the point being made and where the participant's anonymity would not be compromised, country of origin has been mentioned. De-identified details of all participants, including countries of origin, appear in Appendix 1.

Identification of participants

No participant has been identified and the use of pseudonyms has been avoided. Substituting one name with another may protect the participant's anonymity but may also increase the possibility of stereotyping and value judgements. Participants, therefore, have been identified simply, as follows[3]:

Student	= undergraduate or postgraduate student
Teacher	= lecturer or academic staff member
Other	= administrative, support services or general staff member
M	= male
F	= female

Numbers following 'Student', 'Teacher' or 'Other' indicate the number of interview. Where more than one interview was conducted, this is indicated by using a '.1' for the first interview, and '.2' for a second interview. For example, Student 60.1M, refers to the first interview with a male student. Student 60.2M refers to a second interview with the same participant. The number 60 indicates that it was the sixtieth interview in the data collection process. Twenty-three countries are represented (see Appendix 1). Unless otherwise stated, the term 'Students' or 'students' refers to international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The acronym INESB, meaning 'international non-English speaking backgrounds', is sometimes used, for example, 'INESB students'.

Selection of participants

Students

Originally, it was envisaged that first year students would be the focus of this study. Difficulty arose, however, with identifying and accessing international students. Because of Australian privacy laws, the University was not at liberty to advise who these students were. This made the participant selection process somewhat adventitious and opportunistic in nature. As the research progressed, however, and students, teachers and others heard about the study, "network" or "snowball sampling" generated additional participants (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p381). Teachers likely to have international students in their courses (for example, in Commerce and Information Technology) were approached. This gave me entry to classes where I spoke to all

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[3] It is acknowledged that this method of identification may also lend itself to stereotyping.

students prior to lectures, outlining the research and seeking volunteer participants. Initial letters outlining my research (Appendix 2) and confidential contact sheets (Appendix 3) were left for students to complete and return if they chose to be involved in the study. I also attended a range of activities at two of the major campuses where I knew INESB students would be present (such as orientation and information sessions) and sought participants in the same way.

Teachers

My contact with teachers to identify possible student participants also initiated those teachers' interest and participation in the research. Other teachers who were known to have international students in their courses were contacted, initially by email, to outline the research and request their participation. Most interviews generated further contacts until all five faculties – Arts, Commerce, Education, Health, and Science and Agriculture – were represented by student and teacher participants.

Others

Other participants were contacted by email and/or telephone as with the teachers. These participants were selected from divisions and centres of the University which had specific dealings with INESB students, including Administration, Student Services, the International Office, the English Language Centre, and the Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching. Including these participants' voices in the *dialogue* provided an additional source for triangulation of the data.

Despite difficulties in identifying and selecting participants, it eventuated that the sample of students was generally representative of the University's international student enrolment profile. That is, the highest numbers of enrolments were in the Faculties of Commerce, and Science and Agriculture, followed by Health, Education and Arts (see Appendix 1 for further details of faculty representation). In-depth analyses based on student year of study have not been undertaken. Rather, more generalised observations have been made regarding challenges facing undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Length of time in Australia

The students interviewed had been in Australia for different lengths of time. Consequently, each student participant was at a different stage in his or her experience of *going on* and *becoming*. Some students were in their final years of study, having spent more than three years in Australia. Others had only just commenced their studies

when interviewed. Those who had recently arrived spoke about their initial aspirations while others who had been in Australia longer, told of their changing aspirations. Those who had completed, or almost completed, their courses provided views on the final stages in the common – as interpreted – INESB student experience. Three (3) students were at the University for six months only, as part of Student Exchange Programs with China, Germany and Sweden.

Data collection

Data collection was a *dialogic* process and reflects the understanding presented in this thesis that *dialogue* involves *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts.

Listening and speaking

Interviews and conversations

The majority of data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews and informal conversations. In the majority of cases, interviews were one-to-one. In two other cases, however, three students were interviewed as a small group and two students were interviewed together. Most interviews ranged from one to two hours in length and, after consent had been obtained, were tape-recorded using a small Dictaphone. In some instances, participants requested that the interview, or parts of the interview, not be recorded. In no case was the tape-recorder used surreptitiously (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p.89). Tapes were transcribed by myself, apart from three (3) tapes which were transcribed by two typists. The transcriptions became the *dialogic* texts within *The Hermeneutic Helix*. Thirteen of the 85 interviews were conducted by telephone. These shorter interviews were not tape-recorded but notes were taken and key quotations recorded by hand. Lengthier quotations from these participants are not available. These interviews were the last to be conducted as a means of ensuring that no new data were emerging.

Reading and writing

Documents and emails

Data were also sourced from documents, including University policies (the Assessment Policy and the Strategic Plan for 2002-2007), course materials, prescribed assessment tasks, student writings, and emails from participants. In some cases, students sent follow-up emails after they had returned to their own countries. Samples of written assessment tasks were also gathered as further evidence of the teacher/student *dialogic*

process, in particular, teacher feedback to students. These documents were not analysed. They did, however, provide further points of verification; for example, in relation to student comments regarding teacher feedback.

Diaries

Six participants consented to keep informal diaries of reflective thoughts regarding their ongoing experiences at the University. While the limitations of this technique as a data gathering tool are acknowledged, it was considered that any notations may allow a subjective, human thread to be woven through the thesis, reflecting the personal experiences of individuals within the vast university setting. One teacher and one student from each faculty were invited to keep a journal. Not all those approached, however, agreed to participate and, of those who did, time limitations hindered them from making substantial numbers of entries. Additionally, two students left Australia and one student 'lost' his journal. Nevertheless, entries in the six journals which were returned (one male teacher, one female teacher, three female students, and one other female staff member) provide insightful glimpses of personal experiences.

Observations

Data were also gathered via participant observation in a variety of settings, including lecture theatres, tutorial rooms, staff offices, staff and student meetings, and other places where teachers and students gather, both on- and off-campus, subject to the agreement of the people involved. Students were unobtrusively observed both on- and off-campus. I attended a variety of functions which involved international students, such as welcome luncheons, Chinese New Year celebrations, and Easter festivities. Other points of observation included morning teas, orientation week activities, information sessions, workshops, lectures and other activities where international students were present. The students became progressively more open and willing to offer information as they got to know me.

Triangulation/crystallisation

According to Richardson (1994, p.522) the concept of triangulation in qualitative research should be one of crystallisation reflecting the multiple sources from which data are gathered, and the multiple perspectives from which the data can be viewed and interpreted. In this research, data were gathered from multiple sources (including students and teachers of different kinds, other informants, and documents), and by different methods (including interviews, observations, documents and diaries). During

the time that this research was undertaken, a study of *The International Student Experience at Charles Sturt University (Wagga Wagga)*, was carried out by John Mills from the School of Information Studies. Mills's (2004) study reported on Adjustment to a New Living Environment (including Why CSU was Chosen as a Study Destination), Adjustment to a New Social and Cultural Environment (including Cultural Insensitivity/Ignorance and Racism), and Adjustment to a New Learning Environment (including the Student-Lecturer Relationship) (Mills, 2004). Although based on fewer interviews, and conducted over a briefer period (six months), the report and its findings provide an additional source for triangulation of the data.

The interview process

After initial contact with prospective participants via orientation days, information days and/or prior to lectures, participants were contacted by email or telephone to arrange an interview time and place. Interviews were carried out in a variety of situations and locations both on- and off-campus. These included study rooms in the University's library, canteen and coffee shops, dining areas in student residential accommodation, and my office. In the case of teachers, interviews were conducted in their offices on-campus. Each participant was given an Information Statement (for students, Appendix 4, and for teachers and others, Appendix 5) together with a Consent Form (Appendix 6). The Information Statements, tailored as letters for students, and teachers and other staff members, outlined the research project and the anticipated involvement of participants. The nature of the research and contents of the letters were discussed with the participants prior to interview. In the case of students, the letters were also read aloud by me to check their understanding.

Interviews as a dialogic process

While it is commonly acknowledged that interviews are best conducted in the respondents' own mother tongue (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997, p.476) this was not possible because of the diversity of languages represented. Not only that, but undertaking the interviews in English emphasised the difficulties students faced with English language, and the challenges I faced in trying to interpret what some participants said. Thus, the interviews served two purposes. Firstly, they were a means of accessing the challenges facing students and teachers as they tried to negotiate *academic discourses* and, secondly, they provided examples of the sorts of language used, not only by students, but also by teachers. In the early phases of data collection, participants sometimes appeared to have 'standard' or 'politically correct' responses to some questions. It

appeared, for example, that some teachers and other staff members did not want to be seen to be negative in their attitudes towards international students. Similarly, some students did not want to be seen to be negative towards their teachers or the University. However, as Thomas (1993, p.38) points out, when this happens "it is safe to assume that the rhetoric belies the reality, and standard means of probing are not sufficient". This required other means of probing to elicit responses more congruent with the observed evidence. This was done by rephrasing questions, if not immediately, then in follow-up interviews or in interviews with other participants. The gap between the "onstage rhetoric and backstage action" also became a means of teasing out the contradictions between participants' words and actions (Thomas, 1993, p.38).

At times the interviews took a different direction from the open-ended questions, as the participants saw the interview as an opportunity to raise issues which were causing them concern. Advantage was taken of such moments to explore these issues more fully, as comments made at these times helped to direct further questions or to identify or answer questions yet unasked. I had to be perceptive to hear in participants' responses, topics other than those about which they were ostensibly speaking, and to try to relate those voices to the emerging answers to the research questions (Anteliz, Danaher & Danaher, 2001, p.3). While all interview questions (Appendices 7, 8 and 9) were answered, not all participants answered all questions. Additionally, not every student was asked the same questions, since the questions evolved over time. This made any quantitative analysis of the data impossible; that is, it was not possible to say, for example, that a certain percentage or number of students responded in a particular way to a specific question. Rather, the data revealed broad areas of concern experienced by Students, Teachers and Others. Individual comments have been selected to illustrate these broad areas of concern when voiced in different ways by the majority of participants. Contradictory data, where a Student, Teacher or Other participant voiced a quite different opinion, are also included as part of the *dialogue*.

The interviews reflect the process of negotiation through *dialogue* in an interpretive *space*. Fontana and Frey (2003, p.62) assert that interviews are "active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results". The interview is also considered as "a practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of interviewer and respondent" (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p.92). This reflects another *dialogic space* in the student experience and, as such, the interviews became a further means of observing aspects of the negotiation process in an academic setting.

Data analysis

Data analysis was a cyclical process which continued during Spirals 3, 4 and 5 of *The Hermeneutic Helix*. Ongoing analysis informed further interview questions which evolved as data collection progressed and further issues emerged. Care was needed during the analysis and interpretation of the transcribed texts. As Fontana and Frey (2003, p.61) point out, "The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers." Additionally, students were speaking English as a second or third language. Some students were thinking in their first language and then translating into English to respond to the questions. The reverse is true of the interview questions. Students' responses to the questions may not have been what they really wanted to say for a number of reasons. In addition to English language hindering their expression, they may have feared reprisal of some sort if they voiced opinions which differed from those of their teachers or the University.

In addition to translation difficulties causing problems with the interpretation and analysis of data, another dimension was added by my interview and writing style, that is, "the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as author" (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p.87). When analysing the data, it was important to consider my style of questioning and interjected responses as these could influence a participant's response (Thomas, 1993, p.39). The point is that the research process and the techniques by which data were collected were not neutral enterprises, and how the data were gathered could dramatically shape the critical potential of the research (Habermas, cited in Thomas, 1993, p.37). Additionally, while ethnic or cultural background is not the focus of this study, clearly, as Thomas (1993, pp.52-53) points out, "racial identity is a sign system that sends off cues that allocate power and privilege; establish social, political, and other boundaries" and, as such, that background shapes interaction. This "power and privilege" extended to the exclusion or inclusion of data which, as Clifford (1983, p.142) points out, was a "strategic choice" which it was in my power to make.

A number of possibilities existed when considering how the transcribed responses could, or should, be reported, including the following:

- as spoken by the participant (verbatim transcripts)
- as interpreted by the researcher (paraphrased transcripts).

Based on Bakhtin's insistence that "One must start with the act itself" (cited in Morson

& Emerson, 1990, p.50), the decision was made to report the selected responses verbatim, as spoken by the participants. These voices, then, became a part of the research *dialogue* which I would analyse, interpret and report. This interpretive process required judgement and creativity (Patton, 1990) or, in Bakhtinian terms, *creative understanding*. Tesch (1990, p.96) agrees, suggesting that, while there are no "prescriptions" for analysing text data, the "one hallmark of qualitative research is the creative involvement of the individual researcher". Nevertheless, it was essential that I recognised my interpretations of data as being reconstructions of the interview experience, negotiated and influenced by the social context in which the data were collected and in which my study was embedded (Fletcher, 2004, p.62).

It should be noted that analysis of the transcripts was neither by discourse nor by conversation analysis. Although the interview process involved 'discourse' and 'conversation', the analysis focuses on the responses of the participants and their negotiated meaning, not on why participants responded when or how they did (for example, turn-taking), or what roles we adopted during the interview process (such as questioner/answerer; professional/client; teacher/student) (Silverman, cited in Silverman 2003, pp.357-358). What is being reported is, firstly, what the participants said in response to certain questions and, secondly, my interpretations of these responses. Participants' responses have been accepted as their individual 'experiences' – their lived 'realities' and 'truths' – whether or not they are 'real' or 'true'. Following an interpretivist approach, the participants' responses were regarded as "giving direct access to 'experience'" (Silverman, 2003, pp.345-6) even though the reported "experience" may not necessarily equate with "authenticity" (Silverman, cited in Fontana & Frey, 2003, p.95).

Taped transcripts and hand-written notes were word-processed as soon as possible after the interviews. Identifying information was removed and contextual comments inserted. Ambiguities were clarified where these had been negotiated with the participant; if not, ambiguities were left as a means of demonstrating the inevitable and ineluctable challenge of reaching mutual understanding – never, of course, complete. Because of the complexities of translation, it was considered that returning the transcripts to participants to check their meaning could add another layer which would need further interpretation. Also, as students left the university, the return of transcripts became logistically untenable. For consistency of the data collection process (even though the majority of teachers and other participants were English speaking), a decision was made

to use the original transcripts without participant verification. Credibility was established by using verbatim transcripts and allowing as many participants' voices to be heard as possible. In transcribing the interviews, however, it was difficult to capture effectively the nuances of students' challenges in constructing sentences in English. As reflected in Bourdieu's (1999, p.2) comment earlier in this chapter, transcription not only eradicates everything from "body language, gestures, demeanor, mimicry and looks, to silences, innuendoes, and slips of the tongue" but it also eradicates "pronunciation and intonation" and, in the case of these students, the individual difficulties many experienced as they tried to answer the interview questions.

Analysis of the data began by reading each transcript and identifying challenges expressed by participants. These challenges were then considered for recurring issues and notes taken of participants' different perspectives (Patton, 1990, p.376). Themes began to emerge, guided by the objectives of the research and the research questions. Ongoing analysis facilitated the identification of common challenges for students and teachers (some mirroring each other), enabling me also to identify common themes and supporting quotations from participants. It also allowed me simultaneously to answer (dis-)confirmatory and exploratory questions about the challenges which were emerging, and also about the nature of negotiation of *academic discourses*, generating theory at the same time (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Immersion in the data, and their analysis through *creative understanding*, also facilitated the *becoming* of concepts through which the challenges and the negotiation process could be interpreted and as a model of *academic discourses* was created. The identified challenges were reconsidered in light of the emerging, overarching themes of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which linked with the previously categorised themes of 'English language', 'understanding' (teaching and learning), and 'achievement' (assessment). As the critical role of *dialogue* in the negotiation process became clear, the data were re-examined for evidence of *dialogue* and challenges which hindered dialogue. The further five Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*, which emerged from ongoing reading of these philosophers, immersion in the data, and deep reflection, became more evident in the data with my deepening understanding of the dimensions of the challenges and the dimensions of the negotiation process. The data were again scrutinised for illustrations of these concepts which – in an unsophisticated yet effective, if laborious, process – were identified by using differently coloured sticky labels.

Computer based analysis

While the possibility of using a computer-based analysis tool (such as NVivo or NUD*IST) was considered, the decision was made not to. Although huge volumes of data were generated from the 85 interviews, I felt that computer software could not replace the conceptual processes and *creative understanding* required to analyse the data. I agree with Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002, p.729) who believe that "Computer software does not, and cannot, analyse qualitative data for the researcher." It was also considered that a danger with using a computer-based analysis tool was the possibility of becoming 'locked' into "sets of categories" from which it may have been difficult to 'evolve' (Silverman, 2003, p.348). The decision to analyse 'by hand' demanded a commitment to spend extensive periods of time working through the data multiple times.

Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability were concerned with my interpretations of the phenomena being described and any claims I have made on the basis of that interpretation (Fletcher, 2004, p.74). According to Silverman (2003, p.359) "standard issues of 'reliability' can, in part, be addressed by systematic transcription of data". Wolcott (cited in Fletcher, 2004, pp.74-75) suggests that the question of validity is best solved by "letting informants speak for themselves" which is a feature of this thesis. Denzin (1994, p.503), however, considers that, "even when 'we' allow the Other to speak, when we talk about or for them, we are taking over their voice" and suggests that a "multivoiced as opposed to single-voiced text can partially overcome this issue". This is a multivoiced text.

Trustworthiness

Data were analysed multiple times to check consistency of emergent themes and to reinterpret the data through different conceptual lenses. Initial interpretations were compared with previous research for congruence and early findings presented at conferences and seminars for feedback from colleagues in the field.[4] The first round of data collection and analysis revealed that the three major challenges facing INESB students and their teachers as they negotiated *academic discourses* were related to 'English language', 'understanding' (teaching and learning), and 'achievement' (assessment). *Dialogue* with colleagues helped my deepening understanding of the phenomena and informed further questions of students and teachers.

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[4] 17th International ISANA: International Education Association Inc. conference, Melbourne, 2004 and staff seminars, Charles Sturt University.

Establishing transferability in the study

While the generalisability of all qualitative research should be treated with caution (Glaser & Strauss, cited in Thomas, 1993, p.64), the number of interviews (85) may increase the typicality (generalisability) of the findings to other similar contexts.

Methodological considerations

Identification of the University

It was considered that non-identification of the University would neither guarantee the anonymity of the University nor facilitate future research in the field.

The interview process

The fact that the interview process was a negotiated, *dialogical* process also had drawbacks. Firstly, an interview is not a neutral process. As Fontana and Frey (2003, p.90) point out, "researchers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions". Lincoln and Denzin (2003, p.239) agree, cautioning that "the interview is a negotiated text, a site where power, gender, race, and class intersect". It is acknowledged that the individual characteristics of both interviewer and interviewee impacted on the extent to which participants were willing to be open and honest with their responses and also on the extent to which the interview could become a negotiated text. Secondly, while face-to-face interviews in a non-threatening and secure environment may (or may not) have encouraged honest and open responses, they did not, as Silverman (2003, p.343) points out, offer "the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another, or even for a politically correct dialogue in which researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support". And thirdly, while the interviews generated an extensive data-base, the words accumulated through the interviews can never be replicated and, if the same students were asked the same questions again, they may have a different story to tell since their experience evolved as they learned strategies for overcoming challenges, as their English language improved, and as they *became* as individuals.

The observer cannot be taken out of the act of observation. I am acutely aware of this and have two responses to it. Firstly, I have taken care to ensure that this thesis is not just about what I, as the observer, see. I understand that there is much more to be seen and others may see things differently from what I have seen. Also, if others do see the things I see, then it may be that they interpret those things differently. Secondly, my observations are only of the things that were, or which became, accessible to me. What I

see, however, is not of consequence here but whether what I say about it contributes to the debate about the research field into which this thesis is an intervention.

Summary and transition

The *dialogical* interview process with these Students, Teachers and Others involved multiple translations and interpretations on the part of both interviewer and interviewee. Thomas (1993, p.66) suggests that:

> … all ethnography is a dual translation process. We are translating the cultural codes of our subjects into a symbolic form that we can understand. We then translate our understandings into a form that the audience can understand. We must therefore be fluent in three languages: that of the subjects, that of our own science, and that of the audience.

Similar linguistic acumen was also a necessary attribute of the students in this study. Translations, however, are rarely accurate renditions of original realities – nuances are either lost or added in the process of interpretation. Cocks (1989, cited in Grant & Giddings, 2002, p.16) suggests that "the interpretivist turn is the 'first and smallest step of abstraction' where theory travels away from felt experience".

As well as the data collection process being *dialogical*, each piece of datum became a text into which I entered through interpretive *dialogue*. The outcome is a *dialogue* with the data that were collected and interpreted, not with the purpose of arriving at a set of empirical conclusions that are guaranteed, but to arrive at a legitimate interpretation that is a contribution to the *dialogue* about these people and their experiences and, possibly, about other people in similar situations to those in this study.

The challenges facing students and teachers which emerged from this interpretive *dialogue*, however, were not interpretations in their eyes, but were the lived realities as they perceived them. These challenges were identified primarily as being related to English language in *everyday* contexts (for students), and in *academic* contexts (for both students and teachers). For students, challenges also impacted on their Australian cultural experience. Academic challenges were also identified as being related to understanding concepts in the context of teaching and learning, and achievement of high grades in relation to assessment. In order to present these challenges as the lived realities of the students and teachers, the voices of the participants themselves speak in the following three chapters, namely, *Chapter 3: English language*, *Chapter 4: Understanding* and *Chapter 5: Achievement.*

Part B
Chapter 3: English language

Synopsis

The international students from non-English speaking backgrounds in this study came with hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their Australian experience. Mostly, they wanted to improve their English language, understand the concepts being taught, and achieve high grades. More generally, students also wanted to experience 'Australian culture', both on-campus and in the local community.

Most students sought opportunities to improve their English language and to experience 'Australian culture' in *everyday* contexts. Speaking with students, however, revealed that they faced diverse challenges in relation to accommodation, employment and community spaces, which are part of the students' orientation into 'Australian culture'. While *academic* challenges are the major focus of this thesis, these *everyday* challenges reported by students impacted on their *academic* challenges and on the extent to which they achieved their aspirations. Some of the challenges were not specific to INESB students. Nevertheless they did exacerbate the challenges that INESB students faced. Additionally, these challenges in *everyday* contexts exacerbated the challenges which students faced in *academic* contexts.[1]

This chapter has three sections, all of which present students' perspectives in their own voices. Section One re-establishes students' hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their Australian experience, Section Two presents challenges facing students in *everyday* contexts, and Section Three presents challenges regarding English language in *academic* contexts. How students experienced language-related challenges, and how they referred to language, differed among individuals. For example, students referred to 'English', 'language', 'communication' but, more specifically, to the four skills of language including *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts. Although these oracy- and literacy-related skills are integral parts of the whole of language, each skill is reported separately as students articulated which

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[1]While *everyday* English language impacts on students' achievements in *academic* contexts, students' ability to communicate effectively in *everyday* contexts is not a focus of this thesis. To foreshadow one finding of the study, however, the opportunity to develop *everyday* English by using it in community and social contexts appeared to be important in helping to scaffold the *academic* English the students needed for their studies.

areas of language caused the greatest challenges. *Academic* writing, because of its major role in assessment, is discussed in more detail in *Chapter 5: Achievement*.

Section One – Hopes, expectations and aspirations

The international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (INESB students) who participated in this study chose to come to an Australian university for a number for reasons. Apart from wanting to graduate with a degree from a Western university, the students had four basic hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their experience in Australia. Firstly, they wanted to improve their English language. Secondly, they wanted to understand the concepts being taught. Thirdly, they wanted to achieve high grades. Fourthly, and more generally, they wanted to experience 'Australian culture' during their stay, both on-campus and in the local community. Students' aspirations regarding an Australian cultural experience will be discussed first, followed by their aspirations to improve their English language, to understand concepts and, finally, to achieve high grades.

An 'Australian cultural' experience

It appeared that most students chose Australia as a study destination because it was less expensive than other Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom or New Zealand. Having come to Australia, students wanted to experience 'Australian culture' during their stay. Apart from expecting to get a Western degree, one student said, *"I also expected to know more people here and learn about the culture and system here in Australia"* (Student 19F), while another added, *"I hope to enjoy Australian lifestyle"* (Student 83F). Another student commented:

> *I want to take advantage of my time here to practise listening and speaking English. This is my aim to come here ... I want to improve my English and learn about the different cultures here.* (Student 14F).

The following comment encapsulates aspirations made by the majority of students:

> *My hopes and expectation is that I get to learn more English or improve my English. Then there is all the social part of it; see some of Australia; get to know Australian people; get into the student life here. For my academic, I suppose it would be to get more knowledge about what people really do in real jobs. That is what I expect to do here because it is so practical. When I leave from here I know what we actually do in the work place and not just know the theories behind things but I know the reality more. That's what I'm expecting, well, hoping for.* (Student 35F).

Another student explained his aspirations in this way:

> *I hope that I can keep contact with friends and lecturers and classmates here when I come back [to my country]. This is what I think about globalisation – that we can get some friends in very faraway countries. I like that!* (Student 17.1M).

Improve English language

Wanting to improve their English language was the most common hope, expectation, and/or aspiration among the 43 students who took part in this study. While students differed in which aspects of English language they wanted to improve, that is, *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* or *writing*, all students participating in this study said they either hoped, and/or expected, to improve their English language as a result of studying in an Australian university. In fact, one student not only hoped and expected to improve her English but also hoped and expected *"to speak English really fluently"* (Student 3F).

Some students considered that improving their English language was the most important reason for choosing to study abroad, seeing this as a means to enhance their chances of employment, either in their own countries or in other countries. As one student commented, *"[English language] will help me with my job. English is very useful"* (Student 14F), while another said, *"[Improving English language] is very important ... almost the most important reason ... to study abroad"* (Student 17.1M). This student went on to explain why English was important for him:

> *... if you got good English communication skills you can get a good job. We have a lot of joint venture corporation companies in [my country]. If your English communication skills are high, you can get a good job. And I think if you think in English style ways, it will give you a different perspective of opinions and ideas. I think it's very important.* (Student 17.1M).

The same student repeated that it was not only English language, but also Western thinking which would help him find a job when he returned home:

> *Another reason is that [my country] is in a transformation process and the direction is going to Western style like capitalism and marketing orientated. So I think what I learn in Western countries may be useful and helpful for me to get a better salary or a higher life quality.* (Student 17.1M).

Other students made similar comments, reiterating the usefulness of English as an international language:

> *English is always important ... because English is an international language. ... We graduate from foreign country. ... We will go to the private company. For private companies the main language will be English, so that is really important for us.* (Students 18.1F, 19F, 20F, 21F).

Another student added:

> *[English] is easier for communication anywhere in the world. Resources and meetings – everything is in English. Websites in English. All the resources are in English. I find it very hard to find resources in [my language]. English is just there. Like, everybody knows English.* (Student 47F).

Understand concepts

Apart from wanting to improve their English, most students said without hesitation that 'understanding' is far more important than 'remembering'. As one student pointed out:

> *Well, I think it's very important, very, very, very important [to understand concepts]. I try to study to understand, because if I understand then I will remember better. If I study to remember, then I will tend to forget after the exam.* (Student 46F).

Many students referred to 'spoon-fed' education systems which focused on memorisation of material and which did not encourage, or allow, students to think. Students explained how this did not help them to understand the concepts being taught, and also conditioned them to learn in this way:

> *The problem with the spoon-fed education system [in my country] – [is that] it causes us to become like that. The lecturer gives you the concept, but he doesn't explain how the concept evolved. So in the exam you just give everything he has told you. We are looking at the results [of the exam] but very good results don't mean that you know everything. Sometimes it's very embarrassing because we get asked about something we are supposed to know, but we don't know how to answer because we don't know the concept. Sometimes it is just a basic thing, but we can't answer. This is a problem.* (Student 19F).

Another student added:

> *I do feel I have to understand everything before I memorise. All I want is to understand what is going on. If I don't understand, I can't accept the fact that I need to memorise. I need to know, to imagine, the flowage of the concept. You need to understand the concepts. If you don't understand it, how will you remember it? If you understand the concept, you know what they are talking about. You know how to apply it to your life. Everything in life has a concept.* (Student 47F).

Another student expressed similar thoughts when she said:

> *The main problem in [my country] …we are not really told the concept. We just taught ourselves to remember everything about the concept, so we ... cannot use the concept to apply to another context* (Student 21F);

while another student added:

> *... we can work well in exams, but it doesn't really mean that we understand the concept.* (Student 20F).

Achieve high grades

Many students hoped and expected, at least initially, to achieve high grades, as reflected in the following response:

> *[I want] HD [High Distinction]. This is a measure of how much you have mastered in that subject.* (Student 44M).

Some students equated high grades with being a 'successful student'. One student said, for example, that she would be a *"successful student"* if she achieved *"high academic*

grades" (Student 3F), while another added, *"High grades definitely equal success!"* (Student 49F). Another student put it this way:

> Student: *Maybe most Asians are not here to pass. Maybe they want colourful results ...* (Student 22F).
>
> Interviewer: Colourful?
>
> Student: *Yeah, Distinctions.* (Student 22F).

The following student explained why she wanted to achieve high grades, saying:

> *I really want to get distinctions to show back home to my parents* (Student 15F);

while another lamented:

> *... so far I just can get Distinctions. I can't get any HDs [High Distinctions]. And this is my problem ...I don't just want to pass. No way! ... Every parent, they wish their children will be good in every aspect.* (Student 18.1F).

Although the majority of students said that understanding was much more important than simply memorising, they still wanted to achieve high grades. The following comment pre-empts tensions and coming challenges for this student when he said:

> *Understanding is more important than remembering, but I want a high score.* (Student 44M).

Section Two – Challenges in *everyday* contexts

Accommodation

The type of accommodation, who shared it, and whether English was spoken there, impacted on students' aspirations, both in an *everyday* sense and academically. Students lived in a variety of on-campus and off-campus accommodation. Those who lived on-campus had single rooms in student residential halls, or single rooms in cottages which were shared by four to six other students, often from non-English speaking backgrounds. Students living off-campus generally shared flats and houses with other students, both NESB and local university students or local college students. Those who were exposed to English where they lived believed they would benefit by practising the language. As one student commented:

> *...here my flatmates are all native speak. I have to talk to them in English. Maybe my English improved after that!* (Student 17.1M).

A number of students found board with Australian families seeing this as a way to improve their English and experience 'Australian culture'. As one student pointed out:

> *I stayed with them [the Australian family] ... one of the most important points, because I want to learn English.* (Student 18.1F).

Students sometimes found accommodation through the University's Accommodation Office or Student Services. At other times, they tried to find accommodation through local real estate agents. This was not always easy, however, as some landlords did not want foreign students in their rental properties, saying that overseas students were not aware of the norms, expectations, and contractual agreements between landlords and tenants, such as care of the outdoor areas or the number of people permitted to dwell in a residence (Other 10F). One student reported that he had experienced this response when seeking accommodation. In fact, he said that finding accommodation was the *"worst thing"* he had to deal with because *"people don't want to rent to foreign students"* (Student 72M).

Private advertisements seeking someone to share accommodation are sometimes posted on the University's notice boards. These arrangements did not always work out, as was the case for the following student who also spoke of her living situation as her *"greatest challenge"*:

> *The worst thing is, because I share one apartment – two rooms – I have one single room and the other room two people share; then one of them is not quite easy-going. There becomes many problems between three of us … her room mate complain her to me. The three of us face together and say the problem but cannot, because they say one of us must move out. Oh, it is very wrong! Because both of them share a room – not my fault – but like because they are in same class, so they might ask me to give up my bed. Oh, I feel very sad that night. Now we don't talk to each other. It's no good. Sometimes I'm very scared to see them.* (Student 15F).

While such challenges are not specific to INESB students, they do exacerbate challenges which *are* specific to these students. Another student told of his experience of sharing a flat in the city with two young Australian men. The student had not met his flatmates before but had responded to an advertisement on a local community noticeboard. His flatmates were not university students but were undertaking apprenticeships at a local college. The student commented that his flatmates drank alcohol every night and he wondered if this was common for young Australian men. His flatmates also played loud music which made it difficult for him study, as he explained:

> *I think they are a little bit noisy and I'm looking for my next accommodation. They are, you know, do you think that people receive different education level, they have different minds? Do you think that? They just finish year 10 and work a lot. So sometimes I cannot talk too much to them. After work they just call a lot of friends and drinking, and play games, watching Rugby. I think it's a little bit funny. Otherwise they just play music very loudly – hip hop boom boom boom boom! So, yes, I can learn something from them, but I would like to live with someone who still studies on campus. I just feel a little bit noisy [laughs].* (Student 17.1M).

In response to a comment about this situation and his accommodation, the student said:

I would like [to live with] a senior citizen. I would like to live with some people doing their business. Because I am doing business and if they are doing their business we could have a discussion. But how can I find that sort of accommodation? Ask at the [real estate] agents? (Student 17.1M).

Another international student from an English speaking background had similar challenges with her on-campus accommodation. As she explained:

Where my room is, it's near the patio. At about 8.00 or 9.00 o'clock at night, everyone goes out there and gets drunk and gets loud. I don't really study at night very much any more. I usually do it during the day when everybody is out at class and it's quiet. If I don't have class, I don't come in. You can find times during the day when it's quiet. (Student 16F).

Employment

Cost was a major determining factor in why most students chose Australia as a study destination. Many students commented on the expense of their study experience and on the cost of living in general. As one student explained:

... here it is, oh, too expensive! ... You cannot feel that because you don't know what the exchange rate is. About 7 of our currency to $A1. Everything times 7 ... $A200 per month equals my common salary. Per month! Not per week. Maybe now you can understand why I think it's expensive here. (Student 17.1M).

Because of financial difficulties, many students found (or were looking for) part-time employment and, in at least one case, without a work permit. As the student admitted, *"I'm not supposed to do some work [because I do not have a work permit], but I need some money"* (Student 15F), while another added, *"I hope I can find some money to rest my father's burden"* (Student 18.1F). The number of hours students worked impacted on their study and, while employment allowed students to experience an aspect of 'Australian culture' and, depending on the type of work, provided an opportunity to improve their English, it sometimes hindered them from becoming involved in a wider range of cultural excursions or activities. Many students worked part-time at local restaurants. As one student pointed out, *"Just about every person working in Asian restaurants is a uni student"* (Student 18.1F). Other students worked in industries where transient workers were common (for example, Students 3F, 4F, 56F, 77M and 83F). Some employment situations, however, did allow students greater opportunity to use their English language and to experience 'Australian culture', as with the following student:

I have mainly [NESB] students at uni [and] Australian and others at [work]. I invite them home [from work] for tea – Indian food – they like that. They've said they'll invite us home too. (Student 84M).

Community

Interaction with local people in the community helped some students to improve their *everyday* English and added to their 'Australian cultural' experience. A number of students found creative solutions to combine the two. One student, for example, helped out at a children's holiday camp (Student 49F). Another student did voluntary work at one of the University's laboratories, and also tutored a young NESB child in English as a way of improving her own English language. As she explained:

> *I do voluntary work in the lab. And a neighbour asked me to tutor her eight-year-old child in English. She is a single mother from China. She wants someone to speak to her in English.* (Student 64F).

The following student, as well as working at a restaurant, improved her English and experienced an aspect of 'Australian culture' by doing volunteer work at a local charity. She spoke of how this experience helped her to learn something of Australian humour while also helping her to overcome feelings of homesickness:

> *... every Saturday I go to an Opportunity Shop[2] to help. All the ladies and gentlemen there are so nice. They help me with my English. They teach me some slang and they help me when I miss my parents. They just make jokes to make me feel better. They are very nice.* (Student 4.1F).

Humour

For many students, understanding and appreciating Australian humour was a challenge which sometimes led to feelings of exclusion.[3] In fact, a number of students said that understanding local humour was their greatest challenge. As one student said:

> *Australians – trying to understand the culture, the humour [is my greatest challenge]. Sometimes we laugh, sometimes they laugh!* (Student 83F).

Another student, when asked what her greatest challenge was, replied:

> *I think it's English. Because now, even some jokes I cannot understand and I think that's the worst thing. Sometimes we watch a movie, TV. They laugh and we just keep watching and we don't know what's happened. That's the worst thing! [laughs]* (Student 22F).

During her second interview, a student re-assessed what she found to be a challenge:

> *Last time I remember I said the only thing I was worried about was the language. But now it's not just the language. Sometimes I really feel confused when I cannot understand you properly. At the beginning I couldn't understand your English, but later I couldn't understand something – humorous people, something very funny. ... So now I can understand my lecturers and answer them much better. But when it comes to joke, everyone laughs. It was **so** funny, but I say, 'Why are they laughing?' [laughs]* (Student 4.2F).

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[2] A charity run by volunteers.
[3] This feeling of exclusion, and similar feelings caused by isolation, loneliness, homesickness, etcetera, can be described as *negative outsideness*, which will be discussed in coming chapters.

Isolation, loneliness and homesickness

Most students said they expected to experience culture shock. In a world made relatively familiar through technology, many students were somewhat prepared for what they encountered when they arrived. Nevertheless, feelings of isolation, loneliness and homesickness caused challenges for many students, particularly during their orientation and settling in period. A number of students reported that these feelings presented their greatest challenge. As one student commented:

> *I am very lonely. I am very homesick. I have no friends. I know no one.* (Student 85M).

Another student made similar comments:

> *I am lonely. I have a few [NESB] friends. But I have no real Australian friends.* (Student 74M).

For some students, feelings of isolation stemmed from a physical sense of there being fewer people around them, as indicated by the following comment:

> *We are used to many people around us. We feel very isolated here. There are not many people.* (Student 84M).

Another student explained his sense of loneliness and isolation:

> *It was very difficult. I was very lonely. I cry a lot. Everyone lives separate here. At home six people live in one room. We live together. I feel very isolated here.* (Student 80M).

The ways in which students dealt with these challenges impacted on the extent to which they found opportunities to improve their English language and experience 'Australian culture' in positive ways.

Interacting with Australians

For students who had studied away from home before, feelings of isolation and loneliness were more to do with a lack of interaction with local students than a sense of homesickness. Several students said they found it difficult meeting and interacting with Australians. As one student commented, *"It's very difficult to meet other [off-campus] Australians"* (Student 83F), while another added:

> *The first two months were very tough. ... It was hard to make friends. People just don't talk to you. I don't know.* (Student 52F).

Another student explained:

> *Most of the things that happen here are quite acceptable to me, but one thing is, I feel a bad experience – loneliness – you're in the middle of everybody but you still feel lonely and lost sometimes. For me you just feel that you don't fit into some group of people sometimes. And sometimes you just feel confused. Especially when you've got nothing to do, like in the summer [holidays]. Everybody has got something to do and you've got nothing to do and you can't do anything about it, so you just feel a bit ashamed ... sometimes.* (Student 21F).

Although students came hoping for an 'Australian cultural' experience, feelings of isolation and loneliness often caused them to seek out members of their own ethnic group as a means of finding moral support, at least initially[4]. While this provided a degree of moral support and, at times, academic support, this situation provided neither an opportunity to improve their English language nor the 'Australian experience' they had hoped for. As one student pointed out:

> *I share a flat in town with my friends. ... Mostly we speak [our language] with my friends so there's not a lot of chance to improve English.* (Student 22F).

Another student explained how this sort of situation hindered her from interacting with Australians:

> *Sometimes I wanted to get out from [my first language] conversation, or something, but once I got into [my first language] group it's harder to get out because they expected for me to be with them. Also [other people think], 'She is with them', so hard to get out and communicate with people from other countries.* (Student 3F).

One group of international students from both English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds took the initiative to meet socially and share meals which they took turns to prepare (Student 81F). While this experience allowed languages and cultures to mingle in positive ways, it was not the Australian experience that these students had expected or hoped for.

Racism

Interaction with Australians was also hindered because of racism. Racism may be more common, or visible, in rural Australia than in some parts of the larger multicultural metropolitan regions. Whatever the reason, INESB students encountered racism, both in the classroom and on-campus, and in the local community. Some students said they did not experience any racism on-campus, but had experienced it in the community. Others had experienced behaviour, which they interpreted as racist, from some local teachers

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[4] Two exceptions to this common practice were the following cases:

> *... one of the things, I find it ... not funny, but I mean, most of the international students somehow, when they come here, they look for their [own] culture. I mean, like, Indian looks for Indian, Chinese looks for Chinese. I think I'm the only one who came here and didn't look for anyone [from my country] ... I came here to meet new people, new faces, I don't want to be with the same culture. So I tried by this way to improve my English. And it worked in a way, so it wasn't bad.* (Student 48M).

> *I love it! I love it! ... I like the people here. They are friendly. ... Here, even if you're broke, you won't get bored. You'll ring someone, or just go up to the pub. Just go to the pub. I know everybody. Sit down have a chat, share a few drinks, you know, no problem. And there are lots of things to do as well, not just the pub and eating. We can go to the pool, soccer, ten-pin bowling. Yeah, honestly, I don't know why, but when I first came here I thought, '... I can't live here! Everything closes early. I can't live like this!' But the first time I went back to visit my family in [my country], three weeks later, I really missed [this city]. I don't know why, but I really missed [this city]. And I found out that it's the people.* (Student 60.1M).

and students. Incidents of racism in the classroom will be discussed in *Chapter 4: Understanding*. The following reports of racism in the community are mentioned because they had a direct and negative impact on the students' 'Australian cultural' experience. As one student pointed out:

> *I don't think it's overt or obvious racism, but for us, we can feel it. Sometimes you feel that you are different, how the locals treat you.* (Student 19F).

A second student in the same interview, added:

> *Sometimes we feel quite sad about that [how the locals treat you], but it is quite normal.* (Student 21F).

In an off-campus incident, a group of young, female Asian students were refused entry to a local nightclub. They were told it was because they appeared to be underage. However, when the students produced identification which proved their ages, they were still not admitted (Student 18.1F). In another off-campus incident, it was reported that a student was pushed and a racist comment made about the "Asian invasion" (Other 10F). When asked whether he had experienced racism, a male student replied, *"Not on-campus, but in town"* and explained how tensions hindered his interaction with local people:

> *Some people don't like Asian people. Don't like Koreans[5] and don't like us [Asians in general]. Australian people just ignore me. It's like [they think], 'If he doesn't cause any trouble to me, I don't mind. I will just leave him alone.' It is hard to communicate with them. It's language … [pause] but it's not language. They don't **try** to understand me.* (Student 27M).

Challenges facing students in *everyday* contexts, were not only evident in *academic* contexts as well, but also exacerbated the challenges there.

Section Three – Challenges in *academic* contexts

English language

In the *academic* context, the greatest challenges for both students and teachers were caused by English language.[6] This related to students' ability to interact and communicate effectively by appropriately using the four skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in a variety of *academic* contexts. Each of these interrelated skills of language caused challenges for students in different ways. For some students, *listening* and *speaking* caused greater challenges than *reading* and *writing*. For other

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[5]This student was not Korean.

[6]Many of the language-related challenges discussed in this section can also be applied to English in the *everyday* context.

students, the reverse was true. Sometimes one specific skill, such as *speaking*, caused a particular challenge. The degree to which each of these skills posed a challenge differed between individual students. Challenges relating to English language are discussed in this section under the four skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*. These are expanded upon in the next chapter, *Chapter 4: Understanding* when teachers also voice their challenges regarding INESB students and English language. Challenges relating to *Academic writing* are introduced here and discussed fully in *Chapter 5: Achievement*.

Listening

Accents, acronyms, slang and speed of speech

For some students, *listening* was a major challenge which was made more difficult for a number of reasons. The Australian accent, as well as the common use of acronyms and slang by many teachers, caused challenges for the majority of students. This was exacerbated by speed of speech. As one student pointed out:

> *... the main problem for me is listening. Because, if I'm speaking, I can try to explain my ideas so people can understand. But sometimes I cannot follow someone, I cannot understand their accent. That is very hard. I have to ask my classmates. So I think listening is the most important thing. How I listen to my lecturers and others. How do I communicate?* (Student 4.1F).

One student said this of her Australian lecturers:

> *We really do not know what they say. ... Sometimes, if we have studied the subject, we can understand what [Australian lecturers] say, but if it is a new subject and new topic that we don't understand, then we really don't know what they are saying.* (Student 15F).

Another student said, *"There are many slang words and they have so strange accent."* (Student 35F), while another added:

> *... the first time when I came here I have really big problem with English, because Australian English is different with the slang and everything ... really hard to pick up. Even for the first two months, I can't pick up anything that my lecturers say. No, nothing at all!* (Student 18.1F).

A number of students commented on the use of acronyms and the difficulties they caused, as this student explained:

> *That's another thing I've noticed. A lot of Australians here shorten the words. They have abbreviations for everything. They give you one word and they mean a whole sentence. We had a lot of hard time when we first came here to understand even when we asked for directions outside [the University].* (Student 60.1M).

Another student spoke of challenges relating to *listening* and a lack of vocabulary and explained how she missed things being said:

> *When I went here I thought, you know, 'I know English' and is OK but when I got here I find that I have lack of words and there are things that I don't understand so I feel like in just these two weeks I feel it is more important for me to learn English because I feel like*

even though I can speak and people understand me and I understand them. But there are so many things missing. You notice that when you are around people that speak it all the time. Now to me, I feel that it is more important than when I arrived here. (Student 35F).

Similar challenges were faced by the following student who also pointed out how these exacerbated challenges in other areas:

… language is the biggest challenge for me. Listening and vocabulary. The lecturer listed a textbook [to read] – 200 pages in less than 10 days. But he also said we could just use the [Inter-]net. Because I missed what the teacher said, I didn't get the task done. (Student 85M).

Teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds

Some students had difficulty understanding teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds. As one student explained:

One teacher is not a local. His accent is difficult to understand, an [ethnicity #1]. In the class, just three [ethnicity #2] students and one [ethnicity #1] student. So the teacher talks with this [ethnicity #1] student and they talk very, very fast, I can't catch it. I put my hand up and say, 'Please can you slow down for me' and the teacher also says that if the students feel his speech is too fast, they can tell him to slow down. (Student 5F).

Another student had similar problems, admitting to his lecturer:

I have one hundred per cent attendance in your class, even … like … I have no idea what you're talking about, I still show up. (Student 48M).

Speaking

For some students, *speaking* caused the greatest challenge, as indicated in the following comment:

Trying to convey meaning through speaking [is my greatest challenge]. I am not very confident with my use of the English language. It is one area. It is challenging. (Student 25F).

Speed of speech not only hindered students' *listening* and understanding, but also restricted them from *speaking* as reflected in the following comment:

It's really hard to talk to native speaker because they have a different speed of speaking and different views of words and they are really talkative people. So I can't catch up with natives. When I am thinking of something, the subject has changed. (Student 3F).

The following comment by a general staff member who works closely with the international students, while lighthearted, pre-empts serious challenges facing students in trying to achieve their aspirations:

... [The students] met me at a study [support] program ... nobody could talk anything that anyone could understand. It ended up that I was drawing different things and [one student] tried so hard with her English, but you didn't even know it was English. It was incomprehensible! But we smiled and bowed and laughed. (Other 2F).

The following comment reflects a similar challenge and the student's frustration as he acknowledges his poor *speaking* skills:

> *The most problem for me is that if I knock [on] someone's door and say 'How are you?' they don't know what I'm talking about!* (Student 27M).

A number of students said that speaking during presentations and practicum placements[7] was a challenge. As one student commented:

> *[Speaking is a challenge], especially with practicum. [It's usually when I'm taking class]. I'm nervous and then I develop a lot of mispronunciations. And I was concerned too because [in this discipline] I have to try to get my message across. And whatever I was saying was not meaningful. I don't know how the lecturers would assess me on that. So I normally go back to a dictionary and check syllables and how to pronounce it. Apart from reading, it's just listening which helps improve.* (Student 25F).

Participation

A related challenge for both students and teachers was the apparent reluctance of many students to participate in class and group work. While cultural background did influence some students' willingness to participate, students consistently said that it was their difficulty with *language* which stopped them from taking part, as indicated in the following comment:

> *Sometimes I'm lost in class discussions because it takes a bit of time before I can get the meaning of what people are saying and take part in the discussion because of the words they use.* (Student 25F).

The same student's further comment reveals that she expected to develop the ability to participate in discussions over time:

> *... I feel that the freedom is there for us to question, but the ability for me to ask is something I haven't developed yet.[8] ... People were talking and giving their ideas but I was just writing. ... I was the only one missing out [on being able to participate]. Like, as I said, it's much more easier for me to communicate in writing than talking.* (Student 25F).

Another student elaborated on the challenges of participation, suggesting they were caused by differences in the ways people communicate, as well as a lack of background knowledge, or *"common sense"* (Student 17.1M), about the topic being discussed. When asked what her greatest challenge was, the following student replied:

> *Communication – because we have opposite to communicate. Maybe you talk too fast and I don't understand. So maybe I'll be too shy to talk to you. Other times, because there are different cultures, I don't know what topic you are interested in, so we don't know the topic and there's no communication.* (Student 14F).

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[7]*Practicum placements* are assessable components of particular courses where students are required to practise in professional contexts.
[8] This comment reflects this student's sense of *becoming* which will be discussed in coming chapters.

If this student's suggestions are correct, then it appears that cultural background may hinder participation more because of unfamiliarity with a topic, or misunderstanding of language, rather than an unwillingness to participate.

Teachers' and local students' behaviours

Behaviours and attitudes sometimes displayed by teachers and local students, also contributed to the reluctance of some INESB students to participate. In his first interview, a student explained why he was reluctant to participate in class discussions:

> *Last semester I tried to express my view of the question in the class, but then some of the [local] girls give me a bad look. I'm not ashamed to speak in a class, but they make you feel [pause] you just don't feel like to talk.* (Student 43.1M).

In a second interview with the same student the following year, he again mentioned the challenge of participation, adding:

> *Sometimes [the teacher] asks a question and we have to answer his question. And today one of our friends, a [NESB] girl, said the answer to the lecturer. And some of our classmates they laugh at us. Of course it doesn't feel good when someone laughs at you when you are doing your work.* (Student 43.2M).

A further comment by the same student illustrates his frustration at not being able to participate in classroom dialogue when he added:

> *[The teacher] says, 'You guys just can't sit here and learn, you have to talk more.' But how do you know that we are not **trying** to learn? How do you know that we are not **trying** to say?* (Student 43.2M).

Reading

Reading, understanding, and correctly interpreting textbooks, assignment questions and examination papers posed considerable challenges for many students (including Students 48M, 69M, 77M, 78F, 81F and 85M). The number of texts and the complexity of the academic language in the texts added to the challenges. As one student noted:

> *The textbook is very difficult! Even Aussie[9] students say it's very difficult!* (Student 72M).

Another student said:

> *It is hard. I am not a good reader. Book language is very difficult.* (Student 3F),

while another added:

> *Some of the time, like, one of the subjects, I had no idea [what the book was about], and it was really hard.* (Student 48M).

Reading and time

Time exacerbated students' challenges to find new strategies which would help them

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[9]Australian

translate and understand difficult textbooks and academic readings. The following comment reflects how these challenges can impact on a student's aspirations to understand concepts:

> *The books [in my country] are in [my language]. I read once, and understand. But here the textbook is too difficult for me … the sentences are very long. I try again and again, but I don't understand. That strategy is not very useful here. I have to change the strategy … After lectures, I go to the library and get some simple books on the same subject … get the simple concepts, then read the textbook again. It is very much more time-consuming.* (Student 14F).

For students who did not learn new strategies, time spent studying in ways which worked for them in the past did not always result in understanding, as indicated in the following comment:

> *... last semester, I tried really hard. I studied five hours per day, but you just sit there and then you don't understand it. There's no point in studying.* (Student 43.1M).

The same student outlined strategies he used to try to understand his textbook before approaching his teacher for help:

> *Oh [reading the textbook] it's a lot of work! What I try to do is just ask my mate because we have to do our tutorial work on Friday. So I ring him up and see how he's going and he teaches me. If he hears something wrong [that I say] he tells me, or something like that. I just ask my mate. He's a good bloke! He is. He's Australian. He's really good, because he's had experience before. He went to Japan for one year and he knows what there's like. Yeah. So he says, 'If you want some backup, I'll be right here for you.'*

He continued:

> *… How do I read [the textbook]? I read it every day! [laughs] And if I find some word I don't understand I try to use my translator or my dictionary. If I can't find the word in the translator or dictionary I just leave it. I have no choice.* (Student 43.1M).

Students who approached their teachers about the difficult texts received various responses. As one student commented:

> *They're approachable. They are, they are. Except for some of them, like … yeah, it's pretty hard. They say, 'Go read the textbook, I'm sure you can understand it!'* (Student 8F).

Accessibility of books

Apart from the difficulty in reading and understanding complex texts, the books themselves were sometimes not available. As one student pointed out:

> *The understanding of all the subjects is quite difficult. Sometimes I have no one to ask because the lecturers are busy. Also there are not enough textbooks in the library, maybe one or two. It is not enough for so many students. It is not enough. And also, sometimes we cannot borrow the textbooks to study.* (Student 15F).

While a limited number of 'targeted' and 'core' books may be available for students to borrow and use in the library for two hours, this student said that this was not enough

time. When asked about her study strategies and whether she pre-read her textbook prior to lectures, another student exclaimed:

> *No! No! I don't even **have** textbooks! I don't buy the textbooks because they are very expensive. And what you have for one semester doesn't coordinate with the other semester, which is amazing! I can't understand that! So I use whatever handouts we get, or print out what's on the forum.[10] So whatever lecture notes they give me, I just read them, then go to the library, and get a lot of resources similar to that which our textbook has. I'm sure the information is the same because it's science. It can't be any different.* (Student 8.1F).

Reading and assessment questions

Interpreting assessment questions caused challenges for many students. As one student pointed out:

> *I tend to interpret the questions incorrectly. Sometimes non-English speaking lecturers, the way they write questions make it difficult to understand.* (Student 81F).

A number of students commented that relatively simple concepts were made to appear difficult by the type of language used to express them. As one postgraduate student observed:

> *[It's] the way the question is asked. The topic looks more difficult than it is. Actually it's just simple. It would be helpful to have questions in more simple English, but that is not so elegant ...* (Student 78F).

The following comment, by a student support person, reiterates:

> ... what allowances to the language do [teachers] make in order to further clarify what's been written [in assessment questions]? I think sometimes it's left up to the academic to do that, sometimes so much so that the assessment task is a page and a half long and no one knows if they're Arthur or Martha. (Other 2F).

Reading and examinations

The combination of *reading* difficulties and time restraints in examinations exacerbated challenges, as reflected in the following comment:

> *Exams cause lots of problems. Two hours is not enough time. We need at least three hours minimum. Difficulties are a combination of language and time. ... It is not possible to read, translate, think and do.* (Student 77M).

Another student agreed, saying:

> *I can't understand some words [in examinations] and that makes it difficult.* (Student 85M).

The following student described challenges he faced with *reading* and *writing* in examinations:

> *I'm a fast talker [laughs]. I talk, that's no problem, but I'm a slow writer and a slow reader. And when I have a big, big exam with 20-28 pages and three hours to do that,*

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[10]A forum is an online discussion co-ordinated by the subject teacher and accessed by students.

and study cases and essay questions and short answer question, like half a page, that was my main problem in every subject that I failed. That was my main problem. I cannot finish the exam. The three hours would be up and I didn't even go through half of it. (Student 60.1M).

Writing

For all students – and teachers in their assessment of it – *academic writing* consistently caused challenges. Some students felt it was their greatest challenge, as reflected in the following student's comment:

Ha! [writing] Assignments! Assignments! That's my biggest problem. [long pause] And to make some friends. (Student 43.1M).

Surface features

Students spoke of challenges relating to surface features of *writing*, such as the use of appropriate vocabulary, grammar and punctuation. One student pointed out how challenges with surface-level features impacted on deeper aspects of academic writing which, in turn, impacted on achieving higher grades. She said that her greatest challenge (apart from understanding Australian humour) was academic writing and, specifically, grammar:

Grammar mistakes for an essay [are a challenge]. Because sometimes you can write one point, but you need to write more points and you get better marks than if you just write one point. Maybe it's interesting but you can't write it because of English. (Student 22F).

An undergraduate student, when asked what her teachers looked for in her academic writing, said:

Oh, they stress on your grammar, your spelling, they look on your commas! Oh, they do! You can a lot of point loss for that! We never think of all that, but they want to know that your commas are added up and the structure of your [pause] I think some things really hard. (Student 8.1F).

A postgraduate student who was studying Information Technology, while recognising the need for high standards of academic English at this level, also mentioned how his expectations of a preparatory English course and the course he was undertaking were different from reality:

My English is poor. My main problem is English. I can write all the essay, but grammar is not good. Masters English standard should be very high. I am improving now. I had three months of English language course and I expected to get high results. I thought I didn't have to do these sorts of English skills [in my course]. I thought it would be coding and programming. (Student 72M).

Deeper features

Many challenges were also caused by deeper features of academic writing such as logical argument, critical analysis, evidence of wide reading, sound theoretical

understanding, and appropriate use of paraphrasing and referencing. As one student explained, basing her writing on theoretical understanding and using the sort of academic language which reflected this understanding caused a challenge:

> *It's just the language that is used in the assignment. You really have to base your arguments on theories, and that is a problem for me. ... I have done an interim report and I was able to put that in writing. But to base those ideas on theory, it is a big problem. It takes time to read, and then to understand!* (Student 25F).

Another student, who felt she could speak collectively for other INESB students, was aware of the need for persuasion and argument in academic writing, but lacked the facility in English language to be able to do so:

> *We face the problem of English because if you want to persuade people to believe you, you have to use quite good English to convince people. This is our problem.* (Student 18F).

Some students understood the complexities of language and recognised the cause of their challenges, as in the following comments:

> *It's not language. It's part of the language. If we want to communicate with our lecturers, I don't think it's a really big problem. And our reading is not a really big problem. But writing down everything in an assignment, all the paragraphs, is a really big problem. Sometimes the lecturer cannot understand. Face-to-face we can use our body language. Understanding our assignments is quite hard for them, especially a formal assignment. Maybe the words and expressions we use are not really suitable; maybe we don't really mean that and the lecturers misunderstand.* (Student 19F).

The following postgraduate student, when asked how important it was for him to improve his academic writing, sighed heavily, and tried to explain the processes and challenges he faced:

> *[Academic writing] is quite important and necessary for me, but I can't do that. So, the way I do is, I use normal English, try to expand academic English to normal English, try to expand everything simple, easy to understand. I can't remember; what **is** that? I can't remember some words. I use many dictionaries; try to convert it into my language. [My language] to simple. I try to speak it simple; [my language] to simple. So some lecturer is still OK, but some lecturer he say he would **cry** if this is academic!* (Student 27M).

When asked if he believed he was marked lower because of his English, he cried:

> *For sure! 100% for sure! I think 75% [of markers] comment on my language.* (Student 27M).[11]

Summary and transition

Listening to students speak about their Australian experience revealed that they had similar hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their sojourn in Australia. Apart

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[11]This student had an undergraduate degree in Political Science and lectured in this area in his home country.

from hoping to graduate with a Western degree, they also hoped to experience 'Australian culture' both in an *everyday* sense and in an *academic* sense. Improving their English language was not only a hope but an expectation and one of the main reasons they chose to study in an English speaking country. The students' voices also revealed that many students faced similar challenges. For example, a common reason why these students chose Australia over other countries was that it was cheaper. The majority of students taking part in this study, it appeared, were not from wealthy backgrounds. Many students sought employment, not only as a means of practising their English language, but also because they needed money. Often, because of the money invested in their study, many students were under a lot of pressure to perform well. As one student said:

> *If I fail it will cost a lot of money. I have a lot of pressure from myself.* (Student 44M).

The following student, an only child *"according to principle"* in China (Student 14F), explained her concerns and the pressure she felt:

> *Money is my greatest worry. My parents are old. My mother is now retired and is sick. My father is [the] only income earner. My mother wants to return to work to help [support me] but my father says he can take care of it. I am very worried. I am looking for a job here but I cannot find one. I want to finish my degree as quickly as possible to help my parents, but I am very worried if I fail any subject. [Then] I would have to stay here for longer and [that would] make it even more difficult for my parents. It might make my mother's health even worse. I am very worried for my parents. I am very worried about it.* (Student 5F).

Another student had similar concerns regarding finance and the debt she owed her brother and sister. As she explained:

> *It's really hard with money right now. I owe my brother and sister [in my country] because they helped me to buy the ticket and stuff to come. I got the scholarship for everything, but the ticket and visa, you have to work on that. I had nothing! I sold everything I had. I sold my computer, my bike, my TV, everything. Whatever I had I sold it. And I got all the money to come here. And I still owe them over there. So I'm here, but I'm just worried about saving money to pay them over there. ... I'm really worried. I'm stressed with money, you know, how I don't have anything. And I'm worried about [the] rent. I want to pay it on time.* (Student 52F).[12]

These pressures, together with other challenges students faced, for example, in trying to find accommodation that was conducive to study, or in trying to integrate in the local community, all impacted on the students' hopes, expectations and aspirations, not only in *everyday* contexts, but also in *academic* contexts. In *academic* contexts, students faced many challenges because of English language. These challenges included

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[12]According to Michael Singh, one of the reasons some INESB students apply for Permanent Residency in Australia is so they can find employment which will allow them to repay study-related debts to their families. Remuneration in their own countries may be insufficient to repay debts (S Kemmis 2007, pers. comm., 11 July).

understanding teachers' accents, acronyms and slang; keeping up with the 'local' people's speed of speech; being hindered from participating in *dialogue* because of language difficulties or feelings of exclusion; having difficulty reading academic texts or accessing textbooks; and trying to write grammatically correct sentences while also writing authoritatively and in accordance with scholarly practice. These challenges, and others reported in this chapter, can be identified as being related to English language and, in particular, to the skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts.

In the next chapter, *Chapter 4: Understanding*, teachers' voices enter the *dialogue*, talking about their hopes, expectations and understandings of these students and the challenges *they* face in relation to them. Students elaborate on the challenges raised in this chapter, and highlight other challenges they face in the context of teaching and learning. This deeper *dialogue* begins to reveal how the challenges impact further on students' hopes, expectations and aspirations, especially those related to *academic* outcomes.

Part B
Chapter 4: Understanding

Synopsis

Apart from wanting to improve their English language, students in this study had hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their *academic* experience in Australia. Without exception, students said they wanted to understand the concepts being taught, not just memorise them. They also wanted, at least initially, to achieve high grades. Teachers also had hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding these students, especially that students would improve their English, understand the concepts being taught, and pass their subjects.

Many students found that ways of teaching and what constitutes learning in a Western university differed from what they had experienced before, either in their own countries or in other countries. The expectation, for example, that students would quickly become independent learners who took responsibility for their own learning, caused challenges for many students. What teachers perceived as students' lack of critical and higher order thinking skills, and their apparent non-willingness to participate in class discussions and group work, also caused challenges for both students and teachers. All challenges which related to teaching and learning were exacerbated by English *language*, as outlined in the previous chapter and reiterated in this chapter. It also emerged from the data that *time*, in various forms and contexts, exacerbated the challenges for students and teachers.

This chapter has two Sections. Section One focuses on the challenges facing students and teachers in teaching and learning contexts. Students talk about the challenges they face in trying to negotiate *academic discourses*, and the challenges which hinder their aspirations to understand concepts. Teachers talk about the challenges they face in facilitating students' negotiations of *academic discourses* and students' understandings of concepts. Through this *dialogue* between students and teachers it emerges that, while both parties appear to be hoping for the same outcomes, there are significant differences in the extent to which and the form in which they hope for these things. And, more critically, there exists a fundamental mismatch between students' and teachers' expectations and understandings about how these outcomes might be achieved.

Section Two then presents some of the tensions and contestations which arose as a result of this mismatch which exacerbated challenges facing these students and their teachers. These tensions provide the backdrop for *Chapter 5: Achievement*.

Section One – Challenges to understanding

Different ways of doing, teaching and learning

The students in this study had a range of educational backgrounds. Many had attended schools, colleges and universities in their own countries and other countries, both English speaking and non-English speaking. Despite the diversity of these experiences and the obvious benefits in preparing students for study in a range of contexts, different teaching styles and learning new ways of doing in the academy caused challenges for many students. In particular, the expectation that students quickly become independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning caused significant challenges. As one student explained:

> *I found that the way Australian system was here that to prepare the students or let the students find out, and go and search – it's like you are studying on your own. And if you want help, you can go and ask for help. But in other [Western] countries where I've studied before, they provide you with all the materials and give you all the examples and they make sure you understand the subject, and then they assist you.* (Student 60.2M).

Another student explained:

> *Here I have to use a lot of time to study by myself. During lectures, lecturers just tell his or her experience about the subject. They don't use the books very often; just explain the concepts. If you want to know the detail, you have to read more books. But in [my country] maybe the teachers will tell you a lot about the concepts, give you examples, and also I will not use the textbook because in [my country] what the teacher tells me is enough for me. But here maybe, one hour you have to finish two chapters – a lot of things – but the lecturers just use one hour to express what you are taught.* (Student 14F).

The following student told how he felt about this way of teaching:

> *I don't think I learn anything from uni because it's all study by your own, even if you don't understand it. That means you couldn't, you didn't, learn anything. ... I don't think [the teachers] are helpful. For the overseas students they are not that helpful. They are not willing to offer you help. ... [T]he lecturers at uni, they just say, 'Do it by your own.' ... I could never learn anything!* (Student 43.1M).

It is worthy of note that no teacher specifically mentioned 'independent learning' in any context, possibly because it constitutes an integral part of the University's philosophy of teaching and learning and, as such, is an unspoken expectation by teaching staff of the students.

Nevertheless, teachers did raise other issues which caused them concern, generally agreeing that there were "plenty of challenges" (Teacher 13M) regarding the teaching of INESB students. How teachers perceived, understood and responded to these challenges differed from person to person.[1] When asked about any challenges which she had experienced with INESB students, one teacher replied:

> Whew! Where do you start? Making sure they understand without having to slow down too much to accommodate **them** when trying to explain things for others. The difficulty I've experienced with some is that it's very hard to judge what their problem is because they have a lack of ability or a lack of language. ... You think it's a language problem you're dealing with when it may be a personality problem or a learning disability. At what point do you know, because there are cultural issues as well? Personality, culture and language – they overlap – and trying to identify what you're dealing with can be quite problematic. So, personality, culture, and language, and they overlap. (Teacher 29F).

Another teacher agreed that it was sometimes difficult "to work out ... the problem" with her INESB students, although she felt English was the first major challenge. As she pointed out:

> There are two factors here. One is [INESB students'] level of understanding of English, and even though they come to the University with some sort of documentation to say that they've got some standard of English and I'm not up to speed with all that. My understanding is that it's conversational English and not academic English.[2] So they have trouble writing assignments anyhow. But actually we spent a lot of time with them last semester to try to work out what it is they are having trouble with. It took us a while because they're not forthcoming about what exactly is the problem. (Teacher 30.1F).

Another teacher's comment reflects his perception of INESB students:

> I don't want to use the word 'handicapped' but I think we are looking after the very low-level, handicapped students who need help. (Teacher 11M).

Not all teachers held these views, however, as the following comment indicates:

> Some [teachers] think people are stupid because their English is not good. It's very bad PR. (Teacher 9M).

Nevertheless, English *language* was mentioned by all but three teachers as causing challenges, both for themselves and for their students. It is noteworthy that these three teachers were also the only teachers interviewed from non-English speaking backgrounds. Comments made by these teachers regarding English language included:

> ... [There is] no real problem with English because all INESB students have to have an IELTS of 6.00 or higher [to be accepted into a course]. (Teacher 7.1M);

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[1] Some teachers also interpreted the question about challenges as those facing their students, rather than challenges to themselves. Where this has occurred, it has been indicated.

[2] Students are required to undertake a test in accordance with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (or other approved test) to assess their English Language Proficiency in professional and academic contexts. This is explained in more detail in *Chapter 7: Languages*.

I say [to the students], 'I'm not testing your English – I want points. So forget about English! Don't waste time on writing English, just give me dot points. Only dot points.' (Teacher 11M); and,

[Students do not have] much trouble with writing academically. ... Many O/S [overseas] students write better than local students. (Teacher 12M).

The implications of these comments will be discussed more fully in coming chapters.

English language – accent and speed of speech

A number of teachers, both those from non-English speaking backgrounds and Australians (for example, Teachers 12M, 37F and 40M), were aware that their accents and rapid speech caused challenges for their students.

The biggest [challenge] is being understood; that sometimes is a challenge. I don't have too much of a problem – they get used to my accent – but a lot of other academics have trouble with their accents. (Teacher 13M).

Another teacher agreed that his greatest challenge was "Getting them to understand what you're talking about" (Teacher 40M). The following teacher also considered that English *language* was the major cause of challenges. This teacher, however, interpreted the question from the students' perspective, considering the challenges to her students, rather than to herself as their teacher. As she pointed out:

It's the English language barrier. It's not even the culture – the students accept the culture really well. We do a lot of talking with them about our culture … and they're very accepting of the Australian culture. But it's the English language barrier that is the biggest hurdle for my students. Understanding what is required of them in the academic setting, and analysis. (Teacher 31F).

This comment, however, seems to reflect a view that 'culture' is something that the students 'accept', rather than the intercultural contact being a mutually enriching cultural exchange.

Prior learning, previous experience and general knowledge

Students' lack of previous experience and/or general knowledge in the Australian context caused challenges for some teachers (including Teachers 13M and 53M). Having to explain and repeat things was not only because of language difficulties, but also stemmed from a lack of practical prior experience and general knowledge. As one teacher pointed out:

Being understood when I explain things in prac. classes [is a challenge]. I often have to explain and repeat things a lot more. It's a combination of lack of English skills and lack of experience [in a laboratory]. [INESB students] tend not to have as much experience as local students. There's a problem of not saying if they don't understand. They'll come later and ask. But if I go around and check, I'll find that they are doing things really,

completely wrong – **really** wrong – so that's a challenge. I'm trying to overcome this. I'll go around ... and show everyone individually how to do something, but that is very time-consuming and not very efficient. (Teacher 13M).

Transfer credits

A related challenge was caused by the awarding of credit for previous study. Students who had received transfer credits for previous study were sometimes at a disadvantage, rather than an advantage. As one teacher pointed out:

[Course] students often don't have a background in [this discipline] and this can cause problems for them. (Teacher 6M).

Not only did the transfer of credits for previous study cause problems for students, but it also caused challenges for teachers as indicated in the following case:

... [prior to coming to Australia, these students] were assessed on their working knowledge of [the course] over there to come across and just do one year over here which was our third and final year because they could do all these advanced [discipline] skills and they were very up to speed on this, that and the other. We've hence discovered that perhaps we were being a bit optimistic in putting them into third year and they probably would be more comfortable in second year. But they see that as losing face so they need to go into third year … Apparently there was an awful lot of misunderstanding about their level and their credit package. And now all this information comes to the light [that students did not actually have the prerequisites]. ... But [the students] let us believe this for a while, so that was the first ruffling of the feathers. (Teacher 30.1F).

Textbooks

A number of teachers acknowledged that textbooks and reading caused difficulties for many students, as reflected in the following comment:

They find it difficult to do large amounts of reading in English. They can do limited amounts, but large amounts is very, very hard for them. They lose track, and lose concentration and understanding of what they're reading. (Teacher 31F).

While a few teachers suggested the use of simpler texts, the following comments from a senior support person who works closely with teachers reflect tensions with this suggestion:

[We] need multi-faceted dictionaries for each discipline. [And] simpler texts. Some texts [like] 'The Dummies Guide to ...'. But if we are a university offering a university level education, why are we putting in 'How to Read' books? I know we're catering for people who may have English as a second, third or fourth language, and in that respect [the simpler texts] could be there, but I think you'd have to be careful that it wasn't too demeaning for the person studying – that they didn't feel they were reading the Dummies Guide. (Other 58F).

One teacher, however, as mentioned previously, believed that English language was not a problem, stating:

... [There is] no real problem with English because all INESB students have to have an IELTS of 6.00 or higher [to be accepted into a course]. (Teacher 7M).

This simplistic view, however, does not reflect the challenges for both students and the wider University regarding the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). These challenges are discussed further in *Chapter 7: Languages*.

Lectures

Listening and note-taking

As outlined in the previous chapter, each of the four skills of English language caused challenges for students. *Listening* in lectures caused significant challenges for the majority of students, as reflected in the following comment:

> *The problems I have are probably the same as the other overseas students. I don't think they understand the lecturers really well even though [the lecturers] hand their notes to you. And sometimes the lecturer will say something more than their notes, and then you have to take more notes. But we just couldn't do them because our listening of English is not that good. We can write some easy words, and other words, but that's it.* (Student 43.1M).

Another student explained language-related challenges she faced in lectures:

> *Writing notes. I re-write notes, unknown words. Very difficult. When I was writing in lecture, I'm just writing. I can't think anything so I just write, write, write! It doesn't remind my mind, so I re-write. Sometimes I have an unknown word, so I have to check that word. Sometimes it's not an important word, so I skip it but … sometimes I write the word down from the overhead, sometimes I'm just guessing.* (Student 3F).

Teachers' accents (both Australian and non-Australian), and the use of slang and acronyms, also caused challenges for students. As one student pointed out:

> *There are many slang words and they have so strange accent. … they talk about 'weights' … but he had such an accent that I thought that he said 'whites' … I don't think that is academic English because there is so strong accent.* (Student 35F).

In a second interview, a student raised a similar challenge:

> *Student 1:*   *Can I talk to you about something?* (Student 60.2M).
> Interviewer: Yes.
> *Student 1:*   *I keep telling the teachers. I was talking with my Course Coordinator and they understand that, and I don't know, they just hear it, it doesn't matter. And I just tell you and I keep telling [my friend] about that. It's about [teachers'] accent and the way Australians talk. Sometimes, from last year, I was hearing something from the lecturers like, 'heart right', 'heart right'. And I'm thinking 'What's wrong with "heart" to be "right"? What's wrong?'* (Student 60.2M).
> Interviewer: Ah, it's 'heart **rate**'.
> *Student 1:*   *Yes, you see? See? "Right"! It's like an example. And there's lots of them.* (Student 60.2M).

The students had mixed feelings about how to deal with these challenges saying:

> *Student 2:*   *But I think, I think it's our problem, maybe, it's not a lecturer problem, you know what I mean.* (Student 73M).
> *Student 1:*   *But I also think that the lecturer knows that there are students in the class that have English as a second language and they should have some consideration there. … I think that lecturers here, or anywhere, should*

have that same consideration. If you have a class of mixed-up backgrounds ... from all over, where English is not their first language, they should have some consideration for these students. (Student 60.2M).

Student 2: *Exactly.* (Student 73M).
Student 1: *Don't expect for them to have Australian dialogue.* (Student 60.2M).

Teachers were generally less aware of their use of slang. One teacher, who pointed out that "English is another issue" which caused challenges, explained how students could get help:

The [International Office] certainly look after them very well and get them into the lingo[3] of the place – what you should do if you're having trouble [with English]. (Teacher 30.1F).

Spoken academic languages

Although a few teachers mentioned challenges relating to the level of academic language used in written texts, none referred to their use of *academic* language in the spoken context. The type of language used in the following teacher's comment, however, may reflect challenges for students in this regard:

The challenges are that, often, one needs to simplify some of the literary complexities in terms of content issues and, in summarising, some of the subtle idiomatic nuances might well get lost. You also can't assume that students from another language base and background will know the patterns of allusion and reference that you might want to make. It can slow down the process in ways that might have more to do with teaching structures of language rather than discussing or learning anything about the actual literature under discussion. (Teacher 41M).

The following student explained the challenge he faced when teachers used academic language in lectures:

... lecturers, they just stand there and they speak with different language, you know, an academic language. I've never heard that word. And then you go and ask about this word and they tell you what it means in English and, like, 'Well why don't you say that at the beginning then?' So it confuses me, you know. I think they should simplify their way of introducing information to students. (Student 60.1M).

Delivery

A number of students reported difficulty with the way some teachers presented information in lectures. Students had more difficulty when teachers read from textbooks or notes. Overheads and PowerPoint presentations helped to a degree, although students said that the slides were sometimes wordy and students were not given enough time to copy, as the following student explained:

... during the lecture he also talks very fast. He give us the screen for us to copy down, but he speaks more faster than we can copy down and then changes another. There is no time

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[3] *Lingo* = Colloquial for 'language'.

to copy down but that's not the point because there's also no time to listen to him. (Student 15F).

This experience of Western teaching is not dissimilar to one of Eastern teaching, as described by the following student:

In [my country] we only have lectures. The lecturers just talk, talk, talk every day and talk, talk, talk every class. We just take notes. We have less time for communication with the teachers to ask them what is important to me and what should I need to do? We don't know! The teacher just comes in, talks everything to us, then he or she goes out. (Student 5F).

Despite this common experience of monologic lectures for many students, they recognised what constituted *"good"* teaching techniques. A student made the following comment about one of her teachers:

*His teaching techniques are not very good. He talks to himself. He either looks at the floor or at the ceiling. He doesn't make eye contact with you. He's from [a non-English speaking country] so his slang is different; it's not very clear. Even our friends from Aussie [Australia] too, have difficulties. ... He expects us to really know everything. He throws the books at us and says, 'If you don't understand **that** thing, there's no point being in [this discipline].' I mean that is something discouraging. For the most, he is not an effective lecturer.* (Student 54F).

Students' preparation for lectures

Students understood that they also had a responsibility to prepare for lectures and used a number of different strategies to try to help their *understanding*, as this student pointed out:

I preview, review and prepare for lectures beforehand, and during class I follow the teacher – concentrate – you can't be absent-minded! (Student 4F).

The same student had difficulty with *listening* skills but was prepared to speak with her teacher about it, as indicated in the following comment:

... I have a problem with listening. Some lecturers speak so fast and softly. There are only six students in the class. They have been here for one or two years so it's OK for them. This is my first year, so very difficult. I think I am going to talk with [the teacher] before next lecture. And just say, 'Can you please speak slowly and loudly?' (Student 4F).

This student's confidence in approaching her teachers may also indicate a willingness to participate *dialogically* in other contexts.

Approachability of teachers

A strategy many students used to help their *understanding* was to approach teachers after class. A number of teachers also mentioned this, saying that students approached them after class because they preferred not to "speak up" in class, as reflected in the following comment:

I guess one noticeable thing I would say about international students ... is that they will come to you straight after the tutorials, one by one and ask questions, rather than in

tutorials, partly because a lot of the students don't want to speak up in tutorials. (Teacher 37F).

Students, however, explained why they often interacted with teachers after, rather than during, tutorials and lectures:

I use tut[orial] time to talk to the teacher if I have problem ...[but] I usually wait until after tutes to ask questions because my expression is not very correct. It takes time to form my question. Local students can 'catch the target', but I think I can't. That's the problem with English as my second language. I have to think in [my language] and then translate. (Student 14F).

Another student made similar comments:

Because most of the students, their first language is English, it is more easy for them to study and understand. They can ask questions already in class but not like us because we try to understand – want to find out what's the problem. After the class we take home our study and find the problem, so it's quite slow. (Student 15F).

The same student highlighted the challenges, and sometimes the competiveness, of working with other INESB students when she added:

I talk to my friends about the problems, but because most of them do not really understand either, it doesn't help. Some of the better students are not willing to tell you because they understand already. (Student 15F).

Not all students felt comfortable approaching their teachers after a lesson as the following student explained. Her comment, however, also indicates her view that learning to question is *"good"*:

... with the lecture here ... because of the language problem ... normally if we are having problems, still we wouldn't like go to ask the lecturer. We don't do that. Normally we work it out by ourselves. We rather to do that, rather than ask the lecturer. Yeah, maybe we are just too concentrated. I don't know. It's different. Like, you can see the difference, like when you are teaching [NESB students] like us in the course, we don't normally ask questions. We don't. We just listen. Think, think, think and listen. And that's it. [If] we have problem we keep it and we will find it out ourselves. Australia people, ... they keep on asking, asking. They are good. (Student 18.1F).

When asked if she would feel more comfortable to ask her lecturers if she were in Australia for a longer time, however, the same student elaborated:

No. No. I feel perfectly comfortable to ask![4] *For me. Most of my friends, they don't. Because I mix pretty well because I stay for whole of the summer and I mix pretty well.*

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[4] Only one student said he did not feel comfortable speaking to his female teachers. This was because of his upbringing and his long history of male teachers, as he explained:

I went to the [United] States and then I went to England and studied there for a little bit, and then came here. I still find it a little funny to be in a classroom with girls and a girl-teacher, or a lady, a woman as a lecturer. I just find it a lot more easier and relaxing to have a classroom of boys. ... because my generation is older, we never really had any direct contact with the opposite sex – in school, and life – except our relatives, mothers and sisters and all that. Yeah, so I guess my background kind of affected me. ... And because of a different culture, a different language, you know. ... If she's a female, I can't really say nothing back to her, even outside of class. You know? Because that's how I was brought up. You don't talk back to a woman. If it's a male you can argue with them and talk to them face-to-face. (Student 60.2M).

It's not with the local students. I mix with some people that come from Canada and Indonesia and they speak English all the time and they have been here quite a long time – a few years – so that helps a lot. (Student 18.1F).

Another student, who had initially felt comfortable in approaching his teacher, explained why he had become reluctant to continue do so:

… the lecturer gave us some notes, but I don't really get it [understand]. And I go up and ask him and he say, 'You go home and have a look yourself first.' But if you don't understand something, even if you go home and have a look, you still don't understand it. (Student 43.1M).

The same student in a second interview six months later spoke again about difficulties he experienced in approaching his teacher:

*... the [subject] lecturer, I'm kind of scared to ask him because I had some questions last week and I went and asked him, 'What is this about?' and he just say [pause] and he say to the class, everyone was still in the class, 'This student wants me to repeat the whole lecture!' And I say, 'Ah, no, I just want you to repeat this bit.' And he said, 'This **is** the whole lecture. This is what we've been talking about.' So this is what I say when we talked outside. I couldn't talk about everything I need – just a bit, a bit, a bit, you know – so when I am asking about those questions he said, 'You have to go home and look up the textbook and come back and see me.' And then I say, 'What's the point?' I mean, if I don't understand right now, once I go home and do some study, I still don't understand it, I still don't get it. So what's the point of going home and try my textbook and then ask him again? Why doesn't he just tell me straight away?* (Student 43.2M).

Other students explained that they found it difficult to approach their teachers because they were not available. As one student commented:

The understanding of all the subjects is quite difficult. Sometimes I have no one to ask because the lecturers are busy. (Student 15F).

The same student went on to explain:

... some lecturers are very rushed for time. After [the lecture] they talk to you and say, 'Have you got question?' But if nobody interrupts him, so he just goes – but they still got time – about half an hour. Like yesterday, maybe it's the last lecture, and he say about the mid-term [examination], 'Any questions you want to ask about the mid-term?' One or two students ask him, 'Ah, no questions', so he say, 'OK, you can go home.' (Student 15F).

Availability of teachers

Learning new ways of doing things in the academy caused challenges for students. A number of students commented on the fact that they had to make appointments to see their teachers during specific consultation times:

Here, I think teachers, lecturers, are more professional, more experienced [than in my country]. … But some weaknesses of teachers, lecturers here is, if we got some problems, we can see teachers any time [in my country] without an appointment. Teachers just sit in their office and if you've got any problems – no matter if it is academic or other question – you can just go and see him or her. It's very common. But here you have to make an appointment, whether you email or call. I feel it's … I just don't get used to it. … it's better if you can go directly to see him or her, but I think it's Western style. If you want to

meet people, you should first make an appointment, right? But, before we had telephone, how did you do that? Write a letter? (Student 17.1M).

Teachers also reported a range of challenges regarding students and consultation times. There were cases of students wanting to see their teachers outside consultation times, of turning up without appointments, of being too "shy" to enter the teacher's office, or of being "demanding" in their expectation to see the teacher (for example, Teachers 30.1F and 63F). The following incident reveals a further dimension of the challenges experienced by this teacher from a non-English speaking background:

> As an [NESB] lecturer, the [NESB] students ... tend to approach me in an overt expectancy that they will receive certain favours that they would not receive from an Australian lecturer. I have to tread a very, very fine line to negotiate a pathway that is acceptable to both students and the University. I cannot offend the students by certain things, but I also need the students to learn that there are certain standards and expectations at this Western university which they have to accept also. (Teacher 7.1M).

A number of students said that they contacted their teachers via email as a strategy for overcoming challenges of *listening* and *speaking*. At least one teacher mentioned this, saying:

> Some students wouldn't talk in class but communicate so much by email. I receive three emails [from INESB students] to one email from local students. (Teacher 9M).

Students' willingness to contact their teachers in this way may indicate that it is not so much cultural background as much as challenges with oracy that hinder students from interacting with teachers in classroom contexts.

Tutorials and group work
Participation and interaction
Another major challenge, commonly perceived by teachers to be cultural rather than language-related, was the reluctance of many students to participate in tutorials and group work. Teachers commented that, although INESB students generally had a "100% attendance rate", they were "less willing to participate during tutorials", they "avoided asking questions", and it was "difficult to get anything out of them" (for example, Teachers 13M, 23M, 39M and 40M). As one teacher commented, "It can be a bit like getting blood out of a stone at times" (Teacher 23M), while another added:

> Another challenge is a cultural rather than a language challenge. The students tend not to be very interactive. It's difficult getting them to interact in class. I'm still not sure how to tackle this problem. It's difficult because it seems cultural that they are not very keen to speak up in class. That makes the lectures less interesting and less dynamic and I think the students miss out because of that. I usually find that it's the Australian students who ask questions and interact, unless I ask the [INESB] students specifically. (Teacher 13M).

Other teachers (including Teachers 30F and 39M) experienced similar challenges but dealt with them differently, saying, for example, "The overseas students don't ask

questions, so I ask instead" (Teacher 12M). This strategy, however, was not always without its own challenges, as indicated by the following teacher's comment:

> … it's hard to remember their names … it takes longer. They're hard to pronounce – I get a lot of laughs. Some have English names, not all, and we don't have them on the class list. It's harder to just call on someone in class. (Teacher 13M).

The following teacher had "mixed feelings" regarding students' willingness to participate, and some of their abilities:

> I think often that they tend to be quite quiet in class, so that they tend not to want to contribute, perhaps. We have a number of Australian students that that applies to as well, and I suppose I can only go on a small sample, but I think generally they are less confident with speaking in class. I think a few have been reticent to come and ask questions, even outside of class time, to approach the teacher. But others have not been. They've been quite willing to approach, especially after you've made the effort to seek them out. But there are some that just won't, and you're constantly having to chase – 'Are you comprehending this?' or 'Do you know you need to do this?' and that kind of stuff. So I think mixed feelings about some of their abilities. (Teacher 38M).

Another teacher also pointed to this problem, but was aware of her own, possibly inaccurate, perceptions of INESB students. As she pointed out:

> ... there may be some real cultural issues there. Our [local] students, I think, are quite well able to tell lecturers that they're not very clear and that they're confused and don't understand, and so on. It may not always be easy for our students, but I think as a group you can generally get that kind of feedback. I'm not sure what feedback we'll get from [INESB students]. But they may find it culturally difficult to say that they don't understand. They might think it's rude; I don't know. You see I'm projecting onto them a sort of cultural persona that I have some awareness of. (Teacher 32F).

Although cultural conditioning and individual characteristics did influence some students' behaviour and their tendency to participate, students reiterated that it was their facility with spoken language which determined their willingness to participate, as reflected in the following comment:

> *I prefer working alone mainly because of language. Some group work is OK. Depends on topics. If familiar with topic, it's more easy to join conversation, but if it's not familiar with me, it's very hard.* (Student 3F).

Another student explained why participating was a challenge for him:

> *Problem for me is no confidence because of language. I used to have many confidence in my country, but here ... I quite worried ... are teacher and students going to understand what I say, or not? And when I not meet my expectations, I feel sorry and I feel guilty.* (Student 27M).

Opportunity to work with Australians

Group work and teamwork did not always offer students opportunity to work with Australian students, as they had hoped or expected. As one student commented:

I like group work, but there is no opportunity to work with Australian students. (Student 74M).

Another student agreed, saying:

Australian students want to work with Australians. If we are friendly to them, they'll talk, but otherwise they keep to themselves. (Student 72M).

Another student added:

Ah, it's quite OK now but somehow I'm scared to talk to [Australian students] because they're not very friendly. (Student 15F).

Behaviour perceived as racist

Not all INESB students had experience working in groups or teams. As one student pointed out:

Before Australia I didn't know what teamwork was. (Student 4F).

This lack of experience may account for the reluctance of some local students to have INESB students in their group, feeling perhaps that these students may require extra help. As one local student from another university commented when asked about this, *"It's not a racist thing. It's just that [INESB] students need more help and we haven't got time"* (pers. comm. 5 March 2004). Whatever the reason for exclusion, some students had negative experiences which they perceived as racist. These experiences contributed to their reluctance to participate and detracted from a positive Australian experience. One student described how she felt excluded because of her peers' behaviour during a practical class activity:

Some workshops are very hard. [Course subject] last year was really hard for me. There was more group work and whole class activities. Sometimes I felt left out ... umm ... like umm ... [long pause] umm ... like, when I tried to make four lines and I was in front, and when I turned back there was nobody behind me. [started to cry] (Student 3F).

When asked if this had ever happened before, or whether it was just certain people who treated her this way, the student was silent for a long time before answering in tears:

I don't know. Some students are very kind, others are very unkind and others are just normal. (Student 3F).

Teachers, on the other hand, did not mention racism as causing challenges for themselves or their students. One teacher, however, did make the following observation:

You need to be careful of the way you say things because [INESB students] don't understand the [Australian] cultural context. Racism is not just an Australian phenomenon. It's an individual thing. (Teacher 9M).

A lack of understanding of cultural contexts and nuances, on the part of both teachers and students, sometimes created tensions and misunderstandings, as in the following case:

[The student] came to introduce himself last week and there were quite a lot of students coming in and out of my office during consult time. And I just have a standard joke with everybody 'Oh, here's trouble, come in' because they usually bring a problem or two. Well, he arrived [and I said] 'Oh here's trouble, come in.' Well, he took an instant offence. He took it literally that I was calling him a trouble-maker and he hasn't come back into my office since. He's sent two of the other [INESB students] in to give me messages. (Teacher 30.1F).

Intercultural tensions

Not surprisingly, perhaps, students did not mention tensions between different cultural and sub-cultural groups among themselves, referring only to tensions between Australians and non-Australians. Some teachers, however, did raise this issue, saying that tensions existed between different cultural and sub-cultural groups which sometimes caused challenges. As one teacher observed:

There are tensions, but they are adults. There are certain tensions – you might sense them – but they sense them themselves. (Teacher 26M).

Caste systems

The deeper nuances of intercultural tensions, such as internal caste systems, caused challenges for those teachers who were aware of them. As one teacher commented:

[The Indian students] ... run on a pecking order from my observations. The caste system is alive and well – you can observe it in the classroom – how they react to and behave towards each other. They defer to certain people. (Teacher 23M).

A teacher from a non-English speaking background elaborated:

... with the Indian students, there is a caste system, which most Westerners are unaware of. This caste system exists very, very strongly among these students even though it is a system which many Westerners would believe doesn't exist any more or shouldn't exist any more. The point is, it does exist ... If I insisted that they sat at the desks or sat in different places, it would immediately put up barriers between me and both the students of the higher caste and the lower castes because I would be seen to be not capable as a lecturer. ... If I ask a question, a lot of hands would go up. I have to be very careful which hand I choose. If I choose a lower caste over a higher caste Indian, I would offend the upper caste students, and the lower caste students would think less of me as a lecturer. (Teacher 7M).

The same teacher also pointed to tensions among students from Northern China and Southern China:

... when I organise tut[orial] groups, I make sure students from Northern and Southern China are each grouped separately. If I don't, half of the students are missing from tut[orial]s, simply because they will not interact. (Teacher 7M).

Student strategies for group work

Students used a range of strategies to overcome the challenges of participating in groups. Some found members of their own ethnic group to work with, and others found

INESB students from other cultural backgrounds. Some students chose to work alone, believing that teachers might think they were *"copying from each other"* if they worked with others (for example, Student 4.1F) or, more commonly, because they could not find any other students to work with. When asked if he worked with other students, one student explained:

> *Not really. I couldn't find any other students in my class [to work with]. Just the friend I had and he has no idea at all. I try to ask my [NESB] friend to help me. But, you know, ah, maybe, I don't know, maybe if they get it wrong. Once you get it wrong, once all your friends get it wrong, you **get** it [understand it]! [laughs]* (Student 43.1M).

At least one teacher had observed this, saying:

> … They don't like to let others know that they don't understand; they'd rather go and ask their friends later on and discuss it between themselves. That's something that they will do, that if they don't understand, they'll go and find out. But they find out within their own circle, so that if they go and find something and they've got a wrong slant on it, then it tends to go right through the whole group. (Teacher 40M).

Teacher strategies for group work

In an effort to overcome these challenges and have students work together, some teachers purposely organised groups of INESB and local students, as the same teacher explained:

> ... rather than just leaving it up to them as to who takes what role, I try and mix them up, so we have Australian and international students working together in groups, because [INESB students] do tend to stick together, so I try to force the issue, and they're separated out that way. (Teacher 40M).

Another teacher explained how *time* was necessary for successful intercultural group work:

> Most students want to work in pairs with others from their cultural group, but it was difficult to get six to eight students [from different cultural groups] working as a group together. ... you still need to allow for group processing, socialisation, etcetera. There just isn't time for this. If you had the students for a whole year it would allow for that kind of learning. Thirteen weeks isn't long enough. (Teacher 26M).

Critical thinking, critical analysis and higher order thinking (HORT)

Another major challenge for students and teachers was caused by students' perceived lack of critical thinking, critical analysis and higher order thinking (HORT) skills. As one teacher commented:

> ... getting them to open up, to think outside the square [is a major challenge]. Challenging them to say, 'Look, just because Fred Bloggs has written that in his article or Sue Smith has written that in her book, doesn't make it, you know – it's not actually in marble'. (Teacher 23M).

Another teacher referred to "the rote learning industry mentality", saying:

Chinese students can't handle the critical analysis/research expectations of the lecturers. This is linked very much to the rote learning industry mentality, that is, recall and repeat versus critical analysis. (Teacher 6M).

The following teacher also referred to "rote learning" and explained that students are "conditioned" to this way of learning:

The educational system [in Asian countries] is one of rote learning. Here students are expected to critically analyse, problem solve, etcetera. Students are so conditioned to this way of learning – that is, memorise and regurgitate – that they find it very difficult to get used to this other Western way of learning. (Teacher 7.2M).

Teachers who commented on rote learning were referring to 'Asian' students in general. The following teacher, however, speaking of a Middle Eastern cultural group felt that they, also, were surface learners, saying:

... they're good rote learners but they're not very good deep learners. (Teacher 30.1F).

While cultural conditioning did impact on why students found critical analysis and higher order thinking a challenge, students stressed that they wanted to become critical thinkers and independent learners. The following conversation between a number of INESB students and their teacher encapsulates students' aspirations in this respect. The teacher related the conversation as follows:

I said [to the INESB students], 'I know about [the university in your country]. The [course there] is very advanced compared to Australia, so why do you come to Australia?' The students said, 'It may be advanced, but we are not allowed to think. Australian university can let you do whatever you like. We have more freedom to think.' (Teacher 11M).

Although students wanted to learn these ways of thinking and learning, many challenges hindered their achievement of these aspirations, as reflected in their following comments. The following student, for example, explained differences between the *"Asian style"* and *"English style"* of teaching, his comments highlighting what he believed to be the ineffectiveness of memorisation:

Teaching styles are a big problem. I think you know already the difference between Asian style and English style, right? In Asia, this is the book and this is the rule. Students just follow the master. They don't know what it is, but they just follow the master. It is hard to memorise, but when the time [is] past – forget – because they are not using it. (Student 27M).

Another student made similar comments:

Education system in [my country] is more a 'spoon-feed' system. They just tell you what you have to learn. They don't let you think for yourself. The lecturers are a bit different here. They just tell you some question but don't give you a direct answer. You have to find the answer yourself. (Student 19F).

When asked if this way of learning was 'a good thing', the student replied:

For me, because I'm used to the spoon-fed system for more than 10 years, it's quite hard to get used to this, but I think it's a good thing. We just need some time to practise ourselves. (Student 19F).

Later in the same interview, the student reiterated:

It is good [to learn in this way], but we need time to learn. This is new to us. We want to learn this way, but we don't know. We have learnt this way [memorisation] for many years. (Student 19F).

Another student agreed:

[In my country] they just spoon-feed us and we just eat and eat and eat and then vomit everything out ... But this is a habit, so it's hard to change it. (Student 21F).

The time-consuming process of 'unlearning' previous learning strategies and understandings of what constitutes learning was made more challenging by students' lack of facility with English *language* and lack of *"time to practise"* (Student 19F). These factors also impacted on the process of learning critical and higher order thinking skills. The following student, however, demonstrates her well-developed understanding of the process of critical thinking, and it is possible that the challenge with critical and analytical thinking is not in the process, but in *producing the product*, as reflected in her comments. The student refers to critical thinking and critical analysis as *"critical appraisal"*:

I'm having trouble with critical appraisal. Critical appraisal is really, really, really confusingly hard! It is so challenging! It is my first time writing it. It's like a summary of all of it. I have to critique it. I have to look backwards through all the other writers. I have to go through lots of journals, page by page. Is this right? Is this right? I have to code that; reference everything. It's heavy! I'm sure if a student left it to last minute they wouldn't manage. (Student 47.1F).

Another student explained her challenges with critical analysis, also pointing to the difficulty of producing the product:

[Critical thinking] is difficult because you have to think about – critically reflect on what you mostly think. And what textbooks you read and study, according to what you think and your experience, and everything. I think it's a bit hard because they want you to reference at the same time. I think it's a bit more hard for us. (Student 8.1F).

Transfer and modification of study skills

The students interviewed for this study were experienced students who were used to study and motivated to study hard. They were familiar with lectures and note-taking, research processes such as gathering information by manual searches (via the library), or electronic searches (via the Internet), and brought a range of study skills and strategies which they expected to be able to transfer to their new study environment. This was especially the case for those students who had attended English speaking schools, colleges and universities in other countries. However, not all students were able

easily to transfer their existing skills to the Australian context, regardless of previous study experiences. Course requirements, methods of teaching, and assessment criteria differed from country to country. One student, who had studied in the United States and England prior to coming to Australia, found that the expectations of institutions in the United States were similar to those in his home country, but quite different from the British university, which he said was similar to those in Australia (Student 60.1M). His comments regarding his experience in the United States provide a noteworthy comparison between teaching methods in different countries, especially with regard to the concept of 'spoon-feeding' which was mentioned by many students in relation to Eastern institutions:

> *Being an English as a second language student [in the United States], I found that professors, doctors, teachers in the States, they try to simplify the material, even if you are not a second language speaker. They try to simplify it to the point where they will draw a diagram. They will do anything to make you understand, rather than in England and here. I found out that most lecturers [here], they want you to go and find out yourself. They kind of like give you a head start. They tell you, 'This is what we're doing this week. This is what we're going to cover.' The lecturer will explain a little bit, then after that it's all up to you. So here you have to be mostly self-motivated which is also positive, a positive way of learning. You know, it makes you self-motivated. In the States they're feeding you with a spoon, a silver spoon. They did. They show you exactly what they want and put it on a silver platter for you.* (Student 60.2M).

Teachers' expectations that students quickly become independent learners meant that students had to re-think their situations. Working under increasing pressure as time passed and deadlines loomed, and also facing challenges with the volume, complexity and accessibility of textbooks, students had to modify existing study strategies. As one student explained:

> *I don't have the same study habits here. I work more hard. I study the study notes and try to understand. Sometimes I read before the lecture but really, there is no time, and I am tired. The subjects in [my country] are much easier, but by third year it's quite difficult. And when we think how much money we have spent to come overseas to study, we will work harder.* (Student 15F).

A postgraduate student explained the difficulties she faced trying to study:

> *In the beginning it was really, really hard. I was so slow ... I was so slow. I was under so much pressure, but I had to do it. I had a due date. ... But ... I was so slow and I couldn't produce. But I have improved since I got here. ... But I'm always worried that I'm not producing enough, that I'm not doing enough, not using my time properly. At first I had too much work to do but I couldn't do it, I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't read; nothing would get in my mind. It was horrible! Ugh!* (Student 52F).

Another student exclaimed:

> *You have to selective read or you will go crazy! And I think now even I am learning to arrange time wisely, because it's really short time. We have really short time before assignments are due. I study nearly every day, but for a normal human like me – I'm not really extraordinary, I'm just normal – I can concentrate in one day for three to four*

hours and that's it. I can't do any more. I can study for the rest, but it's not quality study. (Student 18F).

Bearing in mind the complex and time-consuming translation process of negotiating *academic* texts, students trying to read widely and *understand* what they are reading in the time available became an unachievable aspiration for the students and an unfulfilled expectation for their teachers. As one student pointed out:

> *They want to see that we read widely, but there is no time for that. How can I read five or six different books and get the context?* (Student 8F).

Understanding concepts

Discipline-specific language

Understanding concepts, also, was a complex, challenging and time-consuming process for many students. As one student explained:

> *English is my second language,[5] so sometimes I can't understand clearly so have to spend time to re-think details and get the concepts clear. I read the Study Guide before lectures and then after lectures I read the books.* (Student 14F).

Two students from the same country explained how they used a combination of their own language plus English when discussing discipline-specific language and terminology:

> *We use our own language [to talk about the subject], but with all the [discipline-specific] terms and stuff we keep it in English so we won't forget it.* (Student 60.2M).

Another student pointed out that she did not know if she understood the concepts because she had learned them only in English and had no first language to refer to. Following a trip back to her country, she found that she could not share her new knowledge with her parents:

> *I couldn't explain certain things about my course to my parents because I don't know the words in [my language]. I don't know if I understand the concepts at all, because I have learned them in English and can't explain them in [my language].* (Student 51F).

Discipline-specific language presents students with new words which have not been encountered before, and this is the case for all students, whether from non-English speaking backgrounds or from English speaking backgrounds. As one INESB student pointed out when asked whether discipline-specific language caused her any challenges:

> *I don't think international [NESB] students have this problem because I'm sure local students are learning new things [too]. So, of course, all of us we are on the same line.* (Student 46.2F).

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[5] For some students, English was not a second language, but a third or fourth language. In the following case, the student's English was a mixture of three languages, as she explained:

> *... my English is a mixture of three languages. I use different words to translate into English. I have lots of grammar mistakes.* (Student 47.1F).

The following comment by an English speaking international student reflects the challenge she faced in understanding discipline-specific language, even though English was her first language:

> *Like there's a vocabulary for everything you take right? Like there's a vocabulary that goes with everything like, in science you have to know science words so that for me, like learning to read the syllabus and learning different terms and terminologies, that in itself is a challenge for me. Sometimes I think that I've got it and then the teacher will say something and I'll think, 'I mustn't know what that word means.'* (Student 33F).

While INESB students initially found discipline-specific language difficult to understand, it is noteworthy that no student found it any more difficult to understand than local accents and slang. Rather, discipline-specific language was generally regarded as something *"you just have to learn"* (Student 46.2F), and which students said they learned through introductory subjects when they *"just start to pick up terminology"* (Student 64F). It is possible, in fact, that INESB students learn discipline-specific language more easily than students from English speaking backgrounds, because they are used to working with multiple languages, are in 'language learning mode', and have attuned strategies for learning new vocabulary. This possibility, however, was not investigated.

Non-academic, idiomatic language

What *did* cause significant challenges for many INESB students, however, was the use of an idiomatic, 'inter-language' which is neither *everyday*, specifically *academic*, nor *discipline-specific*. Rather, it is the type of language commonly used in *academic* contexts, particularly written assignments and examination questions, such as the word "elicit", as in *"Elicit a response"* (Student 60.2M), or the word "immerse", as in *"Immerse in fluid"* (Student 47.2F). The challenges caused by the use of this kind of language are discussed more fully in the following chapter, *Chapter 5: Achievement*.

Broad/surface versus narrow/deep learning and topic coverage

Different types of English language, and time, thwarted students' aspirations to *understand* concepts. Additionally, students felt that the broad range of topics covered in some of their subjects also contributed to their challenges to learn more deeply in the time allowed. As one student commented:

> *Learning is so **short**! Holidays more than study! Uni[versity] learning is good but there's not much research learning you can do because there is no time. Why is it so short?* (Student 47.1F).

A number of students commented on what they perceived to be a broad, surface-level coverage of many topics, as opposed to a narrow, but deeper, coverage of fewer topics.

The following comment reflects a general feeling among students regarding the coverage of some topics:

> *The teachers here, they can finish one chapter during two hours. In my country, one chapter will maybe be finished in eight hours.* (Student 4F).

The following comment by an English speaking background international student is included, not only as a means of emphasising the challenges facing INESB students, but also because it reflects what INESB students are also saying about wanting *deep* learning:

> *... [the amount of reading] was a big thing last semester. I said to one of my professors, like, 'If you give me four chapters to read a week it all starts to sound the same. Like you're reading it and mumbling together.' I thought, 'It's impossible to read that much and absorb it all. I can't possibly retain all that information. There just isn't time.' And [the teacher] just said, 'Just skim it.' But when it comes to it, we don't want to just skim it.* (Student 33F).

Section Two – Tensions and contestations

Listening to what teachers and students are saying reveals that they have different, contrasting and conflicting views about ways of teaching and learning. Additionally there are mismatches between what students and teachers hope, expect and understand regarding each other. These mismatches occur for many reasons but, whatever the reason, these mismatches cause tensions and contestations which exacerbate the challenges.

Mismatches in hopes, expectations and understandings

Mismatches in roles and expectations of teachers and students

Contributing to these mismatches is the fact that students arrive with expectations and understandings about the Australian education system, their teachers and the role of their teachers, and hopes and aspirations which may be unrealistic or naive. Another reason mismatches occur is because of perceptions, common among many of the teachers in this study, regarding INESB students in general, and students from specific cultural groups in particular. Teachers indicated, for example, that INESB students were "extremely motivated" (Teachers 23M), "always attended class" (Teacher 12M) and, in some cases, were seen to "have a positive influence on other, less motivated students"[6]

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[6] In one case, however, the opposite was true. As one teacher explained:

> … [the Asian students] hit the ground running, but when they saw the local students strolling, they slowed down. (Teacher 42M).

(Teacher 13M). The following comments reflect similar thoughts expressed by other teachers:

> Generally [INESB students] are well-educated, keen to attain a [Western university] degree, and hard working. They often appear more dedicated than our Australian students. (Teacher 53M).

Another teacher agreed, but pointed to the problem of English:

> The majority of .... students have been energetic, they've been very good students, but they still have problems as far as English is concerned. (Teacher 40M).

Generally, many teachers' perceptions of students were based on stereotypical understandings of specific cultural groups, either in their 'ways of being', for example:

> The Indian [student] says, 'If I am paying, I am out to squeeze every drop out of you.' The Chinese [student] says, 'If I am paying, you are providing me with a service and you are providing me with a qualification.' And the Australian [student] says, 'If I am paying, you teach me how to think.' (Teacher 7M);

or in their 'ways of learning', as the reader will recall from the following quotation mentioned earlier in this chapter:

> Chinese students can't handle the critical analysis/research expectations of the lecturers. This is linked very much to the rote learning industry mentality, that is, recall and repeat versus critical analysis. (Teacher 6M).

According to a number of teachers, many students had higher expectations, not only of themselves but also of their teachers, as the following teacher observed:

> O/S [overseas] students are a lot more demanding – their expectations are high. (Teacher 13M).

Some teachers understood that students' expectations were linked to a cultural obligation to their families as reflected in the following comment:

> I don't believe there is an issue with respect to their willingness and motivation to want to do well and achieve the appropriate outcome. Their own perspective comes from a number of reasons. I think there's a cultural issue there in terms of doing well, and I think there's an obligation issue there as well in regard to their perceived obligation to their families who have invested quite a lot of time and money into them. So they feel an obligation to perform well while they're away. Otherwise different cultures have different expressions, but broadly it's an issue of 'saving face' when they go home. If they've succeeded they can hold up their piece of paper and say, 'Look, mum and dad, brother and sister, and mate down the road – look what I've done!' (Teacher 23M).

Mismatches in understandings about participation

Teachers also reported that students were generally not willing to participate during tutorials and group work, with most teachers believing that this unwillingness stemmed from cultural background. Students, however, said that they *wanted* to participate in classroom discussions and group work, but were hindered for various reasons, including a lack of confidence with English language and/or what they perceived to be racist

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behaviour by some local students and teachers. Most commonly, however, students said they were hindered because of English *language*. Additionally, when students spoke about challenges with English *language*, they frequently referred specifically to challenges with *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and/or *writing*. Teachers, on the other hand, referred more generally to the challenges of 'English' or 'language'.

Mismatches in understandings about ways of learning

It was also commonly reported that students used rote learning or memorisation, and lacked critical and higher order thinking skills. While a few teachers suggested that factors such as 'personality' or 'learning disabilities' may hinder students' learning, teachers generally believed that the greatest challenges to students' learning were caused by *cultural background* and/or English *language*, as reflected in the following comments:

> I think we'll just keep **ploughing** on and see if they'll change, but I don't think they will. I don't think they will. And maybe it's not their fault. Maybe it's just cultural, entrenched in them, and they can't change (Teacher 30.1F).

> It's the English language barrier. It's not even the culture … it's the English language barrier that is the biggest hurdle for my students. Understanding what is required of them in the academic setting, and analysis. (Teacher 31F).

Students, on the other hand, said that they wanted to understand the concepts and not just memorise them. As time passed, however, they came to realise that there were many obstacles to achieving this aspiration. As a result, although students hoped to understand, they often did not expect to. The following comment reflects many students' similar comments:

> *... the textbook is too difficult for me ... the sentences are very long. I try again and again, but I don't understand* (Student 14F).

Challenges were exacerbated for those students who could not afford to buy textbooks:

> *... because it's the last year, [the content of subjects] ... is more deep and very difficult to understand. Some of us didn't buy the textbook, so quite difficult. It is difficult.* (Student 15F).

Financial pressures added to the challenges of study for the many students who were not from wealthy backgrounds. Chinese students from one-child families were often under more pressure to 'succeed' than those students who had siblings who were also studying abroad. Not all students were able to overcome the challenges they faced in trying to improve their English, understand what they were learning, and achieve high grades. The following email, received from a student six months after her interview, explained:

I am not in Australia. I came back to China. I think I cannot finish the ... course in Australia ... I am very sorry about that I cannot give any help for your PhD course. I hope we can keep contact and be good friends. (Student 5F).

When asked in a follow-up email why she had returned to China, the student responded:

The main reason I gave up the ... course was the financial problems of my family. The tuition fee of [the] course is too expensive, so my family was not able to afford it. I had to give up the course and came [back] to China. (Student 5F).

Generally, however, teachers were unaware of these sorts of pressures on students, believing that they were financially well-off, as reflected in the following comments:

We are dealing with, perhaps, the top 2-3% of overseas families – that is, they are the only ones who can afford a degree at a Western university. (Teacher M6).

Another teacher added:

Most live in high-rise apartments in very dense cities with everything at their fingertips – they're plugged in to the technological era. Some aren't, I know, but generally their parents are high earners and so on.[7] (Teacher 65M).

While some of these students may have been relatively 'well-off' at home, exchange rates mean that costs associated with their education in Australia were exceedingly high.

Summary and transition

It appeared that students and teachers were generally hoping for the same outcomes for these students, namely, that they would improve their English, understand what they were learning, and pass their subjects. It appeared, however, that there were significant mismatches in the extent to which students and teachers hoped for these things and, more critically, in their expectations and understandings about how these outcomes might be achieved. This caused tensions which exacerbated the challenges for both students and teachers.

Different understandings about ways of teaching and what constitutes learning in a Western university caused challenges for students and teachers. Mismatches in students' and teachers' expectations of each other, and in their understandings of the roles and responsibilities of the other, caused further challenges. Teachers' misperceptions, based on stereotypical understandings about the nature of these learners

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[7] Only two teachers said that the students were "not always ... wealthy", or that there were "incorrect assumptions" regarding students' financial status, as reflected in the following comments:

It's not always the wealthy that come (in fact few are wealthy), but there is a status to having a foreign degree. (Teacher 12M).

Quite often, staff don't want to know where students come from. ... [There are] incorrect assumptions, for example, that students have lots of money. (Teacher 9M).

as members of cultural groups, exacerbated these challenges. While cultural background (or conditioning) did influence some students' challenges – for example, their reluctance to 'question the master' – students consistently attributed their challenges to *English language*. Despite the challenges, students emphasised that they wanted to become more independent learners, wanted to participate in classroom and other discussions and, in short, wanted to learn the 'ways of doing' what were necessary to 'succeed' in this Western university. Such aspirations, however, take time to achieve and, as the students pointed out, lack of time, in its various forms and contexts, exacerbated the challenges they faced and hindered the achievement of aspirations. Time also impacted on another major aspiration of students, namely, their hopes and, in some cases, their expectations, to achieve high grades. The challenges they and their teachers faced regarding assessment are discussed in the next chapter, *Chapter 5: Achievement.*

Part B

Chapter 5: Achievement

Synopsis

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is the critical point at which a student's understandings and a teacher's expectations meet and, hopefully, overlap. At this point it becomes apparent whether the teaching and learning undertaken by both parties has been successful – that is, whether there is sufficient overlap of the student's understandings (as represented) and the teacher's expectations, to deem that the student has fulfilled the mandated criteria necessary to pass an assessment task. The processes and products of assessment pose considerable challenges for both students and teachers, usually in that order.

This chapter has four sections. In Section One, students' voices reiterate their hopes, expectations and understandings regarding assessment and their aspirations to achieve high grades. Teachers' voices are also heard as they outline their expectations and understandings of these students and assessment. In Section Two, teachers, and in Section Three, students, talk about the challenges they face regarding assessment. Section Four considers students' and teachers' changing hopes and expectations in light of the challenges they face.

Section One – Hopes, expectations and understandings regarding assessment

Students' voices

Apart from wanting to improve their English language and understand the concepts being taught, students reiterated their hopes, expectations and aspirations to achieve high grades. As one student replied when asked about her hopes and expectations of her study experience:

> *I really want to get distinctions to show back home to my parents ... and [also that] my English has improved.* (Student 15F).

Many students felt pressures to achieve high grades out of an obligation or sense of duty to parents and families, as reflected in the following dialogue:

> *Student:*   *So far I just can get Distinctions. I can't get any HD [High Distinction]. And this is my problem.*

Interviewer:	But do you have an expectation to get those very high marks?
Student:	*Yes, of course! Of course! I don't just want to pass. No way!*
Interviewer:	And your family? Do they want to see that too?
Student:	*Yes, every parent they wish their children will be good in every aspect. They don't really force me, like, 'You have to! You have to study really good!' But I think that it's because that after I came here, I realised that I spending money a lot here and I feel – maybe I have to do something. Like, because I'm been really lucky and I haven't do anything for my parents. I just take, take, take, take!* (Student 18.1F).[1]

For the same student, in fact, achieving high results was her greatest challenge. As she pointed out:

> *This is my main problem ... I have four subjects to do and my expectations for the results will often be good, but this does not happen. ... It's very difficult to achieve high in four subjects. You just have to work hard and smart. And I'm not a smart worker! [laughs]* (Student 18.1F).

Many students made similar comments. The following exchange not only highlights the student's high expectations, but also reflects her disappointment at what she considered were only *"OK"* results:

Student:	*I think for last semester, after the exam, I get my result. I hate exams! Yeah. I thought, like, it's not too bad. I took four subjects. I got three Distinctions and one Credit.*
Interviewer:	That's great!
Student:	*Mmm. It's OK.* (Student 18.1F).

Students' hopes and expectations, however, changed over time. Confronted with the challenges of English language and new ways of teaching and learning, students began to reconsider their hopes and expectations in the light of their lived reality. For the following student, her aspirations to achieve High Distinctions were becoming tempered with reality, as reflected in her comments:

> *... I think [I'll get] Credit/Distinctions. This is not really what I most prefer, but I just do my best.* (Student 22F).

Other students, who had been studying in Australia for longer periods, no longer spoke of *"high grades"* or *"high expectations"*, but of the challenge *"to pass"*. As one student exclaimed:

> *... the greatest challenge is that I have to pass every subject. I don't want to fail any more!* (Student 17.2M);

while another student voiced his concern:

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[1] As mentioned earlier, this was especially the case for Chinese students from one-child families who had no siblings with whom to share the load of real, or perceived, expectations (for example, Students 5F, 14F and 18.1F).

I want to return to [my country] for summer holidays but I don't know if I'll come back. I'm afraid I will fail my exams. I haven't passed a subject yet. (Student 85M).

Teachers' voices

Teachers voiced a range of opinions regarding INESB students and assessment. Some teachers felt an ethical and moral obligation to help students who, they recognised, were facing significant challenges for a variety of reasons and who had paid substantial sums of money to undertake their studies. Other teachers felt that, as these students had chosen to study in an English speaking Western university, they should, firstly, possess the prerequisites necessary to enable them to undertake their course successfully and, secondly, that they should be treated the same way as any other student, specifically, the local Australian student.

Whatever their personal convictions and opinions about these students, and the extent to which they were prepared to support them, teachers generally regarded themselves as gatekeepers[2] who had a responsibility to the University and prospective employers of these students to ensure that 'standards' were 'maintained' and that students graduated with attributes as prescribed in the University's policies and course documents.[3]

While teachers differed in the forms of assessment they chose for students, the following teacher's comment consolidates similar thoughts expressed by most teachers about what they believed was 'important' about the assessment of INESB students:

> I suppose that the outcome is valid, reasonable and fair. But very specifically, is what assessment primarily does, it gives future employers an idea of the skills and knowledge that a student brings with them to a job. If we didn't have that, we wouldn't have to assess them. We could simply teach them and say 'take it or leave it'. But at the end of day we have to say that this student has the knowledge and skills at this bare-pass or HD level recorded on the transcript, and when the employer looks on the transcript they can say, 'I know what I'm getting'. ... Assessment ... needs to be standardised, clear and reliable. ... The bottom line in my head is, if I pass this student, what am I palming off onto a future employer? (Teacher 29F).

The purpose and importance of assessment are discussed further in *Chapter 9: Games*.

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[2]There was one teacher who expressed a different view, as will be discussed in *Chapter 9: Games*.
[3]The data also revealed that, whatever stance teachers took regarding INESB students, the majority of teachers also faced tensions, challenges and contestations as individuals, often debating within themselves the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding the teaching, learning and assessment of their students. Examples of these conflicts (or *heteroglossic* tensions, as discussed later in this thesis), are evident in the following comments from the same teacher during a long interview:
> On acceptable academic writing: "More than two or three errors ... I fail."
> On plagiarism: "It *is* dishonesty. I have no problem ... failing them. ... I follow University policy."
> On a student who was also a refugee: "I protected him in tut[orial] groups because he was vulnerable."
> On equity and equality: "Equity rather than equality requires protecting students sometimes."
> (Teacher 29F).
Similar contestations were not uncommon among other teachers.

Students' unrealistic expectations

Although teachers generally agreed that students expected to achieve high grades, the following teacher's comment reflects some doubt as to whether students' expectations were realistic:

> Most international students generally have a higher expectation of their grades. That is, they expect higher grades than they get. (Teacher M6).

Additional expectations of some students' families with regard to grades added to the challenge of assessment for both students and teachers, as highlighted in the following teacher's comments:

> Another problem is that [students'] parents – although they often do not know what their child is studying – expect their child to pass every subject and, not only that, but to pass well, that is, with Distinctions and High Distinctions. The parents are often in touch with the University, demanding to know why their child hasn't performed as well as they expected. (Teacher 7.2M).

A number of teachers[4] referred to additional challenges where students had studied in the University's programs through partnerships with other countries, prior to commencing their studies in Australia. A problem arose with the grading of students' work and the moderation of grades which also impacted on students' expectations of their grades in Australia. As one teacher explained:

> These [University] programs are delivered by local lecturers. [There are] problems with grading. There was a problem with moderation of grades. The markers in the countries where they study mark far higher [than the markers in Australia]. When the assignments are sent to Australia for checking, it appears that many would not pass, even those which were awarded Ds [Distinctions.] (Teacher 6M).

The same teacher commented that such cases revealed substantial differences in the moderation of grades, with 75-80% of students being awarded Distinctions in partnership programs overseas, compared with 1-6% of students in Australia (Teacher 6M). Such cases often resulted in students' unrealistic expectations or, at least, in students expecting "higher grades than they get" (Teacher 6M).

Students' unreasonable expectations

Apart from higher expectations regarding their grades, some teachers reported that students had higher – and, many teachers considered, unreasonable – expectations of what teaching and other staff would do for them regarding assessment. As the following teacher commented:

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[4]These included one Head of School who was not formally interviewed, but who spoke to me regarding INESB students during the preliminary stages of this research.

They will always come and ask numerous times re assessment tasks. 'How many questions will it be?' 'What sorts of questions will it be?' Very interested in the style of assessment. Also I've written assessment items and they just don't understand the question. Lack of English skills and lack of understanding of the material as well. But I have that problem with Australian students as well. (Teacher 13M).

The following response to students' higher and/or unreasonable expectations by this teacher, reveals his refusal to help students unless they first take responsibility for becoming independent learners. It also reveals his willingness to enter into *dialogue* with students once they had taken the initiative to become independent learners. As he stated:

I refuse to provide feedback where I am of the view that [students] haven't done anything to start with. I want to see that they have done something. Show me what you've done. Let's have a look at it. Let's have a talk about it. I refuse to give an answer where they just come in and say, 'Can you tell me what to do?' 'No, you're a big boy now. Go and get your hands dirty in the library. Go and find out something – I don't care if it's wrong. That's not the issue. The issue's not whether you're wrong now; it's whether you're wrong in two or three weeks' time that's important. So go and find out something, write it down, develop an argument around it, then show it to me, then we'll have a talk about it.' (Teacher 23M).

Staff members other than teachers also commented on the expectations of some INESB students. For example, a general staff member reported that some students expected library staff to assist them with assignments to what she considered was an unreasonable degree. As she explained:

Students would often come in [to the library] with the assignment, give it to the librarian and say, 'Could I please have resources to go with this?' [Students] had to learn that they had to use information literacy skills to undertake their study and their assignment. They come with the understanding that '[You] provide the resources for me and I'll use that to write the assignment.' (Other 58F).

Students as rote and surface-level learners

Teachers' choices of assessment tasks commonly reflected their general belief that many students were rote and surface-level learners, as evident by the following comment:

We try to have a variety [of assessment methods] because [INESB] students do learn by rote learning ... (Teacher 31F).

Despite many teachers trying to have "a variety [of assessment methods]", according to the University's Centre for Enhanced Learning and Teaching (CELT), examinations were still "the most common form of assessment" across all faculties (pers. comm., CELT, 18 March 2005). One reason examinations were chosen as an appropriate assessment method for INESB students was because of students' reported tendency to "recall and repeat" (Teacher 6M), to resort to "rote learning or memorisation" (Teacher

7.2M), and because "they lack critical analysis and interpretative skills" (Teacher 23). As one teacher commented:

> We have a lot of open book exams which tends to reflect the fact that [INESB students] would rather take the material straight out or transpose it rather than thinking about its application. (Teacher 40M).

Teachers' choice of assessment methods

In general, teachers differed in how they chose to teach and assess their students. This is not surprising, and even less so within the University context involving five faculties,[5] numerous disciplines and teachers who included scientists, health practitioners, accountants, computer programers and creative artists. A common factor which influenced the method and number of assessment tasks chosen across faculty and disciplinary boundaries, however, was *time*. As the following teacher pointed out:

> I'm not a great believer in over-assessing. Apart from anything else, I'm too busy. (Teacher 39M).

Section Two – Challenges – Teachers' voices

The following comments from teachers regarding the assessment of INESB students not only highlight specific challenges they faced individually, but also reiterate teachers' general concerns about the challenges of 'maintaining standards' and of ensuring 'equity' in their treatment of all students.

English language and equity

In response to the question "Do you face any special challenges with the assessment of INESB students?", the following teacher pointed to the challenge of English language and the questions this raised about standards in educational outcomes:

> Well, I suppose the most obvious [challenge] ... is when their English is poor. And how do you deal with that? And do you set different standards in written English expression for your non-English speaking students? I mean it's a question that comes up in a different form with students who have certain cognitive disabilities such as dyslexia. So how do you deal with that? And the bottom line is, when they come out of the degree, we're giving them a [Charles Sturt University] degree in **English**. (Teacher 32F).[6]

The following teacher raised a similar question and highlighted ethical challenges she faced when marking INESB students. As she pointed out:

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[5] Arts, Commerce, Education, Health, and Science and Agriculture.

[6] It should be noted that these are not degrees "in English" as such but, rather, degrees in science, health, commerce, etcetera, which are *studied* in English.

... I'm not prepared to mark them against a different set of standards to that applied to English speaking students. You might get into all sorts of ethics issues there. It is the same with dyslexic students. And that is even **more** unresolved. It's very tricky, but at the end of day what am I saying to the employer about this student? (Teacher 29F).

Another teacher elaborated at length. While this is a lengthy quotation, it adds further dimensions to the challenges facing teachers:

From the point of view of equity, I think all students should be the same regardless. I know the international students perhaps have a problem with English, and certainly they are from a different socioeconomic backgrounds sometimes, but we've got Australian students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, rural and metropolitan areas. ... I try not to treat anybody differently, and make any variations in the assessment requirements, so I think, given that it's an accredited course also with the [Professional Body] I think if we were treating cohorts of students differently, then they would perhaps ask questions or would at least require some sort of justification as to why we are treating them differently. So we'd have to show that what we were doing for one group was equivalent to what we were doing for another group. If you start doing different things for different groups then obviously it may be desirable in terms of the individual, but it increases workload for staff and all that kind of stuff. (Teacher 38M).

While teachers agreed that ethical issues caused challenges, others added moral dimensions to the challenges they faced, as reflected in the following teacher's comments regarding the extent to which students should be assisted:

Making sure that we have equity with the other students [is a challenge] and that, although our [INESB] students do have an English language hurdle to get over, that they do meet the same academic levels as the other students. So we do some things to assist them, but we're not doing anything that is going to make a huge difference. They have to produce the goods themselves at the end of the day. (Teacher 31F).

Another teacher told of his experience with INESB students and assessment. His comments not only highlight the extent to which he was prepared to negotiate with students regarding their grades, but also raise pointed ethical and moral questions concerning these students:

... there may be room for some negotiation [between myself and the student], particularly when I think that somebody is just failing. If they only got 48 out of 100, I say, 'OK, you've really got to try to make up some marks', and when it comes to the second assignment I may be a **little** bit more generous in my assessment so they can pass the subject. [But] as for NESB students, well, would an NESB student come to me and say, 'I'm unhappy with my mark'? I've never seen it. Never! Never! So they just take it and I don't know what they do – go away and lick their wounds or cry by themselves – but I've **never** been challenged by an NESB student or **asked**, 'What can I do about this?' ... and yet, it's **not** just their problem, is it, because the University is happy to take their money and say, 'Yes, you come and study here!' But what allowances do we make? It's an ethical question. (Teacher 39M).

Methods of assessment

Examinations

Examinations as a means of assessment were chosen by teachers for a number of reasons. Some degrees, including Accountancy and Nursing, are governed by Australian

professional bodies which prescribe examination of prospective members, that is, students, as part of the degree. More commonly, however, teachers advocated invigilated examinations, seeing them as a means of overcoming plagiarism and generally ensuring that students did their own work. As the following teacher explained:

> I believe that there is a role for examinations in the kind of system we have here ... because we really do need to be sure that students have done their own work. And that, actually, is not something we can be sure of unless we have them under exam conditions. So I see that as important. Of course, if the main reason for exams is the whole issue of identification control, then there may be a value in an open book exam, although, if you were very concerned with plagiarism with a particular cohort, then that may not actually be a very good way – though it depends on how you set it up and what kinds of questions you ask. (Teacher 32F).

The kinds of questions and the ways in which they were asked, however, caused significant problems for many students in examinations. Students indicated that it was not discipline-specific terminology that caused problems, nor general, *everyday* language. Rather, it was a combination of 'educated' and/or 'idiomatic' language which caused problems, as illustrated in the following interview with two male students:

Student 2:	*... here, in Australia, some formal words, like academic words, you know, trying to understand it and use it [causes problems] ...* (Student 73M).
Student 1:	*That's what I notice as well. Here, they use so much academic vocabulary and formal words ... even on the exams, you look at the final exam, you read the questions they put some words there, they so hard, I don't know. ... If you look them up in the dictionary you'll say, 'Ah, that's what it means!' I know that. ... Why can't they say that? ... But I've never seen that word before in my life.* (Student 60.2M).
Interviewer:	So are you talking about technical words, [discipline], and things?
Student 1:	*No, no, no, no, not [discipline].* (Student 60.2M).
Student 2:	*No, not [discipline]. This one we know. And not [discipline-specific] terms and these terms; we know about that. We understand this. But the question is sort of like, tricky. They are using words like 'illushate?', 'illushate?' That means? Is that the word? And there is a difficult word they are using in the exam.* (Student 73M).
Student 1:	*Not everyday language.* (Student 60.2M).
Interviewer:	Can you give me an example?
Student 1:	*Like ... like ...* (Student 60.2M).
Student 2:	*Like 'ill-ish-ate?' 'ill-ish-ate?'* (Student 73M).
Interviewer:	Illustrate? Which means to give an example of.
Student 2:	*No. Like 'ill-ish-ate', you know, E-L-I-C-I-T, E-L-I-C-I-T.* (Student 73M).
Interviewer:	Elicit!
Student 1:	*Yeah, 'elicit!'* (Student 60.2M).
Interviewer:	Yes, OK, to elicit a response. To draw one out.
Student 2:	*I mean this word we can ask you, but it is not an everyday word.* (Student 73M).
Student 1:	*Yesterday we were talking about another word. Here it is. [looking at assignment question] 'Mainstay.' M-A-I-N-S-T-A-Y. The question says, 'What is the mainstay and treatment of [discipline-specific terminology]?' I don't know what's 'mainstay'?* (Student 60.2M).
Interviewer:	I know what it means, but I can see that you could use another word just as well instead. It just means, "What's the most important part? What's the bit that matters most?" That's what 'mainstay' means.
Student 1:	*Why can't they say that?* (Student 60.2M).

Multiple choice questions

Multiple choice questions, primarily because they are quick to mark, were also a popular method of assessment among teachers. Teachers acknowledged, however, that multiple choice questions caused difficulties for students because of English language and the ways in which questions were worded. The following teacher outlined a study he had conducted using short answer and multiple choice questions:

> I did a small study – compared Malaysian and Australian students in an exam with short-answer and multiple choice questions. [There were] huge differences between the two groups' performance in the two types of assessment. Malaysian students performed much better in the short answer, and the Australians performed fairly poorly. The Australians performed much better in the multiple choice than the Malaysian students. I think for two reasons. Firstly, the Malaysians are better prepared and we see that in the short answer questions. It does show whether students know what they are talking about. The multiple choice wording is often a bit complicated and confusing. I think that sometimes confuses the NESB students. However, it gives the opportunity for the Australian students, who may have not put as much preparation into the exam, but can usually work out by a process of elimination what the right answer is. So I'm very wary about using a single form of assessment. (Teacher 13M).

One of the implications of the findings of the study outlined above is that the INESB students may have had to work harder to get the same results as local students. Apart from multiple choice questions being *"really, really confusing"* (Student 8.1F) for many students, the following two teachers agreed that they liked to 'trick' students or 'disguise' assessment tasks, for various reasons. The first teacher said that this reflects what happens in the "real world", explaining:

> I like to give the students some rubbish too, and see whether they take it in. I like to keep them alert all the time because that's what happens in the real world. ... Life is all about tricks; you should be aware of how to fix that problem by questioning. (Teacher 11M).

The second teacher suggested that 'disguising' an assessment exercise helped develop and assess students' negotiation skills after the event. As she explained:

> [It was] a research exercise which I designed to be marked multiple choice – with 140 students, economy of scale is necessary – but it was quite a complex exercise. A research exercise was disguised as a simple yes/no exercise. It was designed with the idea of developing students' negotiation skills. Answers could be either 'yes' or 'no'. Students, once they realised, came and saw me and negotiated to prove their point as to why they answered as they did. They often negotiated their marks up a couple of points. It was very interesting and most students learned a hell of a lot. But it was disguised as just a straight out true/false tick the box. (Teacher 29F).

Regardless of the usefulness of these sorts of assessment tasks, or whether such methods might be questionable or ethical, when coupled with *language* difficulties, they are likely to confuse INESB students and compound challenges they already face regarding assessment.

Academic writing – the essay

While examinations were the most common form of assessment across all faculties, the academic essay was the next most common (pers. comm., CELT,[7] 18 March 2005). Teachers differed considerably in their opinions of what constituted 'good' or 'acceptable' academic writing. These differences of opinion were based not only on what was considered acceptable academic writing in their discipline areas, but also on each teacher's personal beliefs and preferences. The following teachers' responses to the same question, namely, "What do you regard as acceptable academic writing in your discipline?" pre-empts complex challenges, firstly for students in producing an essay, and secondly, for the teachers, in assessing the product:

> Mmm. That's a good question. [long pause] I'm going to have to break it down into two levels. I'd like to say what 'good' academic writing is, and then what is 'acceptable'. Good academic writing is writing that draws on the textbook and other learning materials they've been given. [The student] can somehow look at those collectively and then synthesise them into some sort of point of view or argument. And acknowledge the intellectual capital they're using – so, referencing. At a second year subject [level] where students seem to be increasingly unable to cope with those sorts of standards – international **or** Australian [students] – I guess acceptable academic writing is a good attempt at referencing, reasonable use of the literature, and good attempts to answer the question, even if they can't synthesise very well. (Teacher 37F).

The following response from another teacher highlights a need for students to have a considerable understanding and command of the nuances of English language in deep and complex ways, to be able to produce a 'good' or 'acceptable' essay:

> The things that come to mind are the capacity to define concepts and acknowledge that language might have several levels of an implied meaning and equally levels of inferred meaning and that these might not match up so that academic writing needs to take account of language as a transactional medium and be able to handle complexity in such a way that clarity and complexity are part of the developing argument. (Teacher 41M).

The following two responses by different teachers not only highlight significant differences in each teacher's use of English language, but also have implications for INESB students and their understanding of what is required in assessment tasks. In answering the 'good academic writing' question, the first teacher responded:

> For me, good academic writing is factual, well-referenced and concise. (Teacher 13M).

The second teacher said:

> Um, that's a difficult question to say in one sentence. But yeah, I mean, obviously, proper referencing, you know? Um, um ... an argument ... or two ... an introduction ... you know, in an essay situation, you know, something that introduces what we're going to be talking about ... and then ... talking about it ... ah ... referencing sources so that you're aware of what other people are talking about in that particular field with reference to that subject ... and then, obviously, a conclusion ... ah ... where you're summing up what you've just been talking about, I mean, on a really 'pedestrian' level. Now, as to what constitutes,

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[7]The Centre for Enhanced Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University

you know, 'acceptable academic writing', that's a real problem! I mean you're expecting ... I say to the students, you know, um ... the spell-checker ... you know, very simple ... ah, you ... everything is word-processed ... I don't accept anything that's hand-written ... obviously ... ah, you're putting it through a word-processor ... you've got a spell-checker on there ... ah ... so I at least expect all the words to be spelled correctly ... ah ... whether or not they're ... the word is spelled correctly in that **context** is, of course, the 'spell-checker syndrome' which ... ah ... may ... may be difficult or whether you've got American spelling when you should have English type spelling ... ah ... and, you know ... some sort of ... some sort of ... um ... attention paid to the fact that I've got to read 30, or 50, or 80 of these things ... mm. (Teacher 39M).

Differences of opinion as to what constituted a 'good' or 'acceptable' essay, however, were not confined to the students' teachers, but also extended to academic skills support staff who advised students how to write essays, and people from outside the University who were often appointed to mark the essays. Thus, as the markers may not be the students' teachers (that is, their lecturers and tutors), outside markers may be even less *dialogically* positioned vis-à-vis the students' and their work. This adds to the confusion, not only for the students, but also for the markers. As one teacher commented:

I can understand how confusing it must be [for students] because I get markers who make the comment 'Use points' or 'You could have put this in point form', and I might be inclined to say '**Don't** use so many points'. Some people would say 'Don't use points at all'. Even amongst markers in one subject, unless you keep a very tight control, there's no consistency of expectation. (Teacher 37F).

The "consistency of expectation" reflects the subjective nature of essays and the challenges of assessing them, as reflected in the following teacher's comment:

In [my country] years ago, an experiment – copied three assignments, written in different handwriting, and asked a professor to mark at three different times. Ended up with three different grades. [A science-based subject] is not so bad, but essay marking is very subjective. (Teacher 11M).

Even more challenging for teachers than achieving consistency of grades because of the subjective nature of essays, however, were those challenges caused by students' lack of facility with English language. In commenting on an article she had recently refereed which was written by an INESB student from another university, the following participant commented:

I wrote back and said, 'It's disastrous! It needs a total re-write. The content is brilliant but it's an absolute mess to read.' And that's the same thing with [the INESB students here]. They'd be doing some philosophical thing but it'd be absolutely atrocious English. (Other 58F).

For some teachers, surface features of academic writing contributed significantly to what they considered to be 'acceptable academic writing', as reflected in the following *dialogue*:

Teacher:	To my mind, acceptable academic writing in my discipline contains virtually no errors – grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Certainly at university level, more than two or three errors in an assignment would cause me to say, 'This is not good enough'. I fail students on these grounds.
Interviewer:	*So, do you fail assignments or …?*
Teacher:	[interjection] Yes.
Interviewer:	*On the grounds of …*
Teacher:	[interjection] Yes. We claim that our graduates can write English. If they don't fail, they graduate, and they can't write English. I have no problem with that one. If you have a degree from an English university an employer will expect you to be able to write a level of written English. Plus, the University claims that this is a Graduate Attribute. (Teacher 29F).

This view, however, was not shared by all teachers, as is evident in the following comment:

> I've had problems with [some teachers]. They were obsessed – and this is my personal view – with grammatical issues and not obsessed with the actual learning coming out. (Teacher 9M).

The same teacher believed that surface features of academic writing were less important than evidence that a student understood the subject content. As he elaborated:

> I asked [the other teachers], 'Have [the students] done any work? Has there been some deep thinking? Are they learning from this? Is what they're writing acceptable apart from the English?' And they said, 'Yes.' I then asked, 'Are they meeting the demands and objectives of the subject?' I let [the other teachers] decide, but some can't keep their pens away from the page. Others can. (Teacher 9M).

Plagiarism

While all teachers in this study felt that plagiarism was 'unacceptable', the degree to which they considered it unacceptable, and how they dealt with it, varied, as illustrated in the following comments:

> I abhor plagiarism! It's not acceptable and I basically would accept the University's ruling on it, but it's fundamental academic sin and I always tell my students that they always need to acknowledge ideas and particularly the specific uses of language from the source. (Teacher 41M).

The following teacher also felt strongly about plagiarism:

> Well, at the end of the day, plagiarism is the big issue at the end of the day. And getting them to recognise that yes, you can **borrow** from other people's works, but you can't **steal** from other people's works. By borrowing means you acknowledge from whence it's come, and that is done in a variety of different ways. ... If [plagiarism] is **blatant** and **rampant** throughout a paper – it's just nothing more than great wads of material lifted from texts and articles – and that happens – then you've got to come down heavily on them for it! (Teacher 23M).

Other academics believed that any form of plagiarism should be regarded as academic misconduct and dealt with according to University policy, as the following teacher asserted:

> I take a very hard line regarding plagiarism and will fail them outright. I have a very strict code regarding plagiarism. (Teacher 6M).

Dimensions of plagiarism

A number of teachers felt that there were dimensions of plagiarism – including cultural dimensions and the intent and extent of plagiarism – with some incidents being more serious than others, as reflected in the following comment:

> [pause, sigh, laughs] Yes, plagiarism. I personally find it very unacceptable. But there are degrees of plagiarism and there are cultural dimensions to it in the sense that people from some cultures feel that what the lecturer says or what the textbook says is the most valid opinion and why would you waver from that. But nevertheless, we have to point out that it's not acceptable. (Teacher 37F).

Additionally, many teachers believed that cultural background accounted for students plagiarising, as indicated in the following statement:

> [Plagiarism is] one of the major problems, yes. If anyone has problems with that sort of thing, it's the international students, because it's a cultural thing, and because they tend to think that if you're giving what somebody else in authority has said, that's the right thing. It's very difficult, because what we try to get across to them is that there's no right answer; if you can support it in some particular principle then it's all right. But they tend to think, 'No', that there's a definite right answer, and you've got to think of that definite right answer. (Teacher 40M).

Another teacher agreed, stating:

> The bottom line is, the quicker students learn that plagiarism is unacceptable in Western English cultures and seen as dishonesty – and in most cases where students use it, it **is** dishonesty because they are trying to suggest they can write to that standard and have that level of knowledge and understanding that they found in a book. Then I have no problem with it – failing them, that is. (Teacher 29F).

The same teacher reiterated her belief that cultural background impacts on students' understanding and use of plagiarism:

> I think it's completely unacceptable. Students have to learn that it is essentially dishonest. It's presenting someone else's work as your own. I know that in some Asian cultures that's very problematic for them because that's the appropriate way to do things. (Teacher 29F).

A number of teachers, however, suggested that plagiarism was not confined to INESB students and that local students also resorted to plagiarism. As one teacher pointed out:

> Plagiarism is a huge issue with all students, but is more identifiable with INESB students because of their poor English. (Teacher 6M);

while another teacher observed:

> In terms of INESB students, I haven't seen any particular problems [with plagiarism]. (Teacher 13M).

Purchasing assignments

A number of teachers (for example, Teachers 11M, 30F and 39M), and one other staff member (Other 58F), were doubtful as to whether some students completed their own assignments.[8] As one teacher said:

> I never trust assignments. Assignments can be copied. $50 is the going rate to have someone do it for you. They don't learn anything. I never know if it is the student's own work or not, especially when you have 100 students. (Teacher 11M).

Another staff member raised the question of whether students might enlist the help of support staff to write their assignments. As she commented:

> One of the things which I put a question mark over is the one-to-one tutoring that the international students actually get, and you often wonder who has written the assignment, whether it was the tutor or ... (Other 58F).

The following incident raised similar concerns. The teacher reported an incident where a female student was harassed by a number of male students to do their assignments. As the teacher explained:

> We have another international student from [one country] who's lovely, a female student, who's doing very, very well in her studies. She's a mature student and committed. And [several male students from another country] have been hassling her to do their assignments. That came to light on Monday when she came in here and burst in tears and said, 'I've got enough work myself. But they keep hassling me and following me around and ordering me to do their work for them.' But I said that's not on. (Teacher 30.1F).

Section Three – Challenges – Students' voices

Students spoke of many challenges they faced regarding assessment. Challenges they had previously raised regarding their teaching and learning also impacted on the challenges they faced regarding assessment. They reiterated the challenge of becoming independent learners, of becoming critical thinkers, and of becoming competent users of English language in a range of academic contexts. They highlighted the major challenge of English language, again pointing to specific challenges with *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*, and explained how these skills impacted on other challenges they faced with assessment. They pointed to the challenge of writing academic essays and the difficulties they faced in trying to translate their understandings into 'good' and 'acceptable' *academic English*. They spoke of the challenges of learning, and correctly applying the conventions of referencing, especially within limited timeframes.

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[8]The question of whether or not students completed their own assignments was not investigated in this study. However, from the evidence provided by students, including copies of assignments and academic transcripts, it is believed that students completed their own work. The students' results also reflected this belief.

Independent learning and assessment

The fact that students were expected to quickly become independent learners caused challenges for many students. A student, who had also studied in the United States and England, felt that the focus in the Australian system on independent learning and assessment placed unreasonable expectations on the students:

> *... I find it a lot different here. In the way they assess the students here. ... In my opinion, I think it has both a positive effect and a negative effect on the students. I found that the way Australian system was here that to prepare the students or let the students find out, and go and search. It's like you are studying on your own. ... I think they expect too much from the students, that's what I think. You have to do lots of assignments that require lots of researching. You still have to do a final exam. The lecturer, they will explain or fulfil the objectives that they have, but they would not go any further. ...they expect that you will go; go and search. If you can't understand first up, [they say] 'Go and read for yourself!' Things that aren't so clear for you, things that are foggy, then it's your responsibility to go and look for a source where it can make it clear for you. Not all lecturers, but most of them are that way.* (Student 60.1M).

Another student agreed, the following *dialogue* also indicating the outcome:

> *Student:* *... we have to solve the questions ourselves. [Most of the teachers] just give us some very direct points. Like in [subject] each question have different formulas to them, even though it was just one topic. It was quite a headache! But we cannot find out which [formula] we need to use. But when we say about our problems that we don't know how to do, then [the teacher] will say that this is a thing for you to find out. So it's **our** headache! [laughs] [The teacher] wouldn't help us because he wanted us to do it ourselves. But we can't do it. Like we getting mad [laughs]. We ask about an answer and he said he would give it, but then he not answer for us.* (Student 22F).
>
> Interviewer: How did you end up working it out?
>
> *Student:* *We give up! [laughs]* (Student 22F).

The same student continued to explain her frustration:

> *Sometimes it is quite difficult and I just get mad because of that. ... [The teacher] was saying, 'You must help yourselves! You must have self-confidence!' [laughs] You know, and then he says, 'One plus two is how much? Three?' He made me say 'three' and then he said, 'You have the confidence, so why not you do it yourself?'* (Student 22F).

She added:

> *Sometimes we will ask the lab[oratory] assistants instead if we feel, like, very stupid.* (Student 22F).

Speaking and listening

Oral presentations

As a method of assessment, most students found class presentations challenging. Apart from personal attributes, experience, and, in some cases, cultural conditioning exacerbating the challenge, the main reason cited was difficulty with *speaking*, as the following student explained:

...next week we have three presentations. There is a lot ... I didn't speak like Australians so this is quite difficult for us. (Student 22F).

The following student pointed out that it was *"because of English"* (Student 27M) that he least preferred presentations as a means of assessment. After probing to establish whether the actual presentation process also caused challenges, the student replied:

> *No! [If I could present in my language] I could speak for two hours! I studied Political Science. I used to be a lecturer – speaking, speaking, speaking – 'Bye!' [laughs uproariously]* (Student 27M).

Reading and writing

Examinations

A male student who had previously studied in the United States compared the types of examinations there to those he had undertaken in Australia. He gave an example of differences in the types of questions asked:

> *Let me think of a good example for you. For example, [in the United States] if they want you to learn the definition of something, right, they would expect you to give them the definition. It doesn't matter whether it's in your own words or whether you memorise it from the book, as long as you give the meaning of that word or that term. Here, all the questions are always, describe, discuss, explain, argue, yeh? I'm sorry, I'm not saying this is the right way or the States is the right way, but to me – I think it is beneficial for a student to know these things – but when it comes to an exam, a three hours exam, and we have to write short essays, it's just all too much. The language requirement is different. Because we are not used to speak, read and write in English all our lives, our vocabulary is limited. Sometimes you just find us writing the same words over and over, and that doesn't look good.* (Student 60.2M).

Other students, however, felt that examinations in Australia were not unlike examinations in their own countries where being assessed and what counted towards high grades depended more on memorisation than on understanding. While students felt that *"a mix of assessment methods [including] exams, assignments [and] reports"* (Student 19F) was needed, and that *"all [assessment methods] must come together because it assesses in different ways"* (Student 20F), students generally believed that examinations which required memorisation did not assess understanding, as the following student explained:

> *A lot of time can be spent on assignments and lab reports so there is a lot of understanding in a certain topic. But for exams, the lecturer [here] gives us hints about what to study. We just study that part and we don't really know what that part means. So we can work well in exams, but it doesn't really mean that we understand the concept.* (Student 19F).

The same student reiterated that *"doing research"* contributed to deep learning and understanding of concepts:

> *While doing research we can have more understanding about the theory and have deeper understanding about that topic. Research gives understanding. In exams we just study the parts the lecturer wants. Maybe we study more, but we don't learn more.* (Student 19F).

Another student preferred assignments and presentations for the same reasons, saying that:

> *Exams just force you to read the books, force you to accept the concepts, and because of the tension at that time, you put everything in your mind, then you just release it, and you mightn't remember anything about that. That's what I have found in previous years of study. [But] if you are doing a presentation or assignment, you find out something by reading or searching, I think even though maybe later you'll still forget something, but I think that something enters your mind that you remember about the concept. I think that's better.* (Student 21F).

Multiple choice questions

A common assessment method which caused challenges for many students was the use of multiple choice questions: As one student pointed out:

> *The multiple choice is really hard unless you really, really study the text. And [the teacher] does it in such a multiple choice that it's really confusing for you. I find it really hard. Especially when it's similar; you get really confused. What is the answer? Eeny meeny miney mo! That is the last option if I can't really get it!* (Student 8.1F).

In a second interview 12 months later, the same student expressed her disappointment at having now failed the same subject three times:

> *The examination for [subject] was really difficult – again! 50 multiple choice questions which were very difficult, plus short answer questions which were very specific. I have failed three times! Other students have also failed, local [ESB] students too.* (Student 8.2F).

Two students, however, said they preferred multiple choice tests, both explaining that they found these tests easier than writing in English:

> *I think I prefer a test, multiple choice questions, it's simple for me! If I can understand the question very clearly from the topic, I can know what to answer. If you give me some questions that I have to write down the answer it is a problem. I know it in my head, but my expression is bad.* (Student 14F).

The second student agreed, saying:

> *I prefer maybe multiple choice. Yeah, because less writing! [laughs] The more writing, the more mistakes we make, right?! [laughs]* (Student 17.1M).

In his first multiple choice test, however, the same student scored *"nearly zero"*, as he explained:

Student: You know we cannot avoid some mistakes, but at first the multiple choice make a big problem for me. Because when I first hear 'multiple choice' I understood that you can choose more than one! Yeah, yeah, yeah – so I chose every question more than one! My first class test I got nearly zero! [laughs uproariously]. In [my country] 'multiple choice' means you can choose more than one, but 'single choice' means that you choose just one. That's what I don't understand, so I made a mistake.

Interviewer: What a shame! I mean, that makes sense – multiple choice equals 'you can choose multiple answers.'

Student: Yes, translated directly from [my language], we've got two types of choice questions. One is multiple choice and one is single choice. That's why I got caught. (Student 17.1M).

Academic writing – the essay

Apart from the challenge of *reading* and *writing* in examinations, academic writing, and specifically essay writing, caused challenges for all students. The following comments reflect sentiments common among many students involved in this study.

> My problem is that I can speak a lot – explain it in sentences – but when I'm writing I can't do that. You can't explain so much. That is a problem. Lecturers are after words. I used to say, 'That's not good enough', but my teachers say, 'You mean, "That's not so good"'. You can understand me, but that's a problem. How to explain? (Student 4F).

The following student's response to the question "What are some features of good academic writing?" reiterates the common aspiration among students that they want to understand what they are writing about. It also shows that this student wants to write in ways which demonstrate her understanding:

Student: Understanding about what you are writing is more important.

Interviewer: Understanding the concepts?

Student: Yeah, not putting it very complicated. Just write and that shows that you understand. (Student 22F).

The following student's response to the same question reflects an astute awareness of possible differences between students' and teachers' views when he asked:

> First, will I answer this question from the teacher's point of view or the student's point of view? (Student 17.1M).

From *his* point of view, the student considered that 'good academic writing' was:

> ... well-structured and focused on the question part and ... some of your own experience and logical thinking. That's it! (Student 17.1M).

A number of students referred to the difficulties of knowing what the *"teacher wants"* as the following student explained:

> [A special challenge with assessment is] how you present your English. It's hard for us to find out what our lecturer likes, what kind of argument they like. You might argue in your point of view and think it's great, but the lecturer says, 'What? How can you be arguing with that point of view from what I taught you?' That can really get you low marks too!

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> *[My friend] goes right up to the lecturer – she's so stressed – and says, 'What do you really want me to write in this essay? Tell me exactly so I can write down exactly what you really want!' I tell her, 'Write what you want', but she says, 'No, that won't work!'* (Student 8.1F).

Just as difficult language and the wording of examination questions caused challenges for students, the wording of academic essay topics and other assessment tasks also caused challenges. Many students had difficulty understanding the questions and knowing what was required, as the following student explained:

> *First, I think there are some problems with the questions for the topic. They always use some long sentence and the strange words to present their idea. And it always makes some wrong understanding for the foreign students. [Teachers] can use some simple words to present their ideas, but they prefer to use some difficult words, to, to [pause] I don't know what they want! They just use some long sentence even like [indicated the size of a paragraph] so long – just one sentence! We have to read it word by word. It's very difficult to read. It can be written in short sentences, but they always like to write in long sentences. That's what I don't like.* (Student 17.1M).

The same student, however, was prepared to speak with his teacher to clarify what was required and this was commonly the case for most students, even if contact was via an email. As he pointed out:

> *... fortunately, before I write every essay, I choose to communicate a way with our lecturer because I think it is a little bit hard to understand the questions properly. So I choose first to communicate with my lecturer. I think they can give us the right understanding and some 'common sense' – like the VB[9] case, they can give me some 'common sense'.* (Student 17.1M).

Approaching teachers to ask for help, however, was not without challenges, as evident in the following student's experience:

> *The first time I had problems with assignments, I was scared to ask my teacher. I finally decided to go. I found out how to from other students. Do I have to make an appointment? Consultation times. I was really scared but the teacher was friendly and made me confident. If I go to see her I get some more points. But first I have to organise myself. The first time my questions were unorganised and the teacher could not understand me. Sometimes the teachers don't understand, but they try to. Sometimes the teacher she **try** to understand, she **try** to expand [pause] but her **answer** is totally different to my **question**! [laughs] I think, 'So do I try to make another way to ask her again?' or think, 'I have some new information, some new ideas I didn't have before', [and go and think about that]?* (Student 27M).

All students understood the conventional structure of an academic essay. For example, when asked the features of a 'good' academic essay, one student explained:

> *Intro, body, conclusion. The content answers the question, like the question the lecturer wants. If it answers the topic.* (Student 3F).

Another student explained some features of 'good academic writing':

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[9] *"VB"* stands for *Victoria Bitter*, a well-known brand of Australian beer. The *"VB case"* is told later in this chapter and elaborated on in *Chapter 8: Spaces.*

The body can discuss very clearly – you can give examples and find some serious opinion to support your view. You can give your own opinion, don't always just put somebody else's notes. Just to give your logical way what you want to say. (Student 14F).

While students understood what was required, however, producing the product of an 'acceptable' essay caused considerable challenges for many students. For most INESB students in this study, surface features of academic writing, such as punctuation, grammar, spelling and structure, caused challenges for students. As one student pointed out:

Oh, academic [English]. Well, literary grammars are a big deal. Grammar is a big – it's not, I mean – it's hard, in a way, when it comes to essays and stuff, when I write in English, I want, even when I'm talking, I'm sure I'm not a hundred per cent right in the grammars, in past, present, future or those things. So yeah, in that kind of way it was a bit hard to improve. (Student 48M).

Another student also alluded to the 'elegance' of academic writing, saying:

Writing essays is a problem. How to use language. How to write more beautifully. (Student 79F).

Plagiarism

It appears from the responses of students interviewed for this study that their experiences and feelings about *plagiarism* did not differ significantly from the teachers' views. That is, while referencing constituted a new way of doing for many students, most agreed that it was an *"important"* part of professional academic conduct which they must learn, as the following student commented:

[Plagiarism] is a very important issue especially when you are trying to be a successful student. Honesty really counts. (Student 25F).

The following student's response to a question about plagiarism reflects her well-developed understanding about how the summarisation of texts facilitates critical thinking skills, and acknowledges the use of referencing as a means of supporting students' learning:

*That plagiarism is not allowed here, I know! But in our uni [in my country] sometimes it's all right to download some articles from some website, but here you can quote somebody's thinking, but you have to write the source of it. This is good, because it forces you to think in your way. You have to write **your** articles, not others. You have to have your **own** opinion. You have to **think** it. Maybe with some opinions you have to follow somebody. You are not the specialist. You have no full knowledge about that. You are a student. You have to study what this concept comes from and people can recognise that. You just follow somebody.* (Student 14F).

An undergraduate student who suggested that research projects were effective for deeper learning also considered the matter of plagiarism from her position as a future researcher:

> *[Referencing] is really good. It should be like that [with referencing] because you are using somebody's works. Like, next time when I publish something, I hope somebody will accept me before using my work because I work after that. Every researcher will work after that. It takes a long time. It's not very easy.* (Student 18.1F).

It is noteworthy that, while teachers referred to 'plagiarism' as a major challenge, students, on the other hand, referred to 'referencing' as a major challenge. That is, once students understood what plagiarism was, it was the *process* of referencing which caused the challenges, not the fact that they were required to reference in order to avoid plagiarism. Additionally, the reasons that referencing caused challenges, and the reasons some students resorted to plagiarism, differed from student to student,[10] as the following student explained:

> *I've never done referencing in [my country]. I just learned to do it here. I do it here, but sometimes it's hard to know how much to do.* (Student 3F).

Another student also said that she had never used referencing before, but indicated how she was learning about it:

> *Referencing, I never learned that at all. I had to re-do [an assignment].* (Student 83F).

The following student's comment reveals a critical opinion about plagiarism and a growing awareness of referencing:

> *In [my country], we don't reference. Even some people write and publish books. They steal and copy knowledges from other people. But they think 'I read it, I know it, now it's mine'. Here, I just do it [reference]. I have to reference it, otherwise I will fail it.* (Student 4F).

Apart from students who had no previous knowledge of plagiarism, others had some experience which, rather than support their transition to ways of doing in an Australian university, may have actually impeded their transition, as reflected in the following comment:

> *I think [referencing] might be difficult, because in [my country] it's not very strict. They do have citations, but it's not like very strict and the lecturer knows this. You copy from the book and ... it's all right.* (Student 15F).

The same student's further question reflects her lack of awareness of the penalties of plagiarism:

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[10]There are many reasons for plagiarism, including laziness, but this did not appear to be the case with the students interviewed in the way they presented themselves. Another reason for plagiarism is the need for students to 'save face' among their family and friends, although this possibility was not investigated.

Student:	If like, I copy all the things, is, lose very many marks?
Interviewer:	Here? Yes, you can.
Student:	*Mmm! [nervous laugh]* (Student 15F).

In a similar way, what was considered acceptable use of the Internet in some countries added to the challenges for students when writing assignments, as evidenced in the following comment:

> *... back in my home country, [referencing] is not a big issue. So in [my country] how you do assignment work is to go online and get some information and normally we copy and paste, so we don't have to refer and if we do, we just change the structure, re-phrase it. But here I think we need to do the proper referencing and avoid to write the plagiarism.* (Student 46.1F).

General knowledge, 'common sense' and plagiarism

Because students often lacked general knowledge in the Australian context – or *"common sense"* (Student 17.1M) – identifying information as 'general' and knowing what to reference, sometimes caused challenges for students, as the following student explained:

> *For me it's very hard to say [what to reference]. There is no line to say when knowledge is general. If it is general you don't have to quote anybody, but how do you determine if it's general or not?* (Student 46.2F).

Apart from causing challenges with referencing, this lack of general knowledge caused significant challenges for students in knowing how to complete some assessment tasks. In the following case, hereafter known as *"the VB case"* (Student 17.1M), a student explained his experience with this sort of challenge and how he dealt with it:

> *Some problems make me so I don't know what or how to do. For example in our ... subject they ask you to do some research about Australian people, Australian corporations. We just do not have the 'common sense'. And the lecturers do nothing to help to give you some 'common sense' about the Australian people or Australian firm. So we feel that it's very hard to get started because we don't have the 'common sense'. That's one of the biggest problems. I think lecturers should give us some common sense about our assignment if the topic is related with some specific Australian people or firm. Because I think that globalisation excludes [sic – includes] some well-known brands like McDonalds and CocaCola. Some small brand, it don't make sense to us.* (Student 17.1M).

The same student elaborated on an assessment task regarding Victoria Bitter, a brand of beer well-known in Australia and commonly referred to as 'VB'. He outlined some of the challenges associated with the assessment task, and how he overcame them:

Student:	*Like our case study is VB, Victoria Beer. Oh! If you talk about Casper, another brand of beer, or Heineken, a famous brand, we know. But some specific Australian brand ...*
Interviewer:	Have the lecturers suggested that you can do the same research but choose the topic? For example, that you might write about Chinese beer?

Student:	Ah no, no, no. It's not allowed. It's not allowed. No.
Interviewer:	So there's no negotiation?
Student:	*I'm thinking that the international students are just a few, just a small percentage, so our problems don't make sense to them. If you choose some Australian brand, it is better to give us some 'common sense' before you ask me to do that, otherwise it's unfair, right? (laughs)*
Interviewer:	So how did you work on your VB assignment?
Student:	*[laughs] My room mates are heavy drinkers!*
Interviewer:	So you read the labels?
Student:	*Yeah, I read the labels and I ask him, 'How is this brand?' And he say, 'Every Australian know VB. It's a very famous brand in Australia.' Fortunately I got some 'common sense' from my room mate. But if my room mate is not a heavy drinker – if a girl – oh! I can do nothing, right? [laughs] I ask a lot of friends who are living there. We need some local friends to get some 'common sense' here! [laughs]* (Student 17.1M).

English language and plagiarism

Among the students interviewed for this study, the challenge of English language was the major reason students resorted to plagiarism. When asked how he would approach an essay-style assessment task, the following student explained:

Well, I'll read the question and look up the textbook. And look at the notes [the teacher] gave us and mostly I just copy from the textbook. I understand it, but I just couldn't write it properly. That's why I copy. But I'm not just copying it straight away. I just change it a little bit. That's how I do my assignments. I know it's not good, but what can you do? If I use my English to write an assignment, the lecturer wouldn't understand it and I wouldn't get a pass. (Student 43.1M).

In a second interview six months later, the same student elaborated on continuing challenges he faced when writing assignments. He explained why he used the Internet, and highlighted challenges associated with summarising texts and with having to work independently. His explanation also reflects his honesty about how and why he approached the task as he did:

The assignment I handed in on Monday, I had to re-do it because I told [the Learning Skills Advisor[11]] that I searched the Internet and then I tried to summarise it. She didn't say I was wrong, but she just said to try to look at the textbook and get the information from the textbook and just re-do it. So the problem is, it's really hard to say. The case for me, I can find the exact information on the Internet. I know it's exactly right. So what can I do about it? I can't use it. ... So I don't know. We can't do our assignments together because of the plagiarism. Because if I say this is the answer and someone copies my work – so we can't do it together. We have to do it all by our own. (Student 43.2M).

The following student explained similar challenges, and how finding words to use in academic writing created further challenges:

It's all very difficult – the introduction, the body – because you want to express all the things in your own words because we all find the information from the same places. We

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[11]*A Learning Skills Advisor* is an academic support person for students.

surf the net. Because it's almost the same, but we want to change all the words, it's very difficult. And because all the students find the same thing – because if you really copy, the lecturer will know – it's almost the same sentence. (Student 15F).

The common requirement for students to write lengthy essays, and the challenges they face with limited English vocabularies, also increases the possibility of students resorting to plagiarism.

> *... sometimes we cannot write so many words. Australian or native writers can write very long sentences, but the meaning is the same. What we [can say] in 200 words they can say in 500 words. But the meaning is the same. But the word requirement is the same so sometimes we feel that the requirements are a little bit too high.* (Student 17.1M).

Language difficulties also contribute to the problem of plagiarism in other ways. The actual process of reading and note-taking during the research and preparation of the assignment is an arduous and time-consuming process which is exacerbated by the complexities of translation. Added time restraints and deadlines to have assignments completed increase the possibility of students resorting to plagiarism. The following comments reflect the frustrations and anxieties associated with the academic writing process:

> *I spend a lot of time in the library and on the Internet trying to do the assignments because they say, when you write an essay, you have to reference it. They want ten references. Gosh! Where am I going to get ten books to reference? And how can I read so many books? There is no time for that! That is why I look at the Internet. I did an essay in point form from website. You can't do that! But I didn't know. I just didn't know how to do it.* (Student 8F).

Time to learn

While students agreed that it was *"good"* and *"necessary"* to acknowledge sources of information, they also said they needed time to learn the *"habit"* of referencing. As one student commented:

> *I have lost marks. We try, but it's very difficult. I am getting better, but I need time.* (Student 84M);

while another student added:

> *Essay referencing is my biggest problem. I need time.* (Student 82M).

The following student considered that acknowledging others' work was like *"intellectual property"* and said:

> *I think it's a good habit and I would like to follow it. But, but just give time to me to get used to it.* (Student 17.1M).

Feedback

While teachers were not asked specifically about feedback, they were asked, "For you, what is the most important thing about assessment?" A number of students, on the other hand, were asked, "What sort of feedback have you received on your assignments? Was it useful?" and "What sort of feedback would you like to receive?" Only three teachers made reference to feedback in any context. One teacher (Teacher 23M) referred to his Faculty's rulings not to re-mark examinations or to provide any feedback on examinations. The same teacher mentioned his "refusal to give feedback" to students who sought help with assessment tasks before trying to resolve problems themselves. A second teacher mentioned "feedback" in the following context:

> I know there are a lot of issues about motivating students and formative assessment to give students feedback, and I don't want to denigrate or to deny those, but if you say there is one thing why we cannot abolish assessment – because all those things can be done in formative or American ways, but this one – this needs to be standardised, clear and reliable. (Teacher 29F).

A third teacher (Teacher 65M) was the only one to refer to feedback as a means of "going on" with reference to assessment tasks and this is discussed further in *Chapter 9: Games.* This lack of comment regarding feedback reflects the reality of students' experiences regarding a lack of feedback on assessment tasks. For whatever reason, it appears that teachers were generally reluctant to provide written feedback which may initiate a *dialogue* with students.[12]

All students in this study had similar comments regarding feedback. In general, students said that they received very little feedback. As one student commented:

> *In first semester I had lots of comments like 'Poor English', but now in second semester, I don't have any comments at all. I don't know if my lecturers aren't reading my work as well, or if my English is getting better.* (Student 76M).

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[12]An added dimension to the question of feedback is the growing risk of litigation based on teachers' comments. This risk may explain at least one Faculty's decision not to re-mark examinations or provide any feedback on examination results to students, as the following teacher explained:
> ... the rule went through – you can't have your exams re-marked. Technically you can't. All you can ask for is that the exam mark has been added up correctly, to make sure there hasn't been a calculation error. You can't have your exam re-marked. People re-mark essays and to my mind there is no difference. Some people think exams are more important because they've been done under invigilated circumstances. I mean one mark out of 30 in an essay is worth no more or no less than one mark out of 30 in an exam. We're not allowed to write on our exam papers. We are under instruction not to write anything whatsoever on an exam paper – only the mark. I put the pad next to me so I can make some notes as I go. If it goes to an issue of Freedom of Information and the student gets access to their exam paper, which they're entitled to, then all they get to see is the mark. However, students may not be aware of this situation. This is only in [my Faculty]. I can't speak for the other Faculties. (Teacher 23M).

Other students commented that the feedback was very general with no specific guidance or constructive criticism given. If written feedback was given, some students had difficulty reading it. As one student commented:

> *There is no feedback, only if I fail. But I cannot understand the writing.* (Student 44M).

Another student said:

> *... some [assignments] just came back with 'pass', 'distinction', or, you know, without any comments.* (Student 48M);

while another student added:

> *[There are] no like check marks [just] reminders of my referencing. A lot of reminders of my referencing.* (Student 33F).

The following student made similar comments:

> *... we don't get any feedback. If you've answered the question you get a tick. If you didn't, no tick. Simple as that.* (Student 43.2M).

Section Four – Changing hopes and expectations

Students' voices

The majority of these students had been high achievers or, at least, successful students, in their home countries. When they arrived in Australia, they were highly motivated and often hoped, and expected, to be successful in this context also. To their chagrin, however, they came to realise that some of their teachers considered that they were scarcely 'up to the mark' as reflected in the following student's reaction to one of his assignments, when he cried:

> *I am embarrassing by it! I will burn it!* (Student 27M).

The critical point, however, is that over time students' hopes and expectations changed. Most students relinquished their hopes for high grades and hoped just to pass. Some students did not even expect to pass. When asked if her study experience was "turning out like [she] had expected", the following student replied:

> *No. Stop thinking, like, 'high expectations'. Just pass, like, if I pass, that's fine for me.* (Student 3F).

Students also reconsidered their hopes and expectations to improve their English language, coming to understand that improving language takes *"a long, long time"* as the following student commented:

> *I think it is **our** language problem ... But you cannot improve the language in such a short time. It takes a long, long time. So, in this moment, we do not write well. But, for us, we cannot do anything. We just try our best and try to express ourselves so our lecturer understands. But if he misunderstands, we also cannot do anything about it.* (Student 19F).

However, because of mounting pressures to complete their studies on time and at least to pass their subjects, students were increasingly faced with the decision either to write in their own words and 'hope their lecturer understood', or to resort to plagiarism in order to produce more *"elegant"* (Student 78F) academic writing which they believed, often correctly, that their teachers wanted, as reflected in the following teacher's comment:

> I think it's really valuable in getting students to think about the nature of knowledge and also to be aware that, behind all those elegant journal articles, there are a whole lot of things that go on. And this is an end point even for really skilled academics and perhaps it makes them more willing to challenge and question. And that's very important to me – that assessment encourages students to contest knowledge and not just regurgitate it. (Teacher 32F).

Also, while students agreed that it was 'good' and 'necessary' to acknowledge other people's work in their writing, and while, often as a result of their 'spoon-fed' backgrounds, they *wanted* to learn how to "challenge", "question" and "contest knowledge" (Teacher 32F), in reality, lack of time, mounting pressures caused by lack of facility with English language, and other factors caused some students to resort to plagiarism. The following student, explaining his changing expectations, pointed to some of these other factors which related to achievement, time and money:

> *When I started [at uni], I expected to get at least a CR for all my subjects because I got all HDs at [college] or Ds. But now I couldn't get a pass. It's very depressing. I also expected to finish my course on time. But now it'll take me another half year. And that costs money. Costs time.* (Student 43.1M).

Another decision students had to make at this point was whether to continue trying to understand the concepts they were being taught – an aspiration which they were beginning to realise was unrealistic in the time available – or whether to relinquish that aspiration and resort to surface-level learning. By memorising information, there was at least a chance of passing examinations, as long as they memorised the 'right' parts. As one student explained after resorting to memorisation:

> *... I can say that I really studied hard, really hard, really hard. And I feel a bit unfair for the exam because it doesn't mean that I didn't study well, it's just I'm unlucky for most of the time. I am unlucky. I just picked the wrong – maybe – I just don't know how to. I studied the whole thing, but it's a lot and you can't remember them.* (Student 18.1F).[13]

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[13]The same student had previously explained her hopes and expectations to learn deeply:
> *... in [my] degree, you study general things, general meaning, you have to touch everything, so it's rather broad and shallow. But broad is a problem because you have to touch everything. So you have to understand everything. [pause] I don't really enjoy study and attending classes. Ah, this is my problem. ... I'd rather choose research. That's why I continue for my honours project, because honours is different – narrow and deep.* (Student 18.1F).

Teachers' voices

Teachers' hopes and expectations also changed, it seems, though in different ways and at different times. While students went through disenchantment over the period of their course, teachers, on the other hand, had previously gone through similar experiences and disappointments with past students, experiences which may have led to a self-fulfilling prophecy about these students' ability, or inability, to meet higher expectations. Witnessing the 'same' sorts of outcomes again with the 'same' sorts of students and experiencing the 'same' sorts of challenges – that students lacked English language, that they plagiarised, that they did not participate in discussions, and that they were surface-level learners who learned by rote and lacked critical and higher order thinking skills – teachers' preconceived hopes, expectations and understandings of these students are reinforced:

> I think we'll just keep **ploughing** on and see if they'll change, but I don't think they will. I don't think they will. And maybe it's not their fault. Maybe it's just cultural – entrenched in them, and they can't change. (Teacher 30F).

Summary and transition

These students came to Australia with hopes, expectations and understandings about their anticipated experience, whether these were realistic, reasonable or otherwise. Shortly after commencing their studies, they began to experience challenges associated with the complex negotiation of languages, discourses, and ways of doing things in the academy. They realised – and sometimes with a shock – that their English language skills were, perhaps, not as strong as their pre-entry International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores indicated. They began to realise that their aspirations to improve their English language, to understand the concepts, and to achieve high grades may have been somewhat unrealistic. Many of these students were also under pressure from parents and families who, having invested considerable sums of money, also expected them to achieve high grades. Conditioning from previous study experiences led some students to believe that their teachers also expected them to achieve high grades. As one student said, *"... I am learning to be a better daughter for my parents and I have to learn to be a better student for my lecturers"* (Student 18.1F). Students began to face conflicts involving their hopes and expectations which they had to quickly reconsider, re-assess and re-prioritise. The most important thing for these students now became the need to pass their courses as quickly and economically as possible. And they realised that, in order to do this, they had to relinquish their aspirations. As one student said, *"I just want to pass"* and more telling still, *"I just want to survive"*

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(Student 27M). This student, however – the same one who had previously wanted to burn his assignment – and other students who continued in their courses, also began to understand that they had to learn new ways of *going on*. He reflected:

> *For me, I learn how to survive in my subject, how to pass. But I am not quality and not understand. I think the person who has quality must know the system. He must know how the thing works and, although they don't teach you that, you are supposed to know.* (Student 27M).

From the teachers' point of view, it appeared that past experiences with similar students caused reaffirmations of preconceptions about the nature of these students and how they learn, especially when teachers observed that the challenges impacting on teaching and learning outcomes were, predictably, the same as with previous students.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the voices of the students and teachers have told of the challenges they faced as they negotiated the teaching and learning process. These challenges relate to English language, understanding, and achievement, in the complex processes and contexts of teaching, learning and assessment. As yet, however, the question of what constitutes *academic discourses* remains unanswered. The next chapter, *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*, draws on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein to answer this question.

Part C

Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework

Synopsis

The previous three chapters presented challenges facing students and teachers as they negotiated the teaching and learning process. These challenges related to English language, understanding and achievement, predominantly in the contexts of teaching, learning and assessment. The complexities of the challenges were highlighted through the voices of students and teachers in order to provide a naturalistic backdrop for the more theoretical chapters that follow. While the challenges have been identified, a definition of *academic discourses* has not yet been given.

Starting with the data, that is, the *dialogue* from the previous three chapters, this chapter draws on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein to create a theoretical model of *academic discourses* which is then used to interpret the challenges in coming chapters, thereby linking the voices (the *dialogue*) with an interpretive analysis. The theoretical model presented later in this chapter is used to interpret the challenges identifed in previous chapters as *languages*, *spaces*, and *games*, establishing the overarching concepts for the thesis. Additional concepts critical to explaining and understanding the multi-dimensionality of these challenges, and of the processes of negotiation of *academic discourses*, are also discussed. These include two of Bakhtin's key concepts underpinning his philsosophy of language and underpinning this thesis, namely, *dialogue* and *heteroglossia*. Other critical concepts clarified in this chapter as a type of 'extended glossary', include *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*.

Section One – Definitions and interpretations

Bakhtin resisted the temptation to define. He considered that any word, whether uttered or written, becomes part of an unfinalisable, unbounded and, generally, unrepeatable *dialogue* (Bakhtin, 1986). Wittgenstein (1958, p.14) also pointed to the problematic nature of definition, suggesting that "an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case". Nevertheless, to facilitate the reader's negotiation of this thesis, the

interpretation of each concept critical to this thesis is defined in this chapter. To reflect in some measure the complexities of interpretation, and the beauty of languages, the original Russian words are sometimes used, together with the English translation.[1]

Overarching concept – *Languages*

jazyk – language

> All the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language. Quite understandably, the nature and forms of this use are just as diverse as are the areas of human activity. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60).

The overarching theme of this thesis is *language* (which becomes *languages*), the *dialogic* nature of language, the innate struggle within it, and its impact on INESB students and their teachers. Bakhtin's philosophy of language was complex and multi-dimensional. He recognised the socio-cultural, historical and political influences on any language's evolution and power. As Bakhtin (1981, p.294) observes, "Language 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 *language*, he says, "forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.294). Similarly, the term *language* in the context of this thesis acknowledges and reverberates with multi-dimensional tensions created and exacerbated by socio-cultural, historical and political influences. Bakhtin (1981, pp.356-357) reiterates:

> We repeat: language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language – which are all more or less successful, depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed.

Language, in the context of this thesis, is not about linguistics or forms, systems or stylistics which, Bakhtin (1981, p.273) claims, have been "completely deaf to dialogue". Nor, according to Bakhtin, is *language* ever a unitary system of norms (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.139). Rather, and still acutely aware of the tensions within it, *language* is defined as a cultural, semiotic, semantic and discursive system used as a means of communication appropriate to a particular space. Wittgenstein (1958, p.137), pointing to the power of language, suggests:

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[1] I neither speak Russian nor understand the Russian language. The interpretation of each concept is my interpretation and understanding of translations of Bakhtin's work. It is acknowledged that meaning is often lost or distorted in translation and interpretation.

> Not: "without language we could not communicate with one another" – but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate.

Language is about communication through *dialogue*, that is, through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. Successful communication or understanding as an outcome of *dialogue* is neither guaranteed nor essential to *dialogue* continuing. A response, however, is essential to *dialogue* continuing. Because language is part of a communicative system which is used in "All the diverse areas of human activity" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60), it is living and evolving as the diverse areas of human activity change. Any language is always and ever in the process of *becoming*.

Bakhtin makes three further points about *language*, which are critical to this thesis, namely:

1. *language* is always *languages*, (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.140);
2. *dialogue* is the starting point of language (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50); and
3. only *dialogue* reveals potentials (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.55).

dialog/dialogichekii – dialogue/dialogic

> Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.293).

For Bakhtin, language, indeed life, is always *dialogic*. As he points out, "The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.293) (author's emphasis). Holquist (1990, p.40) also, in his translations of Bakhtin's works, claims that "Dialogism[2] is unthinkable outside its relation to language." As the starting point of language, *dialogue* also reverberates with multi-dimensional and complex tensions among three key elements, namely: a speaker, a listener/respondent, and a relationship between the two (Bakhtin, 1986). This simple view, however, should not be seen as simplistic. Bakhtin (1986, p.68) rejected as "scientific fiction" any suggestion from linguists of the time (including Saussure) that

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[2]Bakhtin never used the term *dialogism*, which was coined by Holquist.

the "complex and multifaceted process of active speech communication" could somehow be depicted as "the speaker" and "the listener".

Dialogue, as already indicated with *language*, in no way suggests successful communication or mutual understanding between or among interlocutors. Nevertheless, the act of *dialogue*, of using language to converse with an 'other', is part of the interactive process of human communication. Any utterance, from a Bakhtinian perspective, expects a response. Without *dialogue* there can be little communication, even if this is simply to say, "I don't understand", thereby negotiating how, or if, to *go on*.

Dialogue is open-ended, *unfinalisable* and social in nature. Through *utterances* with self or others, *dialogue* can be internal (between self and an earlier or later self), or *external* (between two or more people) (Emerson & Holquist, 1981, p.427). Even the sole self is a fundamental *dialogic* relation (Holquist, 1990, p.19), which reflects the *dialogic* nature of consciousness and of human life itself (Bakhtin, 1984, p.293). In the context of this thesis, *dialogue* is entered into through *utterances* which are heard, spoken, read, or written, that is, through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts.[3]

Dialogue, Bakhtin stresses, is not the same as 'dialectics', that formal system and process of logical argument, questioning and debate. In fact, according to Bakhtin, "dialectics is the abstract product of dialogue" (1984, p.293). He says:

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.147).

vyskazivanie – utterance

Any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion.[4] (Bakhtin, 1986, p.84).

Dialogue cannot exist without *utterances*. *Utterances* can be described as links in a *dialogic* chain, which stretches far back into the history of language, links history with present discourse and which will continue into future dialogues (Braxley, 2005, p.13). While Bakhtin rejected Saussure's struturalist theory of language and his distinction

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[3]*Dialogue* can also be viewed, as in visual displays. This aspect of *dialogue* has not been examined in this study.

[4]In this quotation, Bakhtin refers to "speech communion". Later, he refers to "units of speech communication".

between language as a system of interconnected signs and forms, and speech, he did draw on Saussure's teachings to shape his own theory of the *utterance* (Emerson & Holquist, 1986, p.100).

Roberts (cited in Morris, 1994, p.251), as translator, explains Bakhtin's concept of *utterance*:

> On a basic level, an utterance is any unit of language, from a single word to an entire 'text'. More importantly, however, an utterance for Bakhtin is not so much a purely linguistic concept, as the locus of encounter between my self-consciousness, my mind and the world with all its socio-historical meaning (q.v.); the utterance is always an answer to a previous utterance, and always expects an answer in the future.

The concept of *utterance* is critical to Bakhtin's thinking, and critical in this thesis with regard to academic essay writing, as will be discussed in *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice*. The difference should also be noted between the written sentence, which Bakhtin regarded as "a unit of language (in the traditional sense)", and the spoken *utterance*, which he regarded as "a unit of 'speech communication' (*rechevoe obshchenie*)" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.125). Any utterance, as an intrinsic part of *dialogue*, is always subject to the tensions of *heterglossia*.

raznorečie – heteroglossia

The Russian word for *heteroglossia*, *raznorečie*, literally means "different-speech-ness" (Morris, 1994, p.248). Bakhtin uses the term *heteroglossia* to refer to the multiple, socio-ideological speech types, languages, discourses and individual voices which exist within a single language and to the conflicts, tensions and forces in operation whenever language is used. Bakhtin (1981, p.291) explains his concept of *heteroglossia*:

> ... at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages".

Bakhtin also uses the term *heterglossia* to refer to tensions and conflict between *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces, official and unofficial discourses, within the same national language (Morris, 1994, p.248). *Heteroglossic* tensions are caused by these opposing forces which are in constant opposition as languages evolve and *become*.

In the context of this thesis, the term *heteroglossia* is also used to refer to tensions and conflicts which exist, not only within 'official' languages (in this case, English), but also in spaces where multiple 'official and unofficial' languages and discourses are being used, that is, where they evolve and *become*.

centrostremitelˊnyj/centrobežnyj – centripetal and centrifugal forces

Bakhtin (1981, p.272) understood that languages, cultures and life reverberate with multi-dimensional and complex influences, tensions and struggles, and distinguished between forces which seek to keep things the same – *centripetal* forces – and forces which seek change – *centrifugal* forces. These forces continually compete in any language and culture, struggling within social and historical contexts, class stratification and cultural influence. *Centripetal* forces seek unity and stability. *Centrifugal* forces seek diversity and change. *Centrifugal* forces are stronger and, over time, languages evolve and *become*. As Morson and Emerson (1990, p.139) point out, however, *centrifugal* forces, "which continually upset order, are not themselves in any way unified *as* forces of opposition". Emerson and Holquist (trans., in Bakhtin, 1981, p.xix) explain the different strengths of *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces:

> The two contending tendencies are not of equal force, and each has a different kind of reality attaching to it: centrifugal forces are clearly more powerful and ubiquitous – theirs is the reality of actual articulation. They are always *in praesentia*; they determine the way we actually experience language as we use it – and are used by it – in the dense particularity of our everyday lives. Unifying, centripetal forces are less powerful and have a complex ontological status.

As Emerson and Holquist (1981, p.433) suggest, "Languages are continually stratifying under pressure of the centrifugal force, whose project everywhere is to challenge fixed definitions." *Heteroglossia* tends to move language toward multiplicity (Klages, 2001, p.3).

slovo – discourses

> At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.271-272).

Discourses are languages within languages. Bakhtin (1981, pp.262-263) speaks of an "internal stratification" which "is present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence" and suggests that this stratification includes:

> …social dialects, characteristic group behavior, 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 sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases ...

These languages, or social dialects, make up the repertoires of *discourses* used in *everyday* and *academic spaces*. *Discourses* define the *spaces*. Discipline-specific *discourses*, for example, define the disciplines. According to Bakhtin (1981, pp.291-292), these "languages of heteroglossia" – or *discourses* – "are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values". *Discourses* are hierarchical, stratified and diverse, and are neither passive nor neutral. As Bakhtin (1981, p.293) points out:

> ... there are no 'neutral' words and forms – words and forms that belong to 'no one'; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents.

All discourses reverberate with multi-dimensional and complex tensions of the historical past, present social and political realities, and future potential.

академический slovo – academic discourses

Some *discourses* are more specialised, more difficult to access and more resistant to change than others. The academic environment of a university consists of many such *discourses*, existing among and between faculties and disciplines. In Bakhtinian (1981, p.293) terms, such *discourses* "have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour". Similarities exist among *academic discourses*, since they are governed by the conventions of a unified language, in this case English. *Academic discourses* are also governed by the conventions of academia. *Academic discourses* refer, not only to academic language, but also to ways of thinking, ways of being, and ways of doing in the academy. In this context, Kress, cited in Clarke, 2001, p.47) provides a useful definition suggesting that *discourses* are:

> … systematically organised sets of statements that give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, or process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. [sic]

Clarke (2001, p.47) expands on Kress's definition, adding:

> In organizational settings, discourses dictate how members of organizations, objects or activities, are defined, what values are ascribed to them, and the particular sets of options that might apply to them in a specific situation.

A further definition, in dot point, is offered by Valdés (2004, p.73), who suggests that *academic discourse* (singular):

- Is a set of intellectual practices and a way of reading the world
- Involves the presentation of opinions and explicit argumentation in support of opinions
- Follows conventions of explicitness, detachment, and appeal to authority
- Is organized to allow appropriate reader interpretation
- Follows stylistic conventions involving grammar and usage, and is error free.

While these definitions provide useful starting points to highlight the nature of *academic discourses*, the research reported in this thesis revealed that these definitions could be expanded upon to reflect more adequately the complexities and interrelationships of the *academic discourses* which students and teachers strove to negotiate in this study, as illustrated in the model and the revised definition of *academic discourses* presented later in this chapter.

avtoritetnoe slovo – authoritative discourse

Bakhtin (1981, p.342) also refers to *authoritative discourse*, suggesting that this form of *discourse* "…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". *Academic discourses* are historically and traditionally *authoritative*. In the context of this thesis, there is a sense in which *authoritative discourse* could be regarded as 'the voice of the master', for example, the voice of 'the teacher', or the voice of 'the author' of an academic text. *Authoritative discourse* also reflects the nature of *academic discourses* as ways of talking, ways of knowing, and ways of doing in *academic* contexts.

Bakhtin (1981, pp.343-344) explains his concept of *authoritative discourse* more fully, saying:

> … authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants to 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. Therefore the distance we ourselves

observe vis-à-vis this authoritative discourse remains unchanged in all its projections: a playing with distances, with fusion and dissolution, with approach and retreat, is not here possible.

vnutrenne-ubeditel'noe slovo – internally-persuasive discourse

Internally-persuasive discourse reflects the concept of *internal dialogue* – an entering into *dialogue* with self. The concept of *internally-persuasive discourse* has been used in this thesis to refer to the critical and higher order thinking required to question the truth of *authoritative discourse* – *'the voice of the master'* – such as, from a student's perspective, a teacher's voice or an author's voice in an academic text. *Internally-persuasive discourse* does not just ask, "What does this mean?" as a translation, but questions the meaning of what it *does* mean. *Internally-persuasive discourse* is also instrumental in an individual's *going on* and *becoming*, concepts explained later in this chapter. As Emerson and Holquist (1981, pp.424-5) explain:

> Human coming-to-consciousness, or *becoming*, in Bakhtin's view, is a constant struggle between these two types of discourse: an attempt to assimilate more into one's own system, and the simultaneous freeing of one's own discourse from the authoritative word, or from previous earlier persuasive words that have ceased to mean.

This "coming-to-consciousness" or *becoming* is also subject to the tensions and struggles of *heteroglossia*.

Overarching concept – *Spaces*

> The ability to see time, to read time, in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event – this is the ability to read in everything signs that show time in its course, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas (all the way to abstract concepts) … (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.415).

Spaces, or contexts, are places in time. Some *spaces* are *finalisable*, others are *unfinalisable*. *Spaces* may be physical or virtual, *everyday* or *academic*. As with *dialogue*, *spaces* may be formal or informal, and any *dialogue* within the *spaces* may also be external (between two different people) or internal (with self). Because *unfinalisable spaces* are emerging places in time, they cannot be constant, but change and evolve as they progress through the 'course' of time together with the people and circumstances within them. The nature of *space* reflects its relationship with the transient people, cultures, and languages moving through the *spaces* in the *unfinalisable* process of *becoming*.

In the context of this thesis, and within the broader definitions already given, *space* has three interpretations. The first reflects the emerging, *unfinalisable* nature of *space* and Bakhtin's notion of *space* as an "emerging ... event", for example, the *unfinalisable space* of the teaching and learning process. The second interpretation refers to *space* which is neither *finalisable* nor *unfinalisable*, but which is defined by *centripetal* tendencies, for example, the 'language-defined' *spaces* of disciplines, together with their discipline-specific languages and discourses. Discipline-specific languages and discourses define these *spaces*. The third interpretation refers to timed, *finalisable spaces*, for example, lectures, tutorials, consultations and assessment tasks. These interpretations include both *everyday* and *academic spaces*. *Spaces* in *everyday* and *academic* contexts are filled with *heteroglossic* tensions.

One of the greatest tensions and a major contributor to the challenges facing students and teachers is caused by the clash between *unfinalisable* processes (such as teaching and learning) and *finalisable* practices (such as assessment). In academic contexts, *spaces* become timed, *finalisable* events such as lectures, consultations, assignments and examinations, all strategically sequenced within *finalisable spaces* of semesters and academic years. Thus, *unfinalisable* processes of learning and *becoming* are constrained by and assessed in *finalisable spaces*. Another aspect of *spaces* which is critical to this thesis is that of *culture*.

While culture is commonly assumed to be something which is bounded and self-contained (Knoblauch, 2000, p.26) for Bakhtin, the very metaphor of "territory" and "boundary" in relation to "culture" is faulty (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.51). As Bakhtin (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.51), emphasises:

> One must not … imagine the realm of culture as some sort of spatial whole, having boundaries but also having internal territory. The realm of culture has no internal territory: it is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through its every aspect …

Despite Bakhtin's suggestion of the realm of culture being entirely distributed along boundaries, there are still *spaces* which have "become enclosed in their own specificity" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.2), as will be discussed further in *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice*. Culture, like *languages* and *spaces*, continues to evolve and *become* under the influence of *heteroglossia.* Although cultures are boundaryless, culture and cultures have been conceptualised here as dimensional *spaces* with denser, internal territories made up of multiple, intersecting individual cultural

boundaries. The words of Morson and Emerson (1990, p.51) are useful in illustrating this concept of boundaries and cultures:

> Cultural entities more closely resemble oscillating "fields", a play of force lines rather than an assembly of objects.

The fickleness of boundary, however, is reflected in the following observations by Yury Lotman (1990, p.136), one of Bakhtin's students:

> The notion of boundary is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. It is always the boundary of something and so belongs to both frontier cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The boundary is bilingual and polylingual.

Despite its ambivalence, this *space* is full of potential, as it "belongs to both frontier cultures" and is "bilingual and polylingual".

Overarching concept – *Games*

The notion of boundary is also useful when considering *games*. As Wittgenstein (1958, pp.138-139) suggests:

> … when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary.

Just as there are different ways of doing things in an *everyday* sense within the community, so too are there different ways of doing things within the academy. Drawing on Wittgenstein's (1958) notion of *language-games*, these ways of doing are referred to here as *games*. *Everyday games* refer to general ways of doing outside the academy. *Academic games* refer to ways of doing within the academy. The concept *games* does not imply that the practices to which they relate are frivolous or fun although, in some contexts, the concept has those connotations as is evident in the way it is used. In general, however, the *games* are serious and involve skill, dexterity and endurance, and cause considerable pressures and levels of anxiety for the players, in this case, both students and teachers.

Academic games are played at all levels within the academy, from the top of the hierarchical structure of the University, through its academics, to general staff members and students; from questions about academic governance, or subject design, or quality control, to questions students raise from pre-enrolment to graduation. *Academic games* refer to norms and procedures, which constitute part of the intellectual practices and policies of a university. They reflect traditions and conventions upheld by the academy

as an essential part of what it is to *be* a university. For students, in the context of this thesis, *academic games* refer to ways of doing such as attending lectures; participating in tutorials and workshops; learning study strategies; consulting with academic staff; accessing academic texts; writing academic English; and completing academic assessment tasks. For teachers, *academic games* refer to ways of doing such as preparation and presentation of teaching materials; consultation with students; and assessment, feedback and grading of assessment tasks. Another *academic game* is the one called 'research'. The *game* of research for teachers is a serious and time-consuming one which is worthy of a study in its own right. This *game* is not a focus of this study.

As with most *games*, there are rules. In order to 'win' the *game*, or, as Wittgenstein (1958, p.139) would say, "to jump over the boundary", a player needs to learn these *games* and rules. New *games* require new skills to be learned, or existing skills adapted to the new rules. New languages are also required to talk about these *games*, rules and skills. Time and *spaces* are required for players to practise the *games* in order to become proficient players. Also, in order to learn the rules, players must play the *games*. That is, players must be able to participate. The learning of the *games* is in the playing of them.

Underlying concept – *Outsideness*[5]

> In the realm of culture, outsideness is the most powerful factor in understanding. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7).

Outsideness represents difference and diversity. For example, each country, in a generalised and stereotypical way, has its own ways of being, doing, and *going on* (Wittgenstein, 1958) with others. More especially in this thesis, *outsideness* refers to those qualities which each individual as 'self' brings to his or her perception of the 'other'[6] (Morris, 1994, p.250). Morson and Emerson (1990, p.56) suggest that the bases of *outsideness* can vary considerably and include such qualities as 'personal' (for example, gender, age and individual experience); 'spatial' (for example, faculty or

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[5] Bakhtin (1986, p.7) used the term *outsideness*. Some recent scholars (for example, Potter, O'Neill & Danaher, 2006) have used the term *outsidedness*. For the purpose of this study, Bakhtin's term *outsideness* is used.

[6] The concept of "otherness" is not used in this thesis. See Bakhtin (1981, p.276) for further discussion of the concepts of "the other" and "otherness".

discipline); 'temporal' (for example, situation); 'national' (for example, ethnic, cultural or linguistic qualities); or 'any other' (for example, religious, or philosophical).

Thus, a student brings to any *dialogic space* his or her *outsideness*, including these ways of thinking, ways of being, ways of doing, as well as knowledge, hopes, understandings, expectations, skills, values, attitudes, biases and emotions, both as foreigners sojourning in another country, and as human beings moving among other human beings. Similarly, teachers also bring their own multi-dimensional *outsideness* from broader global orientations and individual experiences and personalities. It is this *outsideness* which participants bring to any *dialogic* space, which creates the possibility of *dialogue*, and *dialogue*, as Morson and Emerson (1990, p.55) suggest, "helps us understand a culture in a profound way".

In the context of this thesis, the term *outsideness* can have positive or negative connotations. Positive *outsideness*, for example, refers to mutually rewarding cultural exchange and creativity in a variety of contexts. Negative *outsideness*, on the other hand, refers to feelings of exclusion, isolation, and inadequacy in a variety of contexts. Being unable to participate through *dialogue*, or share humour, because of difficulties with language, are examples of negative *outsideness*. Racism is an example of extreme negative *outsideness*.

Underlying concept – *Creative understanding*

Bakhtin introduces the concept of *creative understanding* as a strategy for the study of intercultural communication and *dialogic* understanding but actually rejects the notion of mutual understanding between two cultures as either ground or goal of intercultural communication (Min, 2001, p.7). Rather, and critically for this thesis, Bakhtin suggests that "… any culture requires the perspective of other cultures to develop their potential" (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.290). That is, any culture requires the *outsideness* of another culture to develop its own potential. As Morson and Emerson (1990, p.290) point out, "other cultures both contain potential that they themselves do not suspect and promise semantic rewards attainable in no other way". This potential is recognised by and accessed through *creative understanding*. And while, as Bakhtin (1986, p.7) explains, "a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it ... if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and

would not entail anything new or enriching". Rather, through *creative understanding* both cultures are mutually enriched in individual ways. As Bakhtin explains:

> *Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7).

The concept of *creative understanding* is also used in this thesis to refer to the multi-dimensional ways in which individuals respond to various challenges, for example, in trying to communicate with someone from a different linguistic background, or in experimenting with new strategies to achieve certain ends whether by students finding innovative ways to achieve their aspirations, or by teachers experimenting with creative teaching methods. *Creative understanding* is paramount to an individual's *going on*, either in his or her own journey, or in a journey with others, especially when cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ.

Underlying concept – *Going on*

The notion of *going on* (Wittgenstein, 1958, pp.60-61) has been used in this thesis to refer to the point in any event or *dialogue* where a participant or interlocutor knows how to proceed. In a spoken conversation, this point may be negotiated through *dialogic* feedback, verbal or non-verbal, such as a nod of the head. Written feedback on a student's assessment task is another example of that point where that student may know how, or if, to *go on*.

Going on also refers to the use of *creative understanding* through *dialogue* to negotiate meaning, that is, to communicate with speakers of other languages, particularly when verbal or non-verbal cues are not understood or are misinterpreted. *Going on* also refers to participants' use of *creative understanding* in determining how they will *go on* in a variety of contexts and circumstances, for example, how they will negotiate the *everyday* and *academic games* they encounter. A further dimension to the notion of *going on* refers to a sense of positive, intercultural communication where individuals with differences – *outsideness* – learn to *go on* with each other.

In his article *Living in a Wittgensteinian world: Beyond theory to a poetics of practices*, Shotter (1996, p.295) suggests that Wittgenstein's notion of *going on* is simply about

"us being able to 'going on' with each other in practice, with us being able to sensibly 'follow' each other, to intertwine our activities with those of others". In the context of this thesis, *going on* – and negotiating how to *go on*, through *dialogue* – impacts on and facilitates an individual's learning and understanding. That is, *going on* facilitates *becoming*.

Underlying concept – *Becoming*

Becoming is the evidence of change or growth over time. This change can be evident in individuals and practices or, in the context of this thesis, in the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which make up the practices. *Becoming* is part of the evolutionary process of changing languages and practices and the individuals who move amongst them. *Becoming* demonstrates change in ways of thinking, ways of knowing, and ways of doing. *Becoming* reflects enrichment and growth. In the context of academia, this enrichment, or *becoming*, is evident in the evolutionary processes and practices of teaching, learning and assessment. In the context of individuals, this enrichment, or *becoming*, is demonstrated in their personal and academic growth and development. *Becoming* is about the *unfinalisability* of learning.

Underlying concept – *Unfinalisability*

The term *unfinalisable*, which appears frequently in Bakhtin's writings and in many different contexts, suggests "a complex of values central to his thinking" including innovation, surprisingness, the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom and creativity (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp.36-37). Bakhtin used the term *unfinalisable* to suggest that "the world is not only a messy place, but is also an open place" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.36).

In the context of this thesis, the term also refers to the *unfinalisable* process of *becoming* for individuals and practices. This process is *unfinalisable* while ever life exists and refers not only to individuals, but also to *languages*, *spaces* and *games* – the practices of academia. All are in the process of *becoming*; none is *finalisable*. As Bakhtin explains:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.37).

Reading the concepts

To read these overarching and underlying theoretical concepts as discrete conceptual 'boxes' in the linear way in which they have been presented, is to detract from the complexity of their interrelationships. By overlaying these concepts with the voices of students, teachers and others which will be heard in coming chapters, the interpretations of these concepts will become clearer.

Section Two – Theorising *academic discourses*

Revisiting the challenges

Characteristic challenges which emerged from the data revealed that they were directly related to the students' aspirations, namely wanting to *learn English*, wanting to *understand the concepts*, and wanting to *achieve high grades*. Students' greatest aspirations became, in fact, their greatest challenges. These challenges were categorised in the following way:

Aspirations to	Challenges relate to
learn English	*English language* (everyday and academic)
understand concepts	*understanding* (teaching and learning)
achieve high grades	*achievement* (assessment)

The challenges, as voiced by students and teachers, were presented separately in *Chapter 3: English Language*, *Chapter 4: Understanding*, and *Chapter 5: Achievement*.

Dimensions of language, understanding and achievement

In reality, however, the challenges facing students and teachers are all interconnected and occur together in complex and multi-dimensional ways. There are dimensions of *language*, dimensions of *understanding*, and dimensions of *achievement*, just as there are "dimensions of culture" and "dimensions of difference" (Hofstede, 2001, p.29). Negotiating and examining the complex interconnections and dimensions of these challenges demanded a multi-dimensional, theoretical framework which would allow the phenomena to be examined from multiple perspectives. Perhaps because of their multi-dimensionality, these major areas of challenge are also reflected in the three major areas of education, namely, *curriculum*, *pedagogy* and *evaluation* (Bernstein, 2003).

Similarly, they are reflected in Habermas's *work*, *interaction* and *power* (1971), and Kemmis's *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* (2008a). While any of these triumvarates could be used to analyse and interpret the challenges facing students and teachers, there is another way.

Key theoretical perspectives – Bakhtin and Wittgenstein

By drawing on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein for *languages*, principally Bakhtin for *spaces*, and principally Wittgenstein for *games*, it is possible to interpret and understand the challenges facing students and teachers in terms of *languages*, *spaces*, and *games*. As outlined in Chapter 1, by juxtaposing Bakhtin's philosophy of *language* and the *dialogic* and *heteroglossic* nature of language with Wittgenstein's concept of *language-games*, a multi-dimensional framework was created and used to interpret the data. In addition to the overarching concepts of *languages*, *spaces*, and *games*, five further underlying concepts have been used to add multiple layers and dimensions to the theoretical framework. These concepts, drawn from both Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, are – *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. While there may be a sense in which some of the challenges facing students and teachers are unsurprising, these concepts and the philosophical perspectives of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein allow observations and interpretations to be made in ways which would not otherwise be possible.

A model of *academic discourses*

In listening to the voices of students and teachers, there is a clear sense of the challenges they faced and the complexities of the negotiation of *academic discourses*. These complexities of *academic discourses*, however, were felt not to be reflected in the definitions of *academic discourses* used as a starting point earlier in this chapter. To understand the challenges more fully, therefore, it was necessary to re-define *academic discourses* in a way which reflected more accurately the complexities of the *discourses* themselves and also of the multiple relationships within and among them. Thus, a definition of *academic discourses* evolved – or *became* – during the cyclical hermeneutic research process, allowing Research Question 2 – What are academic discourses? – to be answered as follows:

> *Academic discourses* are the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which comprise the *teaching*, *learning* and *assessment* practices of a university.

The complexities of the relationships between and among the *languages*, *spaces* and *games*, and the *teaching*, *learning* and *assessment* practices, are illustrated in Figure 6.1.
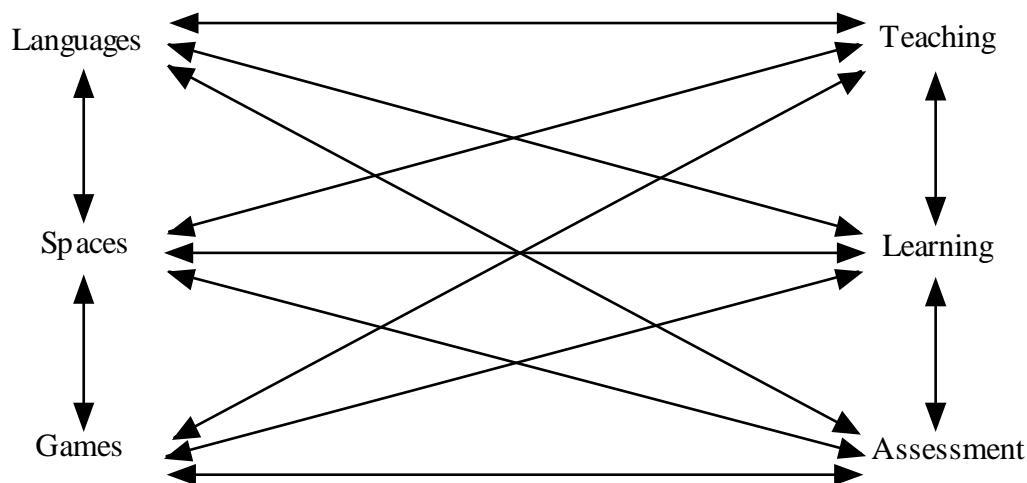
Figure 6.1 – A model of academic discourses

To put into words what Figure 6.1 aims to convey, then, one might say that *academic discourses* involve a complex of:

languages of teaching	and	teaching of languages
languages of learning	and	learning of languages
languages of assessment	and	assessment of languages
spaces of teaching	and	teaching of spaces
spaces of learning	and	learning of spaces
spaces of assessment	and	assessment of spaces
games of teaching	and	teaching of games
games of learning	and	learning of games
games of assessment	and	assessment of games

Figure 6.2 – A complex of academic discourses

This complex is not just a way of elaborating the complicated relations between the terms in Figure 6.1. It also offers a framework for critique – in particular, a framework for critique of some simplified views of *language*, *understanding* (teaching and learning), and *achievement* (assessment). The complex, if true as a description of what is involved in *academic discourses* and their evolution in use and in practice, will explode the simplified view of communication as the transmission and reception of a stable message through a noisy or less noisy medium. It explodes the notion of learning as the linear accumulation of knowledge or concepts. And, among other things, it explodes that view of intercultural or transcultural education that imagines an 'outsider' to a culture (such as *academic discourses* or a language like English) can simply be assimilated to a

new discourse or language in a way that will leave no trace of that previous outsider status, so the one assimilated will or can appear just the same as the ones who were 'insiders' all along – like the English speaking background students who studied alongside the international non-English speaking background students interviewed in the research reported in this thesis.

This complex, then, offers a new way of seeing what is going on in *academic discourses* and, especially, in learning to practise and to be and to *go on* and to *become* in *academic discourses*.

A further critical dimension of examining the challenges facing students and teachers is the understanding, as will be shown in coming chapters, that *academic discourses* are negotiated by *language*, that is, by *dialogue*, through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes.

Summary and transition

Major challenges for students and teachers as they negotiated *academic discourses* emerged from the data. These challenges related to *English language*, *understanding* (teaching and learning), and *achievement* (assessment). During the cyclical hermeneutic research process, a definition of *academic discourses* emerged and a model of *academic discourses* was created. This interpretive theoretical framework based on the philosophies and concepts of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein as defined in this chapter, now allows these challenges to be interpreted as *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. Each of these overarching concepts is layered or "shot through" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276) with the additional underlying concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. These concepts of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, examples of which appeared less explicitly in the preceding three chapters, will now be demonstrated more clearly through an interpretation of the challenges in the following three chapters – *Chapter 7: Languages*, *Chapter 8: Spaces* and *Chapter 9: Games*. Most critically, it will also be demonstrated that *dialogue*, as the starting point of *language*, is the currency needed for participation in these *academic discourses*. And it is this *dialogic* participation which facilitates the chances of students achieving their aspirations to learn English language, to understand the concepts, and to achieve high grades. In *everyday* contexts, *dialogic* participation also facilitates students' aspirations to experience 'Australian culture' in any of its many and diverse forms.

Part C

Chapter 7: Languages

Synopsis

In the previous chapter, an interpretive theoretical model was presented which defined *academic discourses* as a complex of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which comprise the teaching, learning and assessment practices of a university. Having listened to the voices of students and teachers in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, it became evident that *academic discourses* are negotiated by *language*, that is, by *dialogue*, through *listening, speaking, reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. *Dialogue* permeates every aspect of the student and teacher experience and is a sustained theme throughout this thesis. The data presented through the participants' voices give a dimensionality to the challenges students and teachers face as they try to negotiate *academic discourses*, while the interpretive theoretical model presented at the end of Chapter 6 illustrates the multi-dimensionality of those discourses and the complexities of their negotiation. With this understanding, the following three chapters – *Chapter 7: Languages*, *Chapter 8: Spaces* and *Chapter 9: Games* – reconsider and interpret some of the things students and teachers said about these challenges, especially in light of the students' aspirations.

Although these chapters follow Chapter 6, it should not be thought that they are merely an 'application' of the theoretical model presented in Chapter 6. They follow Chapter 6 in sequence, but not in time. The process of interpretation, described in Chapter 2 as *The Hermeneutic Helix*, produced the model in Chapter 6 and the interpretations in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 *together*, through the long, iterative process of *making* the interpretations in the light of the data, on the one side, and the theoretical insights prompted by Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, on the other.

This chapter focuses on *languages*. The INESB students interviewed for this study have some English language, but not as much as they would like, nor as much as their teachers expect, nor as much as their pre-entry IELTS scores may have indicated. With the English language they have, they are not only trying to enter a *dialogue*, but also repeatedly trying to enter *dialogues* of multiple kinds, in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts. These include *dialogues* between students, between students and others, between students and teachers, and between students and texts. This chapter also

discusses the *heteroglossic* nature of languages and *dialogue*. Students enter the University expecting a monoglossic English language and monoglossic *academic discourses*, but instead encounter a complex, interconnected network of *heteroglossic languages* – or *language-games*, both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts – which have to be negotiated and re-negotiated, and all of which can be negotiated and re-negotiated only through *dialogue*.

Language is always *languages*

In *Chapter 3: English Language*, *Chapter 4: Understanding* and *Chapter 5: Achievement*, it was established that students' expectations to experience 'Australian culture', their aspirations to learn English, to understand the concepts and to achieve high grades, and teachers' hopes and expectations for the students, were all related to and influenced by *language*, that is, *English language*. Additionally, it was established that *English language* was the major cause of challenges for both students and teachers. As stated in Chapter 6, Bakhtin makes three points about language, which are critical to this thesis, namely that:

1.   *language* is always *languages*, (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.140);
2.   *dialogue* is the starting point of language (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50); and,
3.   only *dialogue* reveals potentials (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.55).

If *dialogue* is the starting point of *language*, as claimed in the second point, then any discussion about *language* should, perhaps, begin with a discussion about *dialogue*. However, in keeping with Bakhtin's precedent that "One must start with the act itself, and not its theoretical transcription" (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50), the discussion here must begin with a discussion about *language* since that is what students and teachers spoke about. That is, the voices of students and teachers which were heard in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 repeatedly talk about 'English', 'language' or 'English language', when discussing the major challenges they faced. When students said that one of the main reasons they chose a Western university, and that their greatest aspiration was to 'learn English' or 'improve English', they were not referring to *languages* or *dialogue* – they were referring to one specific *language*, namely, English. And while students often spoke of challenges with parts of English language, including, *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and/or *writing*, they were still referring to challenges associated with one *language*. Similarly, teachers, when discussing the challenges they faced with students from non-English speaking backgrounds, referred more generally to 'English',

'language' or 'English language'. It appears that one of the first factors which confound, and compound, the challenges facing students and teachers is that they refer to *one language* when, in reality, there are many *languages*, the starting point of which is *dialogue*.

IELTS, the International English Language Testing System

As a prerequisite to enrolment, students had undertaken a test in accordance with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to determine their level of English language proficiency.[1] The IELTS test not only fulfilled a University requirement, but was also intended to reassure the students and the University that the students had adequate levels of English to enable them to complete their degrees successfully. Although IELTS testing does assess certain aspects and skills of English language, however, it is still a formal testing system for one language. And while, as reported in Chapter 4, one teacher believed there was "no real problem with English because all INESB students have to have an IELTS of 6.00 or higher" (Teacher 7M), this test – and arguably this level of competence – does not prepare students for the multiple *languages* they encounter, within either *everyday* contexts or *academic* contexts.

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[1]In order to gain entry to the University, INESB students must sit an English language (IELTS) test. Despite IELTS entry scores being set for postgraduate students at 6.5 (and not lower than 6.0 in any of the four individual skills areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening), and for undergraduate students at 6.0 (and not lower than 5.5 in any individual skill area), considerable differences in levels of English language competence were evident among students participating in this study. These differences impact on the challenges students encounter in relation to both *everyday* and *academic* experiences.

It is acknowledged that students use a range of strategies to increase their IELTS test scores. One online, inexpensive, downloadable offer, for example, claims to reveal weaknesses in the IELTS test, which can be exploited in order to increase test scores (Morrison, 2007). There was no evidence to suggest, however, that any of the students participating in this study had gained IELTS scores by false or unethical means, although this possibility was not investigated. As these students were currently enrolled at the University, it was assumed that they had gained their IELTS scores by legitimate means. There was also no evidence to suggest that the University accepted students whose IELTS scores were below the set levels, although students may appeal test results and, in extremely rare cases, the Dean of the relevant faculty may accept the appeal and allow the student entry. In the event of students not achieving the set levels, however, they were generally advised to enrol in an English language course before undertaking a second IELTS test. One student participant, for example, had achieved 5.5 in his IELTS test and was advised to undertake a three month preparatory course through the University's English Language Centre prior to undertaking another IELTS test (Student 72M). A number of students participating in this study had undertaken similar preparatory English language courses, either by choice or because it had been recommended by the University.

The University's English Language Centre which offered English language courses and IELTS testing was closed in 2007 as this research was being completed. While the University continues to accept INESB students, it no longer provides English language courses or IELTS testing services.

Languages as *language-games*

These multiple languages, together with the different ways of doing things, are part of the whole student experience and are referred to here as *language-games* after Wittgenstein (1958, p.5), who says, "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language-game'." Wittgenstein, like Bakhtin, disagreed with forms and systems of language. Instead, he used his notion of *language-games* "to shake off the idea of a necessary form of language" (Rhees, cited in Wittgenstein, 1969, p.vi). Wittgenstein based his concept of *language-games* on the following analogy:

> The rules of language (grammar) are analogous to the rules of games; meaning something in language is thus analogous to making a move in a game. The analogy between a language and a game brings out the fact that only in the various and multiform activities of human life do words have meaning.

Wittgenstein's concept was not, as he pointed out, meant to suggest that there is anything trivial about language, or that language is 'just a game' (Wittgenstein, 1958). Although Wittgenstein did not use the term *dialogue*, he used the term *language-games* as a means "to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" and to refer to the whole process of using and learning words and languages (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.11). Similarly, Bakhtin believed that *speaking* with one another was not only a form of life, but also life itself. In fact, he asserted that "To be means to communicate dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252).

It could be said that such notions of 'life' and 'being' are of a higher order than the aspirations of INESB students who seek to 'learn English', 'experience Australian culture' or 'understand concepts'. However, students' stays in Australia are not just one experience in one language and one culture, but a negotiation through a *heteroglossic* mix of *languages*, cultures and contexts which together form whole experiences linked together with English language. And, if the starting point of language is *dialogue*, then these experiences are all linked *dialogically*. If there is no *dialogue*, or even enough *dialogue* for whatever reason, then students are unable to participate in the *language-games*, whether these are being played in *everyday* contexts or in *academic* contexts. And if students cannot participate, they cannot achieve their aspirations.

Languages as *dialogue*

Bakhtin believed that language is a means of communication through *dialogue* and advocated *dialogue* over monologue in every case. *Dialogue,* from a Bakhtinian

perspective, is about the encounter at a boundary between people who are in relations with themselves and with others and who are always encountering the *outsideness* of others. That is, they are always experiencing the uniqueness of others, through their cultures, their *languages* and their different ways of being and doing. *Dialogue* should be understood, not as aimed at compensating for deficits or at a 'pure' transmission of understanding but as being part of a *language-game* which interlocutors are playing, often with different understandings of what it means to play the *game*.

Languages in *everyday* contexts

Equipped with the understanding that their English language competence was sufficient to undertake their studies successfully, students arrived in Australia ready to improve their English and to experience 'Australian culture'. Realising that using and practising the language would help them 'learn English', students sought opportunities for *dialogue* in different ways and different places. For example, some students found accommodation with Australians, seeing this as a means of learning the language while experiencing 'Australian culture'. It seems, in fact, that students' expectations to learn one 'English language' were also reflected in their expectations to experience one 'Australian culture'. Instead, students encountered multiple languages and *dialogues* in multiple cultural contexts throughout the local community and on-campus. The extent to which these languages, *dialogues* and contexts helped the students achieve their aspirations to 'learn English' and to experience 'Australian culture' was as varied as the individual experiences and personal characteristics of each student.

Culture

Before discussing *languages* and *dialogue* any further, it is necessary to reiterate briefly some points about culture.[2] Just as *language* is always *languages*, so too is *culture* always *cultures*. As Kalantzis and Cope (2002, p.17) point out, "Any individual lives in, and between, many different cultures – the culture of the workplace; the culture of educational institutions; culture as ethnic background; culture as aspiration, interest or inclination." Even within the *everyday* and *academic* communities of the University, languages exist within languages, and cultures exist within cultures. Cultures are not entities somehow bounded by the languages and customs of specific races, places and contexts. Rather, cultures are living and changing and, in reality, exist only on the

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[2]It should also be reiterated that, while this thesis is not an examination of specific 'cultures' or 'ethnic groups', it *is* a study of the multiple *dimensions* of *languages* and *cultures* that both create and permeate the *spaces* and *games* within the context of the study.

peripheries, as pointed out in Chapter 6. In fact, Bakhtin insists that cultural entities are, in effect, *all* boundary, claiming:

> Every cultural act lives essentially on boundaries: in this is its seriousness and significance; abstracted from boundaries it loses its soil, it becomes empty, arrogant, it degenerates and dies. (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.51).

Just as *languages* are constantly evolving – or *becoming* – through the uncountable *dialogic* links of those who use them, so too are cultures evolving, or *becoming*, as individuals encounter, interact with, and are transformed by, the *outsideness* of others, all through *dialogue*, and all on boundaries.

Despite the evolutionary nature of culture and the notion that culture exists only on the boundaries, students come to Australia with a reasonable expectation that they will experience 'culture' which they can identify as 'Australian', just as tourists travelling to China reasonably expect to experience 'culture' which they can identify as 'Chinese'. While students expect to find a monoglossic type of 'Australian culture', however, they find, as with language, a *heteroglossic* mix of boundaries passing everywhere through every aspect of their Australian cultural and linguistic experience. And, thus, there exist tensions between the students' expectations to enter into 'Australian culture', and the reality of encountering only boundaries made up of the *outsideness* of others, and self. Each of the students who participated in this study, and each of the many who did not, has experienced a different 'Australian culture' because of his or her own *outsideness* and the *outsideness* of others. And also, as indicated in Chapter 3, each student's encounter with 'Australian culture/s' is sharply attenuated in time – a year or a few years in Australia – with many requirements to study and work which eat up the available time.

In Chapter 1, it was asserted that the study of "a foreign culture" requires more than an "entering into it" in order to "view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.6-7). And so, despite its unbounded nature, to experience and begin to understand a measure of any culture does require "a certain entry as a living being" into it (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7). This "entry" allows "the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes", which is "a necessary part of the process of understanding it" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7).

Dialogue and dimensions of 'Australian culture'
Entering into another culture requires *dialogue*. It requires interacting with people. As

part of the expected Australian cultural experience, students wanted to meet Australians and speak with Australians. However, students often reported that it was *"very difficult to meet ... Australians"* (Student 83F) because *"People just don't talk to you"* (Student 52F). Or, as another student commented, it was not so much that the *"locals"* did not speak with you, as *"how the locals treat you"* (Student 19F). If the *"locals treat you"* in ways which do not invite *dialogue*, it is impossible to enter into the 'local' culture. As Bakhtin (1984, p.252) says, "When dialogue ends, everything ends." And students' hopes and expectations of experiencing 'Australian culture' also end when *dialogue* ends. This non-entry, this sense of *negative outsideness*, is what students take with them out of Australia, home to their countries and talk about to others.

This is a way of seeing and understanding a powerful lesson for Australian universities and the advocates of 'export education' – what was intended as a partnership or a fair contract between student and university turned out to be something else: a closed conversation, an ended *dialogue*.

Some students, however, did manage to enter into *dialogue* with the 'locals' and, as a result, not only experienced 'Australian culture', or variations of Australian culture, but also extended their English vocabulary in ways which may, or may not, have supported their studies and aspirations. One student, for example, when summing up her experience of studying in English in Australia, wrote:

> *I've learnt many new vocabularies. Eg: to skull,[3] yabby,[4] fair dinkum[5] ...* (Student 49F – diary, 10th December, 2004).

This student not only learned *"many new vocabularies"*, as indicated in excerpts from her diary throughout this thesis, but also put them into practice, as reflected in her earlier notation:

> *It was such a fun & noisy night at cottage XXX. Dinner was a fusion between Chinese cooking, French-Canadian cooking & Aussie dessert. We had our own 'United Nations Meeting'. There was people from Australia, Malaysia, Canada, Sweden, Paraguay & Norway. I learnt what it means to skull.[6]* (Student 49F – diary, 20th August, 2004).

Whether such experiences are reasonable representations of 'Australian culture' and whether they fulfilled the student's aspirations to experience 'Australian culture' is unknown, although Australia *is* a multicultural society and, as such, this multicultural

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[3]To skol (*"skull"*) – an Australian custom to consume a drink at one draught, without taking breath.
[4]An Australian freshwater crayfish, often cooked on a barbecue.
[5]Australian colloquialism meaning *true* or *genuine*.
[6]It appears that this student may also have learned from her Swedish and Norwegian peers the Scandinavian custom 'att skåla' – to drink to someone's health, to propose a toast or, more commonly, to say 'skål!' meaning 'cheers!'

experience in an on-campus student residence may reflect the wider Australian community to some degree. For students who did not enter into the *"fun"*, whether by choice or not, similar experiences distracted from their study and their associated aspirations, as indicated in the following comments:

> *At about 8.00 or 9.00 o'clock at night, everyone goes out there and gets drunk and gets loud. I don't really study at night very much any more.* (Student 16F).

Such experiences not only impacted on students' *everyday* and *academic* lives, but also impacted on their understandings of what constitutes 'Australian culture', as reflected in the following comments:

> *I think [my flatmates] are a little bit noisy and I'm looking for my next accommodation. ... After work they just call a lot of friends and drinking, and play games, watching Rugby. ... they just spend their lives easily. Do you think that people like my roommates are typical of young guys in Australia? Because your welfare is so good, you know. [laughs] They are working, but after they work, they just drink. No matter at home or in club. Maybe five or six nights a week they are drunk. [laughs] I just don't know whether all Australian young men are like that.* (Student 17.1M).

Because of difficulties in meeting Australians, students often resorted to members of their own ethnic groups or international students from other ethnic groups for company and support. Although a measure of moral and academic support was provided by mixing with people from their own ethnic groups, these students had opportunity neither to experience 'Australian culture' nor to 'learn English' through *dialogue* with other English speaking people. Mixing with students from ethnic backgrounds different from their own, at least provided opportunities for students to practise some form of English. In these instances, the *everyday* context of the University setting also provided 'neutral ground' for the negotiation, through *dialogue*, of positive intercultural communication and increased understanding between cultures which, traditionally, had experienced conflict. This is reflected in the following teacher's comments which, although generalised, were based on his experience:

> There are tensions [between some students from different countries], but they are adults. There are certain tensions, you might sense them, but they sense them themselves. But I've also seen lots of friendships. Between a Pakistani and Indian – one is Muslim, one is Christian – and they were really good friends. And lots of Pakistanis and Indians getting together because they get out here [to Australia and find] they're quite the same. And you get your differences. You get the Pakistani Muslim who won't drink and the Indian student who won't **stop** drinking [laughs]. They're big beer drinkers some of them, and they're all good cooks.[7] (Teacher 26M).

Languages, cultures and discourses

Here, the interconnection between *languages*, cultures and discourses becomes more

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[7]These kinds of connections exemplify one of the things which some students came to Australia to learn about, namely, *secular culture* and *secular democracy*.

evident. As defined earlier, discourses are languages within languages which create and reflect cultures within cultures. Discourses also define the *spaces*. Discipline-specific discourses define the discipline. For Bakhtin, any discourse always articulates a particular view of the world (Morris, 1994, p.248). Gee (1998, p.51) suggests that "a discourse" is:

> a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network".

Gee also (1996, p.viii) refers to "Discourses" with a capital "D" as being "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted … by specific groups of people …of a certain sort". As Gee (1996, p.viii) points out, "Discourses are ways of being 'people like us'."

The student who observed his Australian flat-mates' discourses through their ways of behaving and the values they displayed caused him to ask, *"Do you think all young Australian men are like this?"* (Student 17.1M). The same student chose to observe rather than to 'enter into' the cultural *space* created by the discourses in this *everyday* context. Rather, because he was studying commerce, he wanted *"to live with some people doing their business"* so he could *"have a discussion"* with them (Student 17.1M). He understood that certain sorts of *dialogue* with certain sorts of people would help him to learn the specific discourse which he needed to learn in order to achieve his aspirations. Unfortunately, this student had little opportunity to enter into these sorts of *dialogue*. As Valdés (2004, p.88) points out:

> ... the increasing residential and academic segregation in which these students find themselves offers few possibilities for their participation in communication spheres where academic language is used naturally and comfortably by those who, as Gee (1992, p.33) suggests, have acquired it by 'enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interactions with people who have already mastered the Discourse.'

Instead, the student learned language which was used 'naturally and comfortably' by his flatmates, as well as the attributes of *"Victoria Bitter"* or how to *"cook barbecue"*, that is, *"just throw the beef on the cooker"* (Student 17.1M). The student who learned, among other things, *"what it means to skull"* (Student 49F) chose – and was able – to 'enter into' the cultural *space* by learning and using the discourses of those around her, as evident in the following diary entry:

> *Muz threw a barbie[8] today. The gang came over & relax after a hectic week. I must admit that he did a good job, despite being a pea brain brag bag. I did something outrageous.*

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[8] 'barbie' = barbecue

Pat & i tipped the esky[9] of ice over Leanne & Mike. Not me! Not me! Must be the beer.
(Student 49F – diary, 15th October, 2004).[10]

Humour

'Australian culture' and humour

Like language – and culture – humour can include and exclude. What constitutes humour is not only an individual thing, but is also influenced by cultural background. As the following student observed:

> *Australians and [Indians] have a different sense of humour.* (Student 82M).

Differences in humour, together with challenges caused by nuances and subtleties of language, also hindered students from entering into 'Australian culture'. As one student pointed out:

> *... trying to understand the culture, the humour [is my greatest challenge]. Sometimes we laugh, sometimes they laugh!* (Student 83F).

Students used different strategies to try to enter into the culturally-charged *spaces* of humour, with varying degrees of success. The student who did volunteer work for a local charity, for example, found that *"the ladies and gentlemen"* taught her *"some slang"* and used humour to help her when she missed her parents – *"they just make jokes to make me feel better"* (Student 4F). This *dialogue* with others helped her enter into one type of 'Australian culture' and helped her *go on* to overcome feelings of negative *outsideness*, including isolation, loneliness and homesickness. For the following student, however, attempts to enter a *space* created by the highly sensitive nuances of language, culture and humour were less successful. Recognising the common Australian use of sarcasm as a form of wit, the student tried this use of language as a means of entering into the class culture. Her attempt, however, only exacerbated her sense of exclusion, or negative *outsideness*, as her teacher reported:

> I had an experience with an Indian student who picked up on how the Australian way of putting your friends down in humour. She tried to do it, but couldn't, and got the whole class offside. (Teacher 29F).

Laughter

While humour can exclude, laughter, on the other hand, or so Morson (2004, p.323)

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[9] 'esky' = Australian trade name for a portable icebox, typically used to cool drinks at barbies.

[10] According to Bakhtin, a model of language '… is nothing unless it can help us appreciate the overlooked richness, complexity, and power of the most intimate and most ordinary exchanges' (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.34). While this study reports some of these ordinary exchanges, it is not a study of these exchanges.

suggests, is "implicitly pluralist". Not only that, says Morson (2004, p.323), but "Laughter at oneself invites the perspective of the other." While "laughter at oneself" may invite others' perspectives, laughter at others can create negative *outsideness* which excludes, as is evident in the following student's reaction:

> *... some of our classmates they laugh at us. Of course it doesn't feel good when someone laughs at you when you are doing your work.* (Student 43.2M).

Negative *outsideness* "doesn't feel good". Mutually positive outcomes, such as creativity and understanding, which should result from the *outsideness* of others, are sabotaged when people laugh at, rather than with, others. Instead of the mutual negotiation of alien perspectives through *creative understanding* to a point where interlocutors know how to *go on*, negative *outsideness* not only sabotages creativity but also discourages *dialogue* and undermines and skews understanding. That said, humour and laughter can be powerful resources in overcoming racial tensions and feelings of exclusion and negative *outsideness* caused by perceived cultural differences, as Bakhtin (1986, p.135) suggests:

> Serious tones also sound different in a multitonal culture: resonances of laughing tones fall on them, they lose their exclusivity and uniqueness, they are supplemented by the element of laughter.

Outsideness **and** *creative understanding*

Bakhtin (1986, p.7) suggests that, "In the realm of culture, *outsideness* is the most powerful factor in understanding" and, not only in *understanding*, but also in *creative understanding*. It is this concept of *creative understanding* that is needed to overcome situations of negative *outsideness* which arise between interlocutors if *dialogue*, and ultimately understanding, is to occur. Understanding requires more than listening, as the following participant observed:

> The listener needs to go beyond just listening. You need to be **tolerant** with listening. The person listening needs to take into consideration where he's [a student is] coming from and what he's meaning and fill in all of that. (Other 2F).

The following example of *creative understanding*, which combines tolerance with listening, respect for others, and humour, was able to cross boundaries and ease tensions:

> ... [The students] met me at a study [support] program. ... Nobody could talk anything that anyone could understand. It ended up that I was drawing different things and [one student] tried so hard with her English, but you didn't even know it was English. It was incomprehensible! But we smiled and bowed and laughed. (Other 2F).

If there is no *tolerance* with listening, or *creative understanding* in trying to 'fill in the gaps', then *dialogue*, and the chance for students to participate in the *language-games*,

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is diminished or lost, as with the student who commented:

> *Australian people just ignore me. It's like [they think], 'If he doesn't cause any trouble to me, I don't mind. I will just leave him alone.' It is hard to communicate with them. It's language [pause] but it's not language. They don't **try** to understand me.* (Student 27M).

Languages in *academic* contexts

Strategies for understanding

Trying to negotiate languages for INESB students, however, extended beyond communicating with the 'locals'. Just as different students used different strategies to learn and negotiate *everyday* discourses, so too did they use different strategies to learn and negotiate *academic* discourses. Students used different strategies for either making themselves understood, or understanding others, the strategies obviously different depending on whether the communication was spoken or written.

Body language and listening/speaking

Although strategies differed, *dialogue* which includes non-verbal cues, and *creative understanding*, were instrumental in facilitating understanding, as the following student explained:

> *... if I'm speaking, I can try to explain my ideas so people can understand. But sometimes I cannot follow someone, I cannot understand their accent. That is very hard.* (Student 4F).

Another student, as spokesperson for two other students, explained that communicating with their lecturers was *"not a really big problem"* because *"face-to-face we can use our body language"* (Student 20F). The same student, however, also said that *"writing down everything in an assignment, all the paragraphs"* was *"a really big problem"*. As she pointed out:

> *Maybe the words and expressions we use are not really suitable. Maybe we don't really mean that and the lecturers misunderstand.* (Student 20F).

This comment pre-empts one of the greatest challenges for students and teachers, that is, *"writing down everything in an assignment"*. The strategies students used to fulfill the requirements of assessment tasks will be discussed more fully in *Chapter 9: Games.*

Becoming familiar with the nuances of language, and what makes *"the words and expressions ... suitable"* or not (Student 20F), is a skill acquired over many years of practising a language. Many of the non-verbal messages, the intonations, innuendos and layered meanings of English language, are lost on INESB students or, at least, create varying degrees of difficulty depending on whether the language skill is *listening*,

speaking, *reading* or *writing*. Speaking of native speakers, Bakhtin (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.34) points out,

> In real life we very keenly and subtly hear all those nuances in the speech of people surrounding us, and we ourselves work very skilfully with all these colors on the verbal palette. We very sensitively catch the smallest shift in intonation, the slightest interruption of voices in anything of importance to us in another person's practical everyday discourse. All those verbal sideward glances, reservations, loopholes, hints, thrusts do not slip past our ear, are not foreign to our lips.

Subtle nuances which may be discernible and acceptable to the human ear when *listening* and *speaking*, however, can be indecipherable or unacceptable in other contexts, for example, when *reading* or *writing*, especially in *academic* contexts. Such nuances, almost as "discourse accents" (Valdés, 2004, p.75), are more noticeable in written form.

Understanding written language

For students, challenges with understanding written language were primarily to do with textbooks, assigned subject readings, assessment questions and examination papers. All of these modes of communication are entered into via *dialogue*, not only through reading and writing, but also via internal *dialogue* with self. The written language of assessment questions and examination papers is discussed in *Chapter 9: Games*. Students said that textbooks and other academic texts were very difficult to read, causing many challenges for students as they strove to understand content and concepts. Students used a number of strategies to understand academic texts. Some students tried to find simpler texts that, as much as possible, covered the same topics and concepts. Others used electronic translators or dictionaries to help them understand despite the fact that some words, especially discipline-specific words, were untranslatable. Whatever strategies students used – for example, *"I ... get some simple books on the same subject"* (Student 14F) – and regardless of how effective these strategies were – for example, *"If I can't find the word in the translator or dictionary I just leave it, I have no choice"* (Student 43.2M) – they were all, as one student pointed out, *"very much ... time-consuming"* (Student 14F). And any time spent trying to negotiate complex written language was time taken away from possible spoken language, that is, *dialogue* through *listening* and *speaking* with others where there could be opportunity for untranslatable words and concepts to be discussed and explained. Students who spent hours studying alone not only missed *dialogic* interaction with others and, consequently, the opportunity to practise spoken language, but also struggled to understand the concepts through *dialogue* with texts, as the following student explained:

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I studied five hours per day, but you just sit there and don't understand it. There's no point in studying. ... I don't think I learn anything from uni because it's all study by your own, even if you don't understanding it. That means you couldn't, you didn't, learn anything. (Student 43.2M).

For this student, a lack of *dialogue* with others resulted in him not understanding, not knowing how to *go on*, and not having the motivation to *go on*.

Summary and transition

Dialogue through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* is critical to students' participation in 'Australian culture' whether in *everyday* contexts or in *academic* contexts. This participation was influenced to a large degree by students' facility with English language. *Languages* in *academic* contexts become more discipline-specific and are integral to the *spaces* and *games* played within the academy. In fact, *languages are* the *spaces* and *games*. Discipline-specific discourses define the *spaces* and are the *languages* of the *spaces*. The disciplines, discourses and *spaces* are also the professions that these students want to practise. This discussion of *languages*, particularly in academic contexts, continues through the following two chapters, *Chapter 8: Spaces* and *Chapter 9: Games.*

In the next chapter, it will be seen that students need *dialogue* to enter the *spaces* of teaching and learning and to enter the discourses of the professions they are studying. *Dialogue* is needed to practise the professions. If there is no *dialogue*, or even *enough dialogue*, these discourses cannot be negotiated. If students are hesitant with their English, they are not able to play the *language-game* because they are not able to participate. And if students are not able to participate, they cannot achieve their aspirations.

Part C
Chapter 8: Spaces

Synopsis

Students arrive in Australia with a plan they hope to realise and aspirations they hope to achieve from their study experience. They also bring differences in knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, understandings and expectations to their Australian experience. Teachers also bring these things, together with personal and professional expectations of the students. In other words, students and teachers bring individual *outsideness* to the teaching and learning *spaces*. Tensions and contestations arise from the differing hopes, expectations and understandings that exist between students and teachers, often because of misperceptions and misunderstandings, on both sides, of the other. Teachers, for example, say that INESB students have trouble with English language in general. Students, on the other hand, say that they have trouble with specific skills of English language, namely, *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and/or *writing*. Teachers say that, although INESB students have excellent attendance, they prefer not to participate in class discussions, generally believing that this non-participation is culturally related. Students, on the other hand, say they want to participate in class discussions, but are hindered, primarily, because of difficulty with *listening* and *speaking*. Students also say that behaviour which they perceive as racist, from some teachers and students, sometimes discourages them from participating. Teachers say that INESB students are surface and rote learners who lack critical and higher order thinking skills. Students, however, say that they want to learn to become deeper and more critical thinkers, but that previous conditioning, the demands of their course requirements, and time restraints hinder these skills from developing. Teachers say that most of their INESB students are from wealthy backgrounds. Students, on the other hand, say that their families struggle to pay tuition and accommodation costs, and seek part-time employment to help pay their way.

This chapter considers students' aspirations to learn and understand the concepts of their disciplines and the discourses of their chosen professions. It discusses the critical need for participating *dialogically* in the *spaces* in order to learn the languages and discourses of a discipline, and in order to understand its content and concepts – that is, in order to learn to play the *games*. It examines the extent to which teaching and learning *spaces* are *dialogic*, and emphasises the role of *dialogue* in accessing and participating in these

spaces.

This chapter also considers the challenges which hinder *dialogic* participation, including language and prior knowledge, and discusses some of the strategies students and teachers use to overcome these challenges. It considers the role of internal *dialogue* in the development of critical and higher order thinking skills and discusses how the translation process impacts on the development of these skills. It also considers students' changing understandings of the teaching and learning process and their realisation that they must learn to play new *games* in order to achieve their aspirations.

Tensions and contestations

Apart from individual differences causing tensions, teaching and learning *spaces* reverberate with social, political and historical influences which are reflected in the subject content presented and the *languages* and methods used to present it. Power relationships also exist between teachers and students, some of which are exacerbated by cultural and traditional backgrounds where students regard their teachers as 'masters' who may not be questioned. Conversely, male students from cultural backgrounds which promote gender inequity also enter a power relationship when they confront female teachers, whose position and knowledge they may neither accept nor respect and whose authority they frequently question. Additionally, students from different cultural backgrounds which have been traditionally at war may sense hostility or unrest when sharing *spaces*. Similarly, students from cultures within cultures, such as hierarchical caste systems, also experience uneasiness when sharing teaching and learning *spaces*.

Thus, the process of teaching and learning begins in tension-filled, non-neutral *spaces* which are "shot through with intentions and accents" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.293) and *heteroglossic* undercurrents of conflicting hopes, expectations and understandings. Furthermore, in academic contexts, these *spaces* are filled with timed, *finalisable* events such as lectures, consultations and assessment tasks, all strategically timetabled within semesters, terms and academic years. It is within these *spaces* that teachers and students meet and begin the teaching and learning process, that is, their personal and *unfinalisable* process of *going on* and *becoming*. The fact that *unfinalisable* processes are constrained by *finalisable* events, adds to the tensions. What happens in these *spaces* plays a significant role in the extent to which students achieve their aspirations to learn English, to understand concepts and to achieve high grades.

Defining the *spaces*

Spaces are boundaryless places in time. *Spaces* are, in Bakhtinian terms, boundaryless contexts. According to Doecke, Kostogriz and Charles (2004, p.32) "...spaces are produced through language". *Languages*, and specifically discourses, define *spaces*. It could be said that discourses *are* the *spaces*. *Everyday spaces*, for example, were discussed covertly in the previous chapter, *Languages*. *Everyday* discourses define, or are, *everyday spaces*. *Academic discourses* define, or are, *academic spaces*. That is not to say that *everyday spaces* and *academic spaces* are entirely separate. Rather, these *spaces* are moving and boundaryless. And because these *spaces* are not filled "as an immobile background", to use Bakhtin's words, they should be perceived "as an emerging whole, an event" (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.415).

Because *language* is always *languages* (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.140) and because *dialogue* is the starting point of language (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.50), *spaces* populated with people cannot exist without *dialogue*. As Bakhtin points out, "There is no existence, no meaning (q.v.), no word (q.v.) or thought that does not enter into dialogue or 'dialogic' ('*dialogichekii*') relations with the other, that does not exhibit intertextuality in both time and space" (Morris, 1994, p.247). Even a sole person enters into internal *dialogue* in *spaces* peculiar to him or herself. Thus *dialogue* may occur in *everyday spaces* and *academic spaces*, externally with others and internally with self.

In the previous chapter, it was also said that "*outsideness* is the most powerful factor in understanding" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7). The concept of *spaces* also accommodates the concept of *outsideness*. *Spaces* are entered into through *dialogue* and the discourse of the *spaces*. As students entered into *everyday spaces* by learning *"many new vocabularies"*[1] (ways of knowing), or how to *"cook barbecue"*[2] (ways of doing), students also entered into *academic spaces* by learning *"more specific vocabulary"* (Student 78F) (ways of knowing), and how to *"become more independent learner"* (Student 79F) (ways of doing) appropriate for those *spaces*.

Differences between *discipline-specific spaces*

Discipline-specific discourses have evolved as a means of facilitating the process of learning to *become* a member of a specific discipline or profession. But, as Kutz (1998, p.38) suggests, many conventions of academic discourse "are not arbitrary

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[1]See *Chapter 7: Languages* (p.147).
[2]See *Chapter 7: Languages* (p.149).

prescriptions, but have evolved as the clearest way to express the thinking done in various disciplines – even as a heuristic for that thinking". What these languages have in common and, as Morson and Emerson (1990, pp.141-142) point out, "the only thing they all have in common, is that they are each 'specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values'" (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.142). Every faculty has discipline-specific language which includes terminology, jargon, and acronyms. Students learn the discourses by participating, through internal and external *dialogue* – that is, by using the skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading*, and *writing* – in the knowledge and debates that constitute the disciplines and fields they are studying. Within those *spaces* they learn to think and be like a member of the profession they are studying. They learn ways of knowing and ways of doing appropriate for their profession, or their *space*.

When Bakhtin was considering the *dialogic* nature of multiple discourses and the relationships between them, he added a further note, namely: "The problem of 'precision' and 'depth'" (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.98). For Bakhtin, "precision" was "the goal for the natural sciences", while "depth" was the goal for the humanities (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.98). This "problem" of "precision" and "depth" emerged in this study as differences between the discipline-specific *spaces*. As one teacher from the Sciences commented:

> With maths you either know it or you don't. It can't change. 1+2 is always 3. (Teacher 11M).

Another teacher from the Arts, however, had a different view of "precision" and "depth", evident in his following comment:

> There isn't a right or wrong answer, and so it would be interesting and I'm sure those mathematicians and those into mathematical formulas, or philosophers, might actually put forward the idea that there aren't right or wrong answers either. I mean, even in science there are certain ways of doing things, but there are variations and diverse opinions about what would be good or bad. And so it would be the argument of why one is good and the other is bad, or can I reverse the argument. That's what I would be interested in. Is two and two always four? Now, if I spoke to a higher mathematician, I'm sure they'd give me the argument, 'Well, not always.' [laughs] I couldn't go into those areas, but I'm sure they might be able to. (Teacher 65M).

Several comments by this teacher highlight his sense of *creative understanding*, namely:

> There isn't a right or wrong answer;
>
> ... there are certain ways of doing things, but there are variations and diverse opinions about what would be good or bad;
>
> ... so it would be the argument of why one is good and the other is bad, or can I reverse the argument – that's what I would be interested in; and,

Is two and two always four?

This teacher's question, "Is two and two always four?", his belief that the answer is "not always", and the sense that he "couldn't go into those areas" are reflective of Wittgenstein's (1969, p.1) opening aphorisms of *The Blue Book*, when he suggests:

> The questions "What is length?", "What is meaning?", "What is the number one?" etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something.

It appears that INESB students are not the only ones who struggle with such questions. Their teachers also may suffer from "mental cramp" as "variations" and "diverse opinions" about "certain ways of doing things" and what is considered "good" or "bad" are debated and arguments reversed. Such debates and reversals of arguments, such *becoming*, occur through *dialogue*. As the teacher pointed out:

> ... <u>if I spoke</u> to a higher mathematician I'm sure <u>they'd give me the argument</u>, 'Well, not always.' (Teacher 65M) (my emphasis).

Teaching and learning as *dialogic* processes

Learning has been described by Freedman and Ball as "a dialogic process" (cited in Morson, 2004, p.317). Taking a Bakhtinian perspective, they also point to Bakhtin's belief that "All learning is at its core social" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p.6). Bakhtin also believed that "All knowledge in the humanities begins as an interaction between two points of view" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp.98-99). Although Bakhtin was referring specifically to the humanities, it could be argued that all knowledge in *any* discipline begins as an interaction, and specifically a *dialogic* interaction, between two points of view whether these points of view be shared externally by different interlocutors, or uttered internally in the mind of an individual self. This kind of interaction, or 'event' in Bakhtinian terms, "inevitably entails an evaluation that must in turn anticipate a counter evaluation" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp.98-99). It is this *dialogic* evaluation and counter evaluation, this *going on*, that facilitates the learning process, that is, the changing and *becoming* of a person's knowledges, values and attitudes. Ramsden (1992, p.4) also views learning as "a qualitative change in a person's view of reality" and suggests that teaching also "involves the same process". It implies, he says, "changing how *we* think about and experience teaching – it involves changes in our conceptions, in our common-sense theories of teaching as they are expressed in practice" (Ramsden, 1992, p.4) (author's emphasis).

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Entering the *spaces* – pedagogies and power

Power relations exist within teaching and learning *spaces*. Power equates to control and, together, they establish and determine what constitutes legitimate *dialogue* and forms of interaction within the *spaces*. In Bernstein's work, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique* (1996, p.19), he claims that:

> ... control establishes legitimate communications, and power establishes legitimate relations between categories. Thus, power constructs relations between, and controls relations within given forms of interaction.

It is the teachers – the 'masters' for many students – whose power and control establish *dialogic* relations and guidelines within pedagogic *spaces* and, as Bernstein (1996, p.19) points out, such power relations:

> ... create boundaries, legitimize boundaries, reproduce boundaries, between different categories of groups, gender, class, race, different categories of discourse, different categories of agents.

Bernstein's view of boundaries (which differs from Bakhtin's and his notion of 'boundarylessness') shows how such boundaries promote negative *outsideness* and hinder students from entering the *dialogic* and social process of learning. As Bernstein (1996, p.19) points out, "power always operates to produce dislocations, to produce punctuations in social space".

Learning by participation

Not only are languages and discourses learned by *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in a range of combinations and contexts, but discipline-specific content is also learned in the same way. In this study, those contexts where teachers are present include, primarily, the *spaces* of lectures and tutorials, as well as one-on-one consultations. Students have a limited number of options available to help them learn the *discourses* of discipline-specific *spaces*. As Laurillard (2002, p.1) suggests, "[students] can attend lectures or not; they can work hard or not; they can seek truth or better marks – but", as Laurillard also points out, "teachers create the choices open to them". Ramsden (1992, p.5) agrees that the aim of teaching is "to make student learning possible".

Lectures as *dialogic spaces*

While some *dialogue* may take place in this *space*, lectures traditionally are read or delivered, and become more of a monologue typical of a transmission model of teaching and learning, or a model of academic learning as "imparted knowledge" (Laurillard,

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2002, p.13). This model caused a range of challenges for students, as reflected in the following comment:

> [The teacher] tried to deliberate [deliver] the notes by his mouth and then we have to write it down really fast and then after that he say, 'You [INESB students] took 30 minutes to write one sentence.' How could he say that to us? And it's not just once, not twice, it's all the time. (Student 43.2M).

While this teacher's manner may have been exceptional, his method of delivery as one which did not encourage *dialogue* was not uncommon.[3] The following student's comment, as previously reported in Chapter 4, again highlights a lack of *dialogue* in the teaching process:

> *... some lecturers are very rushed for time. After [the lecture] they talk to you and say, 'Have you got question?' But if nobody interrupts him, so he just goes – but they still got time – about half an hour. Like yesterday, maybe it's the last lecture, and he say about the mid-term [examination], 'Any questions you want to ask about the mid-term?' One or two students ask him, 'Ah, no questions', so he say, 'OK, you can go home.'* (Student 15F).

If teaching and learning is a *dialogic* process, then questioning is an intrinsic part of that process. As Morson (2004, p.319) asserts, "Dialogue by its very nature invites questioning, thrives on it, demands it." The following teacher,[4] however, recognised problems with the transmission model of delivery, as evident in his comment:

> Most lecturers I know try to teach students like they are teaching students in a high school. 'I put this in your mouth, and in an exam we'll see if you throw out what I've given you', rather than seeing if the students understand the basic principles. (Teacher 11M).

The same teacher pointed to the need for *dialogue* in teaching and learning, in order for students to understand, to learn how to learn, and to become critical, analytical thinkers:

> I see three reasons students come to study. To understand the basic principles. [To learn] logical/analytical thinking processes and problem solving. ... And questioning. Never trust a lecturer. Learn to question. (Teacher 11M).

He added:

> Group study is also very important for those three reasons. (Teacher 11M).

These three reasons all require *dialogue*. If *dialogue* is hindered then learning these understandings, processes and skills is also hindered. The following quotation, while lengthy, demonstrates clearly how one student's study experience was becoming easier because of his teacher's use of *creative understanding* when lecturing. The observations of this mature-aged student were also based on his experience as a teacher himself in his

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[3]See *Chapter 4: Understanding* for further challenges relating to lectures and examples of lectures as poor *dialogic* spaces.
[4]This was one of three NESB teachers who felt that English language was not a challenge for INESB students.

own country:

> *It's getting better. It's been hard! It's not easy. It's really hard! This semester is probably the best semester. This is my fifth semester here and it's the best semester. I think it's because we've changed the lecturers. ... Now we've got this lecturer and he's awesome! He explains it and simplifies it so ... I mean, you cannot leave the room without understanding anything. And if you go to him and ask him, or if you ask questions during the lecture and he feels that you truly don't understand what he said, he will explain it a different way. He won't just repeat himself or tell you to open that book at whatever chapter, or whatever page, and you'll find it there, and read it there. He'll try to explain it.*
>
> *For example, last week we had to study something about [subject content], and he tried to simplify and make it easier for people to understand it. And it's the second time I've taken this subject because last year I failed it. Now I'm taking it this year. And from last year I could not understand this [subject content]. I was so worried about this part. And he just walked in and started making a chart. Put everything in the chart. And started explaining what it is, and just made it so simple. That little chart that he put on the board made it so simple. It explained everything to me.*
>
> *Yeah, unlike the lecturers I had before, I had some problems with them. They think ... most of the time they just talk about theirselves. Either they talk about theirselves (they're off the subjects), or they're just – PowerPoint – read it, then say it in a different way – PowerPoint – read it, then say it in a different way. You know, he just reads it and then says it in a different way. He's not really prepared. He's not really trying to help the students to understand. He's not even interested to find out if the students are understanding what he's saying or not.*
>
> *I mean, I'm a teacher too, you know, and when I'm standing in a classroom I can tell from people's faces who's interested or not, who's bored, who's understanding what I'm saying, who's not ... and those lecturers, the ones I had problems with, they didn't care! They didn't care if you give them that look that you're really lost, or you don't know what's going on. But other lecturers, the good ones that I've had, they glance at every one, and they take people out and ask them so many questions, just like they're reading their mind, you know – and it's so professional, so clever.* (Student 60.1M).

There was, however, one case reported of a teacher changing the traditional monologic format of the lecture to one that was more *dialogic* where student interaction was not only encouraged but expected, as reported by an international student from an English speaking background:

> *Even with a large class size, the lectures were more interactive. We had group work in lectures, question and answer periods in lectures, and could ask a question any time, pretty much. It was almost like having two tutorials instead of a lecture and tutorial per week. I enjoyed the interaction; I felt it was more effective than having someone stand at the front of the room and not be somewhat approachable.* (Student 50F).

Most commonly in this study, however, *dialogue* between teachers and students was reserved for tutorials, where there was time and *space* for questions, discussions and debates arising from content material covered in lectures. The extent to which students could enter *dialogically* into tutorial *spaces* varied.

Tutorials as *dialogic spaces*

Student *dialogic* participation in tutorials is not only encouraged, but is often an assessable component of a subject. Although students are encouraged to participate *dialogically*, they need *time* to respond. A slow, or non-, response from a student may indicate that a translation is in process, rather than an unwillingness to respond. As one teacher noted in a diary entry:

> International students are very reticent in group situations. However, when encouraged, give well thought out responses if they had sufficient time to consider their answers. (Teacher 40M – diary, undated).

Time also exacerbated other underlying reasons for students' non-participation. For example, students from Eastern countries in particular often felt "reticent" (Teacher 38M) to respond because of a sense of respect for their teachers as authority figures who should not be questioned, a sense which was reinforced by teachers' unconscious use of academic jargon. As Morson (2004, p.322) notes:

> [Teachers] speak the language and thoughts of academic educators, even when we imagine we are speaking in no jargon at all, and that jargon, inaudible to us, sounds with all the overtones of authority to our students. We are so prone to think of ourselves as fighting oppression that it takes some work to realize that we ourselves may be felt as oppressive and overbearing, and that our own voice may provoke the same reactions that we feel when we hear an authoritative voice with which we disagree.

Students, however, began to understand that jargonistic talk was part of the *game* played within the academy. As one student commented:

> *... lecturers, they just stand there and they speak with different language, you know, an academic language. I've never heard that word. And then you go and ask about this word and they tell you what it means in English and, like, 'Well why don't you say that at the beginning then?' So it confuses me, you know. I think they should simplify their way of introducing information to students.* (Student 60.1M).

Group work and teamwork as *dialogic spaces*

To some degree, a student's cultural background did influence his or her willingness to participate in group work and class *dialogue*, at least initially, as reflected in the following comment:

> *In [my country] you can never say anything that might offend. You cannot say anything directly. Here, if something doesn't suit, you just say it. (Student 4.1F).*

Nevertheless, group work was considered by most students to be a beneficial *dialogic* opportunity to help them achieve their aspirations, as highlighted in the following comments:

> *I like [group work] very, very much because <u>I can ask</u> my class mates.* (Student 85M); (my emphasis).

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Another agreed:

> *For international students, group work is better. <u>We can talk</u> and gather more information and English.* (Student 72M); (my emphasis).

Others saw group work as an opportunity to work together with Australian students:

> *We <u>talk to each other</u>. We <u>help each other to understand</u>.* (Student 84M); (my emphasis).

Another student added:

> *I like to <u>work with others</u>. <u>Group discussion</u> you know a lot <u>and maybe you can learn very fast through discussion</u>. You can't do that alone.* (Student 22F); (my emphasis).

The following student's comment also reflects how each team member's *outsideness* can contribute to *creative understanding*, to students *going on*, both in their individual learning and with each other, and to an overall sense of *becoming*.

> *I enjoy working in teams here. Teamwork is good because, when working on a topic, I might only understand a little part, but <u>together we can understand a lot</u>.* (Student 4F); (my emphasis).

Despite students' willingness to participate in classroom *dialogue*, many students had not been taught *how* to participate. As Thomas (1993, p.42) points out:

> The inertia of years of socialisation of different conventions of schooling, the framing of appropriate classroom behavior shaped by other classes, and a pre-existing structure that formats a system of evaluation and student-instructor roles and status all combine to restrict participation in an alternative classroom culture.

Additionally, a lack of facility in English language – for students and, in some cases, teachers – contributed to the students' non-participation in classroom *dialogue*. The use of slang and acronyms also impeded students' understanding and involvement in classroom *dialogue*, resulting in a sense of negative *outsideness* and confusion in how to *go on*.[5]

Racism and discrimination as *negative outsideness*

Some students reported that Australian students did not talk to them or want them in their groups. Behaviour perceived as racist, from some teachers and local students, also hindered students' participation and resulted in further negative *outsideness*. Morson (2004, p.329) refers to a conversation[6] which may reflect some teachers' behaviours that could hinder students' participation. "The good-humored smile" he states:

> ... represents the confident sense that all proper opinion is behind him; it is what insulates him from dialogue. We have all encountered that smile when asking a real question, answered automatically with the smirk of those who are in the know. As teachers, perhaps the most important thing we can do is to avoid accompanying an answer with

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[5]See *Chapter 4: Understanding* for further examples.
[6]Between Levin and Sviazhsky in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

such a smile or smirk.

Students' reluctance to participate in class discussions, as Ramsden (1992, p.168) points out, is also because most people "do not feel like talking freely to people who dismiss [our ideas] or who seem unsympathetic to us". As Ramsden (1992, p.168) points out, "Tradition in university teaching, it seems, may have temporarily blinded us to an obvious truth", a "truth" expounded upon by the following student, when reflecting on the qualities of his *"favourite"* teachers during the course of his tertiary studies in three different countries:

> *They're down to earth. They make you feel good. They never tell you you're wrong. They never point out your mistakes. They make you understand even if they know you're wrong and it's your mistake, they'll make you figure it out yourself. They will show it to you without making you feel, you know, like, 'That was a stupid mistake', 'How could I not understand that?' You know, they have a smile on their face all the time with everybody, not just me, with everybody. Everybody loves them, they're hard workers. You can't tell, you can't feel, that they've been preparing themself before they come to lecture. They're all prepared.* (Student 60.2M).

He continued, focusing on one particular lecturer who he considered was an outstanding teacher:

> *He covers all aspects and he knows his stuff very well. He kind of puts you to the challenge. And it's good. But still, he never puts you down. He's down to earth. He treats you like a friend.* (Student 60.2M).

Teacher/student *dialogue* to learn content and understand concepts

Despite some reports of racist behaviour, students' experiences with teachers were generally positive. Students indicated that teachers were willing to enter into *dialogue* with them, as reflected in the following comments:

> *[Teachers] are more friendly [than in my country]. PhDs here are totally different. PhDs are good at communication here. They talk to students here. It's not like that in [my country].* (Student 4F).

This perception of teachers as being friendly and approachable opens the way for *dialogue* which students are wanting, as evident in the following comments from a student who saw the possibility of extended *dialogue* with his teachers as very beneficial to his learning. As he explained:

> *I just want some further discussions with lecturers in some topics I am interested in, because in [my country], people don't have so many experiences at marketing and management in Western style. So something is out of textbook we wondering some further discussions in our [University] study life. In [our country], we can talk to our lecturers because they compare Western style and [Eastern] style, so it makes deep sense to us. But here, [my country] is not so interested country for people, so maybe they cannot compare it, but I just want more common sense and description about the marketing system, something out of [not in] the textbook – just to talk, talk, talk.* (Student 17.1M).

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Such *dialogue* and *"talk, talk, talk"* is not only critical to learning discipline-specific discourse and content, but also teaches students how to learn, that is, it facilitates their *going on* and becoming. Additionally, such *dialogue*, through the *outsideness* of individual students and teachers, opens the possibility for *creative understanding* and future potentials. As Morson (2004, p.331) points out:

> We not only learn, we also learn to learn, and we learn to learn best when we engage in a dialogue with others and ourselves. We appropriate the world of difference, and ourselves develop new potentials. Those potentials allow us to appropriate yet more voices. Becoming becomes endless becoming.

Teachers' use of *creative understanding* to facilitate *dialogue*

The following teacher's comment illustrates her use of *creative understanding* in dealing with the challenge of having students participate in group work:

> Students in this subject tend to participate because we put them into small groups right from the start, so they have to get into little chat circles. A strategy that I would do, if necessary, would be to deliberately mix them up. And I often do actually, just go around the room and put them into a different group rather than getting them into little clusters where people 'bomb out'. I mean it's all about behaviour, so a lot of the stuff you do is changing the dynamics of the behaviour. (Teacher 37F).

This notion of 'bombing out' is reflected in Morson's (2004, p.323) comment that, "... in dialogue, the destruction of the opponent destroys the very dialogic sphere in which the word lives". As Morson (2004, p.324) points out, "One wants not to destroy but to learn from an opponent, to enrich one's own perspective by the exchange." Such enrichment is evident in the following teacher's use of *creative understanding* to encourage *dialogue* caused by racial tensions. As he explained:

> Yeah, well, the secret weapon that I use with the Pakistanis and Indians is 'cricket'. We manage to talk cricket. [laughs] And they'll talk about it to each other. (Teacher 26M).

His further comment indicates how this *dialogue* overcame feelings of negative *outsideness* and how intercultural communication and understanding, or *going on*, were enhanced:

> … I've also seen lots of friendships between a Pakistani and Indian – one is Muslim, one is Christian – and they were really good friends. And lots of Pakistanis and Indians getting together because they get out here [to Australia and find] they're quite the same. (Teacher 26M).

Dialogue not only overcame traditional boundaries and barriers, but also opened the possibilities of *creative understanding* and the *potential* of *outsideness*. The same teacher explained how he tapped into this potential and the positive outcomes which resulted:

> Well, we've got to do something on telecommunications policy – it's in the textbook – and I just say [to the students], 'Alright, telecommunications infrastructure and policy in

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your country.' And I came away with one of the richest learning experiences I've ever had, sitting down and learning about the telecommunications structures of fourteen countries.

And in the case of the Pakistanis and the Indians, hearing two or three different perspectives and researchers on basically the same topic, but they were like different talks because they were contextualised to their experience so it was 'nested', and I thought, there's 'nested contextualisation' in international education. That's where you look at the Indian point of view, but if you've got multiple Indians in your class, you've now got multiple points of view within an Indian context. And the Hindu and caste system, and that's a rich, complex system. (Teacher 26M).

The following teacher also spoke about his use of *dialogue* to encourage intercultural communication and understanding - *going on* - between INESB students and Australian students. His enthusiasm is evident as he explained the positive outcomes which resulted from students talking to each other:

> The **perception** of the other, from **both** sides. And that was **learning**! It was very exciting and I used it on every occasion to build up so they could go forward. Because they usually came with a very different set of skills. Not better or worse, but **other**, which **sometimes** impressed the Australians and the Australian skills impressed them also. So it was actually building up to 'Would you like to attempt a conversation together?' I found that the most difficult, that they walked into the room separately and they walked out separately when we first began, and then hopefully it proved to me at the end of three years that they were completely teams or groups that were cross-cultural and that was what I found was a success. I could easily read that. <u>You could tell people were talking to each other</u>. (Teacher 65M); (Teacher's emphasis in bold); (my emphasis underlined).

The following student's comment also illustrates the process of "people ... talking to each other" and their willingness to enter into *dialogue* in order to clarify understandings and establish how to *go on*:

> *Well, we, like everyone, was asking [the teacher] questions and I asked her and then she went around to our groups and I asked her once in my group and she explained parallel to them so they were like, they explain it together to me and I like, they were asking for me, questions.* (Student 37F).

Technology and *dialogue*

Technology was seen by a number of students as creating *dialogic spaces* where they could interact with teachers when other factors prevented them, such as their spoken language, shyness, and time restraints. As one student commented:

> *Teachers are easy to approach [but] if we are shy we can email them.* (Student 47.2F);

while another pointed to the effectiveness of email:

> *I also email [teachers] and get a quick response. It is very convenient.* (Student 14F).

Online forums and chat rooms also provided *spaces* for valuable *dialogue*:

> *I use [online chat rooms] to talk about questions to do with subjects. I think this is a very good thing to do. When you are discussing questions, it really helps you to remember*

things like structure and terminology and really give the picture of it. But if you have a group discussion, you cannot have a chit-chat thing instead of doing work, but when it comes to questions, you can. This is very good. We can just write a chat page and discuss things. If I'm not sure where to find something, they say, 'Check such-and-such a page.' I can say, 'Oh, I agree with you there.' It's good. These are other students, both on-campus and [off-campus]. (Student 47.2F).

The explicit message in many students' comments as illustrated here was their wish to engage in *dialogue* with others, especially their teachers and colleagues, in a variety of ways and *spaces*. The possibilities for *dialogue* are already positive because of the informal nature of the teacher/student relationship at the University, as the following student appreciated:

> *No first names in [my country]. I call by first names here. It makes you feel like friends or partners or colleagues instead of teacher and student. Here they are friendly, they greet you, maybe tap your shoulder like a friend. In [my country] I say, 'Good morning, Sir', but here I say, 'Hi! Hello! How are you?'* (Student 4.1F).

The informal nature of the teacher/student relationship as perceived by this student, of course, may only be informal in a superficial sense as, beneath the surface, the relationship is really between the 'assessor' and the 'assessed'.

Prior knowledge, prerequisite skills and 'common sense'

Students' lack of local knowledge, or *"common sense"* (Student 17.1M), also hindered them from participating *dialogically* in discipline-specific *spaces*, as reflected in the following comment:

> *It doesn't make any difference that we all start together. We do not have the same background [field knowledge].* (Student 27M).

Difficulties caused by this lack of 'common sense' were exacerbated when subject content was decontextualised and Australian-focused, such as in the 'VB case' reported in Chapter 5 (p.114-115). However, as Laurillard (2002, p.15) suggests, "If formal education provided more naturally embedded activities, students could do their own sense-making." While teachers recognised that a lack of prior understanding and local knowledge caused difficulties for students, as reported in Chapter 4, the extent to which teachers were prepared to 'internationalise' their subjects varied.

Internationalising subjects

Some teachers felt strongly that, because students had enrolled in an Australian university, all subject content should be relevant to the Australian context, an approach which was justifiable and necessary for particular courses, such as those developed to meet the requirements of Australian councils, registration boards and institutes, for

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example, specific courses in the Health Sciences and Commerce. However, a number of teachers took this approach for other reasons, as the following participant observed:

> Some [teachers] are very tuned in [with their students' needs]. Others, maybe because they've been here [at the University] for the majority of their academic life, are very sheltered, very sheltered. And they're very focused on their own discipline and getting done what they've got to do, and the daily rigours, which we all know. And I've found some of them very narrow in their points of view, maybe because they're not thinking outside the square they're in, basically, and really tuning in to their students. (Other 58F).

The following teacher, recognising this problem and also recognising potential in the *outsideness* of INESB students, sought *creative understanding* to encourage other teachers to "internationalise subjects" (Teacher 9M). As he said:

> Not just **de-Australianise**, but bring in other perspectives. Use articles from other countries, for example. I don't want to bureaucratise things. I just want to encourage people to do these sorts of things. (Teacher 9M).

There were teachers, however, who did bring in other perspectives to make subjects more relevant to the students' contexts, and used *creative understanding* to negotiate ways of "situating knowledge in real-world activity" (Laurillard, 2002, p.23). This is discussed further in *Chapter 9: Games*.

Deep versus surface learning

As reported in earlier chapters, it was commonly reported by teachers that INESB students (and Asian students in particular) tended to 'recall and repeat', resorting to rote learning and memorisation. As one teacher commented:

> We have a lot of open book exams which tends to reflect the fact that they'd [Asian students] rather take the material straight out or transpose it rather than thinking about its application. (Teacher 40M).

These general perceptions agree with Kember's (2000, p.108) comment that there are "widespread beliefs that these students prefer to be passive learners and resist the introduction of forms of teaching which are not didactic and require them to play an active role in their own learning". However, growing numbers of studies are revealing that teachers' perceptions of Asian students and their approaches to study are based on misunderstandings (Biggs; Kember & Gow, cited in Ramburuth, 2000, p.3; Kember, 2000).

A comparative study by Ramburuth (2000, p.6) of 248 international students and 719 local students at the University of New South Wales found that "there were no significant differences between the two cohorts in their deep approach to learning". In fact, the study showed that international students from Asian backgrounds not only

engaged in deep learning but also appeared to do so to a greater extent than their Australian counterparts (Ramburuth, 2000, p.7).[7] Ramburuth (2000, p.3) refers to further studies involving Asian and local students in Australian universities (Niles, 1995; Ramburuth, 1997; Volet & Renshaw, 1996) which also found that "the approaches to learning of Asian students were not vastly different from those of their local Australian counterparts". In fact, Volet and Renshaw (cited in Ramburuth, 2000, p.3) concluded that "Chinese students' approach to study was, like that of their Australian counterparts, influenced by their perceptions of course requirements rather than any 'typical' personal or cultural characteristic" (Ramburuth, 2000, p.3). These findings seem to contrast with the general assumption by the majority of teachers in the research reported here that Asian students, in particular, learn by rote and lack higher order thinking skills.

Like all students, however, INESB students are conditioned by previous study experiences to use surface strategies such as rote learning and memorisation. Also, rote learning and other surface learning techniques are not only used by INESB students. It is rather, as Kember (2000, p.108) suggests, "a universal phenomenon" as students choose those study strategies which will result in the best academic outcomes for them. Students choose specific 'study' strategies – as opposed to 'learning' strategies, since 'study' does not necessarily equate with 'learning' – for a specific purpose, namely, to pass an assessment task. As Kember (2000, p.108) points out, "Students will adopt a surface approach if they perceive that is what the course and assessment requires or if that approach best enables them to deal with the demands of the course." More specifically, students choose surface approaches when surface approaches enable them to deal with the demands of assessment within the time available to them. That is, they choose strategies which help them pass their subjects – or to overcome *heteroglossic* tensions between the *unfinalisable* processes of teaching and learning, and the *finalisable* process of assessment. And frequently, these surface-level strategies require little, if any, external *dialogue*. The *dialogic* process of learning reverts from being about "what" and "how" students learn, to "how much" they remember (Ramsden, 1992, p.40).

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[7]Scollon and Scollon (2001, p.152) claim that Asian cultures and languages have been influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and traditions of communication without language, where it is thought that the most important things cannot be communicated in language, and that the ideal language is to "purge one's speech and one's writing of everything but the essential information". Thus, they suggest that "one might expect the average Asian to be somewhat more sceptical about the value of direct, informational communication, and to place a higher value on thinking deeply about a subject" (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, p.152).

Internal *dialogue*, critical and higher order thinking skills

It was commonly reported by teachers that students lacked critical and higher order thinking skills. These skills also require *dialogue* and, in particular, internal *dialogue* through questioning and reasoning. The following student outlines her understanding of critical thinking, her examples of internal *dialogue* illustrating her developing critical and higher order thinking skills. Perhaps this quotation also demonstrates how a sophisticated understanding of 'critical thinking' in this case is undiminished by simple direct speech, and unhindered by a relatively unsophisticated form of English language:

> *[I have to] find other writers who have same and different opinions. [I] need to critique writers' ideas; bring them all in, others' opinions. And bring your own opinion in. … I do agree it is better to have critical thinking. We have our own ideas. It's like something you ask a question to yourself, 'Why does this happen?' Then someone answers you. And you say, 'Oh, is it true?' And you find other resources. When you find other resources you get to know people's writing – the writers. You get to know what kind of people there are in this world. Then you feel that you want to critique them because you don't agree with them, so you put that in so that someone else knows what you want to tell them.* (Student 47.1F).

The student's comments also reflect her sense of *going on* and learning as she enters into *dialogue* with others, and her sense of *becoming* as she assimilates others' knowledge into her own thinking and writing. This tendency to "assimilate others' discourse", as Bakhtin (1981, p.342) points out, "takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense". In particular, he continues:

> Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.342) (author's emphasis).

And it is *internally persuasive discourse* that is instrumental in critical and higher order thinking.

Internal *dialogue* and translation

Before any discourse can be assimilated into one's *becoming*, however, some meaning of the discourse must be understood. In the case of INESB students, and the previous student who explained her understanding of critical thinking, this requires translation of the discourses, that is, of the texts that need to be critiqued. Wittgenstein (1922, p.91) ponders the process of translation and understanding when he asks:

> If I know the meaning of an English word and a synonymous German word, it is impossible for me not to know that they are synonymous, it is impossible for me not to be able to translate them into one another.

If, however, the meanings of some words are *not* known, as is often the case with INESB students, then this translation process becomes more challenging, as evident in the following student's comment:

> *Oh [nervous laugh]. [The textbook] is a lot of work! ... I read it every day! [laughs] And if I find some word I don't understand I try to use my translator or my dictionary. If I can't find the word in the translator or dictionary I just leave it. I have no choice.* (Student 43.2M).

Translation difficulties also occurred as new, discipline-specific discourses and concepts were learned, as the following student explained:

> *I couldn't explain certain things about my course to my parents because I don't know the words in [my language]. I don't know if I understand the concepts at all, because I have learned them in English and can't explain them in [my language].* (Student 51F).

Another student explained the difficulties of translation, not only of words which had no equivalent in her language, but also of difficulties with the nuances of language:

> *The most difficult thing for me is that there are a lot of words in [my language] that I couldn't put into English and a lot of words in English that I couldn't put into [my language]. Well, there are some words to describe something which are different in [my country]. Something like 'the food is beautiful'. But I really don't know how to translate that into [my language], because we don't say food is 'beautiful'. We use 'beautiful' to describe music, or people, or some books – the cover is so beautiful – but I never say food is 'beautiful'. I can understand if it is 'delicious'.* (Student 4.2F).

While Wittgenstein (1922, p.59) believed that "Definitions are rules for translation of one language into another" there is, nevertheless, a constant problem of the making of meaning. Wherever multiple languages exist, whether 'within' languages or 'across' languages, translation becomes a part of the communication process. The commonality of what is meant by the 'sender' and what is understood by the 'receiver' is sometimes less than and sometimes greater than what was intended. Concepts, like *spaces* and the *languages* and discourses which make up those *spaces*, are boundaryless and have a kind of infusion with horizons which makes them indefinable. Bakhtin, it could be said, is *par excellence* showing that meanings are not bounded and highlighting the futility of a dictionary definition or of the definiteness of defining. Nevertheless, while Bakhtin never offered a theory of translation (Emerson, 1984, p.xxxi), he did consider that translation, broadly conceived, was the essence of all human communication and that crossing boundaries was perhaps the most fundamental of all human acts (Emerson 1984, p.xxxi). As Emerson (1984, p.xxxi) explains:

> In fact, Bakhtin viewed the boundaries between national languages as only one extreme on a continuum; at the other extreme, translation processes were required for one social group to understand another in the same city, for children to understand parents in the same family, for one day to understand the next. These stratifications of language, Bakhtin argued, do not exclude one another; they

intersect and overlap, pulling words into various gravitational fields and casting specific light and shadow. Living discourse, unlike a dictionary, is always in flux and in rebellion against its own rules.

The challenges caused by these "stratifications of language", and the associated difficulties of translation, impacted on some students' developing critical and higher order thinking skills. Critical analysis and higher order thinking require internal *dialogue* and understanding the difference between questioning "What does this mean?", that is, a *translation*, and questioning the meaning of what it *does* mean, that is, a *critical analysis* or interpretation. Not all students were always translating, of course, as is evident with the student who could not explain certain concepts to her parents because she knew them only in English, or with those students who had higher levels of English language proficiency. However, students with lower levels of proficiency in English – including academic, non-academic and idiomatic[8] languages – were hindered from entering into an internal *dialogue* at deeper, or higher, levels, that is, questioning the meaning of what it *does* mean. Additionally, some students were reluctant to question the writing of an authority figure because, as one teacher explained, "They tend to think very much in terms of what's written by other people as gospel" (Teacher 40M). This tendency, however, appeared to be changing, according to the following teacher:

> ... certainly the younger [students] have been more open to change because maybe they've experienced different things in more recent times. But the older ones, particularly from China – China is an interesting example – my experience with PRC students, not Chinese students, but PRC mainland as distinct from those [from other parts], for example, Singapore and Malaysia, they're in a sense far more Western in their perspective than the PRC. The older the PRC student the less they are likely to think in broader terms, whereas, of recent times, the younger ones, and I have one student in particular in my … class who's from the PRC and she's young, and she's quite willing to challenge the other students in class. She's not frightened to put her 'two bob's worth' in and say something.
>
> Now whether this is peculiar to this young lady or whether it's [pause] but I've also observed it in other younger, inverted commas, 'Chinese'. They're more likely to put their hand up and say something as distinct from the older ones. Now, that may also be true of Westerners as well. If you have a group of younger Australians, they might be far more open to challenging things and asking questions than older people are in that sense, so <u>it may not be a cultural issue at all</u>. It may be an age issue. I don't know. I don't know. But we observe it in a particular cultural group, <u>we automatically fall back on the assumption that it's a cultural issue, but it may not be</u>. But that's one thing I've noticed of recent times. (Teacher 23M); (my emphasis).

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[8]That is, idiomatic language which is neither *everyday*, specifically *academic*, nor *discipline-specific*, for example, the word 'elicit', as in *'Elicit a response'* (Student 60.2M), or the word 'immerse', as in *'Immerse in fluid'* (Student 47.2F). See, for example, *Chapter 5: Achievement* (p.100).

If students overcame any perceived reluctance to question, however, then managed to translate and interpret the language correctly to the point where they *could* question and analyse what the writer was saying, there still remained significant hindrances to their being able to apply and express their analyses in other contexts, whether oral or written, as the following teacher explained:

Teacher: [Students need] to be able to analyse and bring out issues and then the application of the law to those particular issues; and it's one of the areas that the Asian students particularly have difficulty.

Interviewer: In knowing how to apply it, or how to express it?

Teacher: [In knowing] how to express the application of it. (Teacher 40M).

The following student agreed, explaining the problems she encountered with expressing her ideas:

I would love to have HDs [High Distinctions] but I do have problems with my writing skills and how to portray my ideas from my head on paper. (Student 46F).

Transferability of learning skills

To overcome hindrances caused by *language* and background, students drew on a range of strategies to achieve their aspirations. Most students had learned to play *academic games* in their own countries with varying degrees of success and so, initially and most commonly, these strategies involved trying to transfer to this new context, study skills which they had successfully used in other contexts. Generally, however, students found that strategies which were successful at home were no longer successful in this new context.[9] As one student commented:

... [In my country] when the exams came, I would put all of the books on the table and read all the books! In [my country] when the books are in [my language], I can read faster, but if the books are English I will go crazy! [Student 5F].

Trying to overcome such difficulties by studying longer hours did not always help, as the following student pointed out:

... last semester, I tried really hard. I studied five hours per day, but you just sit there and then you don't understand it. There's no point in studying. [Student 43.1M].

This caused students to seek different strategies to try to determine how to *go on*, with varying degrees of success. As one student explained:

In my country, you can quite rely on friends. We compare notes. We go to the lecturer. We help each other. But not here. It might be my bad experience ...In my country I can ask for help. People understand each other. I'm not quite sure. I think here, friends try to help friends [pause] and I am not a stranger in my system. (Student 27M).

The student explained his *"bad experience"* when he had helped an Australian student.

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[9]For further discussion, see *Chapter 4: Understanding* (p.84-86).

He said:

> *She miss a lecture so I give her my notes. [I said] 'OK, that's OK, no worries, we are friends, I can help you.' But two weeks pass and I miss one class. I ask her for her notes. She says, 'No, nothing special [happened in the lecture].' So I think, 'OK, I don't [get] your notes.' [sigh].* (Student 27M).

The successful transfer of skills, however, was highly dependent on students' facility with English language which, for Bakhtin, involves "the reorganization and redevelopment of semiotic tools from the native language to the second language, *through participation in social practices*" (DaSilva Iddings, Haught & Devlin, 2005, p.34) (my emphasis). Students were often hindered from participating in the teaching and learning practices, primarily because of their lack of English language. This non-participation not only hindered their further learning of English and subject content, but also hindered the reorganisation, redevelopment and transfer of their existing skills to the new context, regardless of whether these skills would prove useful in this new context, or otherwise.

Choosing strategies for *going on*

The students' choice of study and other strategies impacted on the achievement of their hopes, expectations, and aspirations, as discussed in Chapter 5. Conversely, students' hopes, expectations and aspirations influenced their choice of study strategies. When students began to experience challenges associated with the complex negotiation of languages, discourses, and ways of doing things in the academy, they realised that they had to change their hopes, expectations and aspirations, and/or the strategies they used to achieve them. They began to understand that the process of learning involves the negotiation through a complex maze that is described (though not by the students themselves, of course) in terms of *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. It is, as Kostogriz (2004, p.3) suggests in relation to "understanding literacy", a "complex interplay as people engage in meaning-making events within multiple systems of spatial and social relations". They also began to realise that the *language-games* and *academic games* which they had learned to play in other contexts – that is, in other *spaces* with other rules – may or may not help them now. They understood that if they were to *"survive"*[10] students had to *"recover very quickly"* (Student 18.1F) and learn how to play new *games* with new rules. As the following student explained:

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[10]As reported in Chapter 5, the following student reiterates his need to survive:
> *For me, I learn how to survive in my subject, how to pass. But I am not quality and not understand. I think the person who has quality must know the system. He must know how the thing works and although they don't teach you that, you are supposed to know.* (Student 27M).

I realise something, like, people are different; really are different. Because you come from different backgrounds, you have different learning methods and you can't change suddenly, but something, most of the things, you have to be sensible and you have to recover very quickly and you have to change it when you know that it's helpful or is not helping at all. This I realised for myself. Most of the time you have to just keep on thinking, 'Which way is the better way? Why people do this? Why people do this and can get the results? Why you can't?' This must be a problem for me. You know. So I have to think like this. (Student 18.1F).

This student's focus on finding ways of *going on*, and her sense of *becoming*, are reflected in her focus on personal change and development and her use of *internal dialogue* as she questions and explains her behaviour. Her further comments illustrate her continued sense of *becoming* through *external dialogue* with others and their *outsideness*:

And I think it depends what kinds of friends you choose, because I just started to mix with them in summer because most of my ... friends went back to [our country]. And I did the summer project and met with my colleagues [from other countries] and I started meeting them over the three months. And that was really a big change for me because they are really smart in this project and doing many things. And they are mature. They are older than me, so I learn from them, I change. (Student 18.1F).

The same student's following comment echoes Ramsden's (1992, p.40) belief that student learning in higher education depends on how people experience and organise the subject matter of a learning task; it is about "what" and "how" they learn, rather than "how much" they remember. After reflecting for a moment, she said:

*It is more about learning **how** I learn than learning about the subject content.* (Student 18.1F); (Student's emphasis).

Summary and transition

Students enter teaching and learning *spaces* through *dialogue*. They learn the *languages* and discourses of discipline-specific *spaces* by participating in them through *dialogue*. Many factors hindered the students in this study from entering and participating in these *spaces*, including a lack of facility with English language, cultural inhibitions, and a lack of background knowledge, prerequisites, and *"common sense"* (Student 17.1M). Students drew on a range of strategies to overcome the challenges they experienced. They recognised that they had to reconsider their hopes, expectations and aspirations, and change the strategies they used to achieve them. Students found that strategies which were useful in other contexts or *spaces* were not useful, or not *as* useful, in these new *spaces*. They began to recognise that there were *ways of doing* things with which they were not familiar and which threatened their chances of success. They began to recognise that success involved playing new *games* with new *rules*. Those students who were able to *"recover very quickly"* (Student 18.1F) and continue their studies, realised

that they had to learn the *games* and the rules of the *spaces* if they were to have a chance of achieving their aspirations or, at least, appearing to have achieved them. The ways in which students learned to play these *games* is discussed in the next chapter, *Chapter 9: Games*.

Part C

Chapter 9: Games

Synopsis

Teaching, learning and assessment are integral parts of a continuous and *unfinalisable* process. Assessment is an artificial endpoint, a staging process in a process that orients students and teachers along their way through the process of teaching and learning. In the context of academia, however, teaching, learning and especially assessment become timed, finalisable events. *Heteroglossic* tensions arise because timed, finalisable assessment tasks are used to record and report the learning that has taken place during the course of what is an *unfinalisable* process. Assessed achievement, or results, is or are determined by the best one can do under the circumstances on the day. *Heteroglossic* tensions also exist between the finalisability of teaching, learning and assessment in the timed context of the students' academic experience and the *unfinalisability* of their *going on* and *becoming*.

This chapter is about the *academic games* of teaching, learning and assessment. In particular, it focuses on the *academic game* of assessment (achievement) because the students themselves expressed strong aspirations to achieve high grades. It discusses ways in which students learn the rules and how to play the *games*, including ways they learn to manipulate the *games* and test the boundaries of play. It discusses strategies that students, and teachers, use to help them play the *games* expected by the academy. It considers the role of assessment in the *dialogic* process of teaching and learning, and highlights feedback as a critical factor in students' *going on*. It briefly discusses the most commonly used assessment methods and discusses assessment in the light of *creative understanding*. It considers students' *becoming* and how their hopes, expectations and aspirations change over time. In particular, it considers how students begin to understand that success is more about being a 'player' than being a 'winner'.

Defining the *games*

Just as there are ways of doing things in an *everyday* sense within the community (*everyday games*),[1] so too are there ways of doing things within the academy (*academic games*). Drawing on Wittgenstein's (1958) notion of *language-games*, these ways of

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[1] Many of these ways of doing, or *games*, in the *everyday* context are discussed in Chapter 3.

doing within the academy are referred to here as *games*. They refer to the norms and procedures, which constitute part of the intellectual practices and policies of the University and reflect traditions and conventions upheld by the academy as an essential part of what it is to be a university. For teachers, these *games* include the preparation and presentation of teaching materials; consultations with students; assessment, feedback and grading of assessment tasks; and a growing list of administrative duties to facilitate all of these things. Another *game* which teachers are increasingly required to play is that of 'research'. For students, *academic games* refer to ways of doing, such as attending lectures; participating in tutorials and workshops; learning new study strategies; consulting with academic and support staff; accessing academic texts; writing academic English; and completing academic assessment tasks.

The concept of *games*, particularly in regard to *writing*, also builds on Casanave's (2002, p.xvii) notion of seeing academic writing "metaphorically as a game". As with most *games*, there are rules, conventions and strategies, and there are various ways to compete (Casanave, 2002, p.4). Also, after Casanave (2002, p.155), the concept of *games* includes themes of language, knowledge (ways of knowing), power and prestige. As Casanave (2002, p.155) points out, "Within the game metaphor, these themes can be conceptualised as reflecting their own rules for practice, role relationships, and conventionalized ways of constructing and sharing knowledge."

When Wittgenstein (1958, p.11) used the term "language-*game*", he said it was "to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (author's emphases). Similarly, these *games* are activities or forms of life of which the *speaking* of language, in this case *English* language, is an intrinsic part. That is, *dialogue* plays a critical role in learning the *games* – in negotiating how to *go on*. Like *languages* and *spaces*, *games* reverberate with *heteroglossic* tensions. As Casanave (2002, p.3) points out, the outcome of such *games* for both students and teachers "can affect course grades, graduation, hiring, promotion, tenure, and reputation".

Dialogue and learning to play the *games*

All *games* of academia are negotiated, or played, with *dialogue*, using the skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. How well the *games* are played depends on the players' skills, especially in using *dialogue* appropriate to the *games*. It also depends on other factors,

for example; how quickly players recover when they realise that the *games* they are expected to play are not the same as the ones they played in the past; how quickly players learn to adapt strategies to play the new *games* well or, at least, passably well; how quickly players learn the rules of the *games*; and, in some cases, how well players learn to manipulate these rules. The extent of manipulation frequently depends on the extent of pressure on students to perform well – regardless of whether this pressure is real or perceived, or whether it is from others or themselves – and this pressure is exacerbated by time.

Differences in the *games*

As discussed in *Chapter 8: Spaces*, students have previously learned to play *academic games* in their own countries with varying degrees of success. They often expect to be able to play the same *games* in the same ways to achieve the same successful (or otherwise) results in this new context or *space*. The *games* they encounter, however, are frequently not the *games* they expect. Wittgenstein's (1958, p.33) insight regarding differences in *games*, reflects students' responses and confusion regarding *games*:

> Someone says to me: 'Shew the children a game.' I teach them gaming with dice, and the other says 'I didn't mean that sort of game.'

Students notice differences in the ways the *games* are played, the positions of the players and the role of the coach. The playing field may be a different size or shape. The net may be higher, or lower. The ball may be an odd shape that bounces crooked. (When is football soccer?) The rules may be different, or there may be more of them. Some games may be played with teams. Others may be played as individuals in a competitive series of round robins and grand slams. Unguided, individual practice against a garage door may be unlike any experience students have had in the past. Expectations of collective teamwork in the practice *space* may be quite different from the expectations of collective teamwork in the final playing *space* when collaboration becomes collusion and the cry, 'Foul play!' is heard. These metaphoric differences are illustrated in the following academic examples:

On the role of the coach and positions of the players

> *[In my country] what the teacher tells me is enough for me [to pass the subject]. ... Here I have to use a lot of time to study by myself.* (Student 14F).

> *It is different here. Teacher in [my country] tells us what we have to do. Here we need to be more independent. This is good, though difficult.* (Student 78F).

On the size and shape of the playing field

> *[In my country] we have to study, study, study for 12 months and remember everything for the end of year.* (Student 8.1F).

> *[In my country] we were asked to memorise lots of things in our minds that answered the questions.* (Student 4.1F).

On balls that bounce crooked

> *In [my country] 'multiple choice' means you can choose more than one [answer], but 'single choice' means that you choose just one [answer]. ... that's why I got caught. ... My first class test I got nearly zero!* (Student 17.1M).

On collective teamwork

> *Before Australia I didn't know what teamwork was.* (Student 4.1F).

> *I studied in groups [in my country]. But here I study alone. I want to [study with others] but find it difficult to find others to study with.* (Student 76M).

On differences between games

> *... how you do assignment work [in my country] is to go online and get some information and normally we copy and paste, so we don't have to refer[ence] and if we do we just change the structure, re-phrase it.* (Student 46.1F).

> *There is more hands on here. The students get to work in the labs themselves, not just watch someone else.* (Student 19F).

On the height of the net

> *In our uni [in my country] ... it's all right to download some articles from some website.* (Student 14F).

> *[In my country] you copy from the book ... and it's all right.* (Student 15F).

On the rules of the games

> *I did an essay in point form for an essay from website. You can't do that! But I didn't know.* (Student 8.1F).

> *We don't use referencing in [my country]. What is 'plagiarism'?* (Student 5F).

> *I never learned referencing at all [in my country]. I had to re-do [my essay].* (Student 83F).

Games, generally, are played in defined *spaces* according to defined rules. The playing *spaces*, generally, have boundaries. Balls bounce in or out. Sometimes they bounce *on* the boundary. Wittgenstein (1958, p.33) contemplates his concept of *games* and their boundedness when he asks:

> For how is the concept of a game bounded? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can *draw* one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word "game".)

He continues:

> "But then the use of the word unregulated, the 'game' we play with it is unregulated." – It is not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too. (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.33).

Academic *games*, likewise – although there are no rules for "how high" a student aspires or "how hard" a student tries – and, as Wittgenstein says, "is a game for all that and has rules too".

Learning the rules

According to Wittgenstein (1958, p.80), rules of games are learned "in the day-to-day practice of playing". In answering his own question, "Where is the connexion effected between the sense of expression 'Let's play a game of chess' and all the rules of the game?" he says:

> Well, in the list of rules of the game, in the teaching of it, in the day-to-day practice of playing.

Students learn the rules, and the connection between the rules and the *games*, by practising and playing the *games*. A player, in order to 'win' a *game* – or, as Wittgenstein (1958, p.139) would say, "to jump over the boundary" – needs to learn to 'play' the *games*. New *games* require new skills to be learned, or existing skills to be transferred and adapted to new rules and conventions. New *languages* may also be used in talking about these new *games*. In order to learn these new *languages*, players also need to learn new rules, conventions and skills necessary to become proficient speakers – users – of the new languages involved in the new *games*. *Time* and *space* is essential to practise the *games*.

As indicated earlier, while the *spaces* in which *games* are played are boundaryless, *games*, on the other hand, have boundaries. These boundaries not only represent the playing *spaces* and the rules of the games, but also help to maintain the professional standards upheld by the University. That is, these boundaries help to maintain order, consistency, equitability and quality in teaching, learning, and assessment practices and outcomes. Bakhtin refers to "constraints", without which he believed "neither freedom nor creativity, neither unfinalizability nor responsibility, can be real" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.43), and this will be discussed more fully in *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice*. These boundaries, however, like the *games* played within them, evolve and *become* over time. Boundaries change through the playing of the *games*. The teacher who believed that the most successful learning comes from lessons where teachers "just create a very loose framework and let everybody

move within that" (Teacher 26M), reflects how boundaries can change over time. This teacher's comments are discussed more fully later in this chapter.

In the previous chapter, it was shown that students' access to the *spaces* of learning is hindered for multiple reasons. If students are unable to access the learning *spaces*, they are unable to participate in the discourse. That is, they are unable to enter the day-to-day practice through which they can learn to play the *games*. Successful participation not only requires *dialogue*, but it also requires the particular *dialogue* that (together with the characteristic activities or practice of the *games*) is partly constitutive of the *games*. The *dialogue* (or discourse) of the *games* is also learned by participation and day-to-day practice. Time exacerbates the difficulties students face as they struggle to negotiate the complexities of *academic discourses* – as they try to learn to play the *academic games* which they recognise are necessary for them to achieve their aspirations.

Learning to play

Those students who learn to "*recover very quickly*" (Student 18.1F) from the incongruity of expectations and reality, seek more effective strategies to learn the *games* and the rules.[2] Students' interpretation and use of the rules are influenced by their cultural backgrounds, previous exposure to such rules, and individual understandings of what constitutes acceptable and scholarly academic practice. Wittgenstein (1958, p.82) raises the question of ethics in his proposition:

> Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right?

The following student outlines her reaction to being trained to "*follow the teachers' rules*":

> *... in my country the teacher will tell you, 'Do this first, then this, this, this ...!' You must follow their rules. When I was in [my country] I thought I must follow the teachers' rules.* (Student 4.1F).

Her further comment, however, reveals that she was starting to learn to play new *games* in the new *spaces* of her academic experience:

> *Here you get your own ideas. That's a different thing. For example, with assignments, here you can say anything you like! You can do your own research. You can use your own way to explain it ...* (Student 4.1F).

While this student illustrated her sense of *becoming* as she moved from 'following rules' to learning to 'express an opinion', her belief that "*you can say anything you*

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[2]See *Chapter 8: Spaces* (p.175) for further discussion about 'recovering quickly'.

like" indicates that, as yet, she did not fully understand the rules of this *game*.

The following comment by another student, however, illustrates the challenge students face in negotiating among their growing sense of *becoming*, their understanding that they *"have to have an opinion"* (Student 8.1F), and their perception that that opinion may (or will) impact on their grades. That is, they begin to understand that they need to play the *game*, but that the *game* is subject to certain rules, in this case, implicit rules. As the student explained:

> *It's hard for us to find out what our lecturer likes. What kind of argument they like. We have to have an opinion, but we aren't allowed to say what we think. You might argue in your point of view and think it's great, but the lecturer says 'What? How can you be arguing with that point of view from what I taught you?' That can really get you low marks too!* (Student 8.1F).

Another student believed he had failed a subject because of writing something that was not what his teacher wanted. While his fail grade is more likely to have resulted from other factors, his comments still reflect the *game* he was trying to play:

> *The [subject] I failed last semester, I thought I did really well and I failed that [subject]. I thought I wrote something really precisely what [my teacher] wanted. It wasn't!* (Student 43.1M).

Ramsden's (1992, p.6) comment in his book *Learning to teach in higher education* echoes these students' concerns:

> [Students] react to the demands of teaching and assessment in ways that are difficult to predict: a lot of their 'learning' is not directly about chemistry or history or economics, but about learning how to please lecturers and gain high marks.

Manipulating the games

Students drew on a range of strategies, not only to help them learn the *games*, but also to help them manipulate the *games* in ways which would help them achieve their aspirations. The following student, for example, recognises how she needs to *"study smart"* and *"study tricky"* if she is to achieve the high grades she hopes for. As she explained:

> *[I don't use the same study strategies as when I was studying in my country.] No, I don't think so. Actually, it's not because of the University or the syllabus. It's because of my own problems. I found out, I didn't study smart when I was in [my country]. Even now, I'm still learning. I'm not very good in that. But I learn from those successful students, like they're really good in the results. I learn from them. Like study smartly. But I found that sometimes they study tricky. I don't know, maybe you don't know this, but for some of my friends, they don't really study the whole thing, but they're tricky. They know what things to study. It doesn't mean that they do everything, but they really can get really good results. They can get High D[istinction]s in their results – always. They're clever. Really clever. And they are amazing. I can't really do that.* (Student 18.1F.)

Her comments, however, also reveal her sense of *becoming* as she examines her own behaviour, questions why she was unable to achieve the results she wanted, and takes responsibility for her own learning. Her use of *creative understanding* is also evident as she recognises how she needs to *"study smart"*, *"study tricky"*, and how she can learn from *"successful students"*. Being *"really clever"* for this student equates with manipulating the *games* in order to *"get High Ds"*. Her aspiration to achieve high grades outweighs her aspiration to understand the concepts. As she pointed out:

> *So far I just can get Distinctions. I can't get any HD. And this is my problem.* (Student 18.1F.)

With this in mind, the same student explained that by *"learning to be smart"* she learned to play the examination *game* successfully:

> *... after I came here I found it's not so hard to sit the exam to do that actually, because they are not changing the exam questions every year, so you just have to know what's happening and you can tell which part is important for lecture, and you are able to get good marks for it. But just for those successful students, they just are better than us in getting the questions. It's about [how] we study the question a lot, but you have to be really smart. I have to tell that! And now I'm learning to be smart and you can pick up which part of the questions will be in the exam paper.* (Student 18.1F).

It seems, however, that being able to *"pick up which part of the questions will be in the exam paper"* was not as easy for this student as she initially indicated. Although her friends appeared to have learned to play this *game* successfully, it may, in fact, have been more a question of luck for them also:

> *... you know for some of my friends, I told you they are really good in picking the examination questions. They took like two HDs, two Distinctions, something like that, because we are staying together, so I know how much we studied and I can say that I really studied hard, really hard, really hard. And I feel a bit unfair for the exam because it doesn't mean that I didn't study well, it's just I'm unlucky for most of the time. I am unlucky. I just picked the wrong – maybe. I just don't know how to. I studied the whole thing, but it's a lot and you can't remember them.* (Student 18.1F).

Testing the boundaries

Students not only learned to manipulate the *games*, but also learned to test and, at times, overstep the boundaries of ethical practice, as reported by teachers in *Chapter 5: Achievement*:

> Assignments can be copied. $50 is the going rate to have someone do it for you. (Teacher 11M);

> One of the things which I put a question mark over is the one-to-one tutoring that the international students actually get, and you often wonder who has written the assignment, whether it was the tutor or ... (Other 58F); and,

> ... [several male students from another country] have been hassling [a female student] to do their assignments. ... She came in here and burst in tears and said, 'I've got enough work myself. But they keep hassling me and following me around and ordering me to do their work for them.' (Teacher 30.1F).

Or in one case where a student emailed the following request to his teacher:

> *Dear Ms [Teacher's name],*
> *Please kindly advise me as to how to answer my second assignment. If possible, could you please give me a guidelines of the answer. Your soonest reply would be highly appreciated.*
> *Thankyou*
> *Regard*
> *[Student's name]* (Teacher 30.2F).

That students play these sorts of *games* is acknowledged. The extent to which students in this study played these sorts of *games*, however, was not investigated. Nevertheless, mounting pressure on students did cause them to play *games* which they may not otherwise have done if they had more *time* and *space* to practise and learn the *games* and rules, as reflected in the following student's comments about how he wrote assignments:

> *... mostly I just copy from the textbook. I understand it, but I just couldn't write it properly. That's why I copy. But I'm not just copying it straight away. I just change it a little bit. That's how I do my assignments. I know it's not good, but what can you do? If I use my English to write an assignment, the lecturer wouldn't understand it and I wouldn't get a pass.* (Student 43.1M).

This student knew the rules, but other challenges caused him to manipulate the *games* in order to win. These sorts of *games* were common among students as they struggled to complete assessment tasks in accordance with the rules they were becoming familiar with, in the *language* they were expected to use, in the *time* they had to do it. Many students, as reported in *Chapter 5: Achievement*, and as indicated in the following student's comment, requested *time* to learn and use the rules:

> *We just need some time to practise ourselves.* (Student 19F).

Flexible boundaries

The rules regarding plagiarism, or what constitutes plagiarism, varied across disciplines and academic *spaces*. Some teachers recognised there were degrees, or dimensions, of plagiarism, which not only reflected cultural dimensions and the 'intent' and 'extent' of its use, but also reflected the "precision" of the "sciences" versus the "depth" of the "humanities" (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.98).[3] A teacher from the Arts, for example, considered that students from China, where students are taught to copy the master, produced work which was not so much plagiarised as "just not ... very original". As he pointed out:

> NESB students in my experience aren't guilty of plagiarism, although you could say that

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[3]See *Chapter 5: Achievement* (pp.104-106) for further examples of and discussion about plagiarism and dimensions of plagiarism.

in the creative subjects and a lot of art teaching in, say China, is very imitative; you know, 'I show you what to do and then you do that too.' There's a lot of that. And so it happens that the work is not terribly original and it looks much like something else and you go, 'You're supposed to be a **creative** person. You're supposed to come up with something that looks a bit different.' But that's not really plagiarism, it's just not being very original which is a problem in creative areas. (Teacher 39M).

Plagiarism also caused less concern for teachers in those disciplines or *spaces* where "precision" was the goal. This was generally because of the assessment method used to test a student's understanding. In Commerce, for example, short answer questions overcame issues of plagiarism, as the following teacher explained:

> Any of the conceptual type things, we just use short answer questions, so they don't have to write essays about them. So probably it's a little bit different to the basic type essays that you write. But by the same token, they still have to have their introduction, body and conclusion and so forth, but it is quite different to the basic, the normal, type [of essay] that is used. And I think you'll find, too, with Accounting, because of the type of subject that it is, that it doesn't really lend itself to the classic sort of essay. (Teacher 40M)

The following teacher, from another science-related discipline, had similar opinions when he highlighted the fact that he was not testing the students' English. He wanted to know about his students' *understanding* of the subject and, when asked whether he used "essay style questions" to assess his students, he replied:

> Yes, but I say, 'I'm not testing your English – I want points. So forget about English! Don't waste time on writing English, just give me dot points – only dot points.' (Teacher 11M).

The same teacher gave his opinion about 'the essay' as a means of assessment:

> Essays are very difficult. Lecturers fall asleep when they're reading them. Imagine marking 100 assignments – you fall asleep! And what happens is that three assignments which are the same, get different marks (as in our experiment).[4] It's human nature. (Teacher 11M).

His use of *creative understanding* in accessing (and assessing) his students' understanding is evident in his further comments about assessment methods that he uses:

> I am only interested in **content**; that's why I ask for dot points. I can see very quickly and very easily whether students have an understanding of the topic. ... Students can show their understanding in one line. I also ask for diagrams, sketches, drawing, tables, etcetera. A picture can say a lot. (Teacher 11M).

Even so, not all teachers agreed with this teacher's comment about *writing*. As another teacher from the Sciences commented:

> For me, in science, the way that you express yourself is **extremely** important. But there is not a lot of emphasis put on writing skills in science courses and there probably should be more. (Teacher 13M).

The same teacher, however, pointed out that this emphasis on writing was more

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[4]See *Chapter 5: Achievement* (p.103) for an explanation of this experiment.

important for postgraduate students, when he added:

> For me, as a scientist, writing is one of the most important things I do and, when I have students coming through to postgrad[uate] studies, it is often the place where they suffer most – in their writing. (Teacher 13M).[5]

And while the same teacher said that he also used diagrams in assessment, he highlighted challenges that still arise. As he explained:

> With students whose English is quite poor, I ask them to draw a diagram and give an explanation of that. Quite often they draw – reproduce – beautiful diagrams, but their explanations don't relate to the drawing at all. So, do they know the concept? Or do they know the diagram but can't explain it? In this case, I'd make a judgement at the time, usually, that they don't really understand what's going on and that's how I would mark it. (Teacher 13M).

Thus, the usefulness of diagrams in assessment is dependent on a number of factors, including the consideration of their use together with *speaking* and *listening* tasks (rather than *reading* and *writing* tasks) such as an oral presentation or explanation by the student of their diagram.

Purpose and importance of assessment

Teachers expressed a range of opinions about the purpose and importance of assessment. These opinions included:

> ... to find out whether [students] have the skills that would be expected by an employer or a client out there, ... to assert and give yourself some information about whether these students are learning anything from what they've been taught, and how can I help them learn better. (Teacher 39M).

> ... making sure that [assessment] is consistent with the objects of the particular subject, and then making sure that the students have a deep understanding of the subjects and the subject generally. (Teacher 40M).

> ... feedback to the student. Transparency in the criteria for assessment. My subject outlines clearly spell out how an assignment will be assessed. (Teacher 53M).

> ... The main aim [of assessment] ... is for them to learn. They come here to learn but I still have to test them in a final exam. (Teacher 11M).

The same teacher from the Sciences had a further interpretation of the purpose of assessment. He considered that:

> Assignments [assessments] are learning processes. You make mistakes and you **can** make mistakes. This is a **great** place to make mistakes, at university. Once you're out of university, if you make a mistake, you can lose your job. So learn from the mistake, re-do

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[5]A number of students and teachers suggested that high levels of academic writing were less necessary for undergraduate students, as reflected in the following comment:
> Undergrads do not need such strong English language skills. Postgrads do lots of reading and writing so need stronger skills. (Teacher 11M).

What is called 'writing' here might also refer to the construction of a logical argument – valid reasoning from sound premises to a (potentially) true conclusion. This is discussed further in *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice.*

it and come back. (Teacher 11M).

Assessment – if it must be a finalisable point in the academic context – is, or perhaps should be, about letting students know how to *go on* from that point. It is not a "box" from which there is no escape, as the same teacher pointed out:

> ... [the purpose of assessment is] to see whether the students are thinking – can they solve problems? It's all about problem-solving. Life is all about problem-solving. To be able to solve problems, we must train students to have an analytical mind. To think outside the box. But the problem was, in the beginning, we created a box. (Teacher 11M).

Assessment as going on

Only one teacher expressed his opinion of assessment as a means of helping students know how to *go on* from that point. The following quotation illustrates the teacher's beliefs and reflects the concept of assessment as a means of *going on*. It also notes the need for feedback in helping students know "the way forward":

> Assessment is the possibilities of the 'what if?' and the movement from this position to the next. That is what assessment is. Not looking backwards. It is where it's going **to**.
>
> So, when one has to numerically put, it's almost like, 'Could do better', or whatever, but ... written feedback, I find, the students find so much more valuable. If taught from high school to require a mark, they will obviously desire a mark, but, if they can be persuaded that this is not the way forward, they prefer 'How did I do?' and the more [feedback] you can give them the better. To give them one mark as the result of 12 weeks' work, I find is quite amazingly inadequate. Even a paper given back with notes on [as feedback] is going some way. (Teacher 65M).

The same teacher, however, highlighted challenges and contestations that teachers face as a result of also having to play the *games* of assessment:

> ... there are other ways of measuring (if you **want** to measure), but we are being imposed upon by our "masters" that we have to measure, rank, critique, and generally place people in boxes. I, when working on my assessment, can**not** do that and refuse to do so. There are other methods of feedback to students of what their progress is in a holistic way, not a specific 'Oh, you did that' or 'Your spelling's not very good'. That is a **minor** aspect of what the project was. And it was, 'Did they succeed?' and most students, if directed to what outcome is expected can, in the majority of times, succeed in that to a great extent. (Teacher 65M).

His further comments reflect his understanding that there are dimensions of achievement and that all students are at a different stage in their *becoming* as a result of where they started. His comments also reinforce what he believes is the inadequacy and "danger" of assessment:

> Some [students] move forward further than others because some have started from a different place, but to actually say that I've got to try to classify these [students] rather like eggs in a box. Human beings are **not** like that, and the assessment procedure for me is always fraught with the danger that I am **not** the gatekeeper of education. (Teacher 65M).

While students were not explicitly asked their opinion about the purpose and importance of assessment, the following student said she *wanted* to be *"measured"*, saying that it gave her a sense of accomplishment:

> *I think if you study you want to be measured because you want to know where you stand. And you want to know it has made a difference that you have been studying. I think that is good that you have tests or write essays or hand in case books because that shows that you have actually learned something and you can feel yourself, 'Yes, I have accomplished it!'* (Student 35F).

Her comment that being measured lets you know *"where you stand"* (Student 35F) not only reflects the general aspiration among students that they wanted to achieve high grades, but also reflects an opinion of assessment more as an end point than a *going on* or "a movement from this position to the next" (Teacher 65M). If her comment *"where you stand"* were followed by the words *"at the moment"*, it would better reflect the concept of assessment as an *unfinalisable* moment in a student's *going on* and *becoming*. If assessment of students is to be measured, then, from a Bakhtinian perspective, it would be seen as the point not only 'where students stand' but also 'where students stand *at the moment*'. Additionally, from a Bakhtinian perspective, if this 'measurement' is to guide students how to *go on* from here, then appropriate and adequate feedback may help facilitate students' "movement from this position to the next" (Teacher 65M).

Feedback and going on

Feedback can be regarded as a form of *dialogue* between teachers and students. The extent to which teachers and students entered into this *dialogic space*, however, varied among participants. Most students reported a lack of feedback on assessment tasks and it appeared that teachers, for reasons including lack of time, faculty rulings on feedback, and the possibility of litigation,[6] were generally reluctant to provide students with written feedback. The one teacher who expressed his belief that assessment was to help students know how to *go on* from that point, however, while pointing to the fallible nature of assessment (and assessors), also highlighted his belief that feedback is an integral and critical part of assessment. As he commented:

> ... I'm a human being and assessment will always be quite complex and an inexact science. ... But ... if the student wishes to know feedback – which can be in written form ... they get sheets of paper after each [assessment task] of the way forward. (Teacher 65M).[7]

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[6]See *Chapter 5: Achievement* (p.117) for further discussion.
[7]While this teacher believed that feedback is essential to help students know "the way forward", his comment "If the student wishes to know feedback" highlights his belief that not all students are interested in feedback. In this study, however, only one student indicated that he did not always read feedback. As the student pointed out, *"I didn't read it because I got a good mark! It would be different if I failed."*

This teacher's approach to assessment and feedback contrasts with that of the teacher referred to in the following interview:

Interviewer: So what sort of feedback do you get on assignments?

Student: Fair effort.

Interviewer: Fair effort?

Student: Yeah, 'Fair effort'. That's what he wrote for everyone.
(Student 43.1M).

The same student, when asked the same question six months later, replied:

... we don't get any feedback. If you've answered the question you get a tick. If you didn't; no tick. Simple as that. (Student 43.2M).

Assessment and *creative understanding*

In general, students and teachers felt there was little room for negotiation of assessment tasks, particularly at undergraduate level. Nevertheless, while the negotiation of assessment tasks may be a slippery notion which can lead to deep inequities, a number of teachers used *creative understanding* to design and negotiate assessment tasks with students.[8] The following teacher, for example, said he was "very willing" (Teacher 26M) to negotiate assessment tasks with students and often encouraged students to contextualise subject content to their own countries. He saw this as a powerful means of tapping into the global *outsideness* that was in his classroom through the diversity of the students. It is this "international dimension" which he speaks of – and these *dimensions of difference* which exist through the *outsideness* of culturally diverse students – which have the potential of stimulating *creative understanding*, not only in teaching, learning and assessment, but also in intercultural communication. As he explained:

One of the things I talk about is 'learning arcs'. So when I get an international class I put the map up and ask students to keep calling out a country and if they hear it called out and it's yours, don't call it out again until we've got the class map. And then you join the dots on the world map and say, 'Well, there's our learning arc. So instead of learning on one single spot, look how much we have to encompass and learn about the international dimension of the subject we are going to learn. And you're all bringing that to the subject. No textbooks bring that.' (Teacher 26M).

The teacher explained how he negotiated assessment tasks to make them more relevant and useful to the students, and pointed to the need for:

(Student 43.2M).
[8]While social class differences between the INESB students and their Anglo-Australian peers in this study may be minimal, INESB students' difficulties with English language – regarded as 'deficits' by some teachers – resulted in inequitable outcomes similar to those where social class differences do exist. For further discussion regarding inequities and language, see Basil Bernstein on 'restricted and elaborated codes', including *The structuring of pedagogic discourse: Class, codes and control* (1990); *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique* (1996); and *Class, codes and control: Volume 1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language* (2003).

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Real life learning. If you stick to the assessment task as it was described [students] have to do a presentation in English, but back in [their country] ... they'll be working in [their language]. [Computer] Programming might be in other languages, but it's [their language] that they will be working in. So they give their presentation [for assessment] in [their language], and do the self-evaluation and other components of the assignment that I have to mark, in English. (Teacher 26M).

The same teacher negotiated with two INESB students to do presentations in their own language. A small peer assessment panel, with a bilingual member, helped to assess the content of each student's presentation material and provide feedback. The students had three days to write reflections on their presentations in English, which they submitted together with their support material, including overheads and PowerPoint slides, untranslated – or translated if they had time. The same teacher believed that this sort of flexibility:

... opened up a whole more interesting, cross-border, cross-culture imports on the assessment tasks simply because you're free to negotiate with the student up to the point of submission of the work. (Teacher 26M).

Allowing students to submit work in their own language also caused challenges for this teacher who accepted students' untranslated written "reflections" following an oral presentation. He said he would "struggle with them" if they were untranslated, but pointed out:

That's part of what I want to look at – 'What can you teach me about that particular topic in [your language]?' (Teacher 26M).

The question of which language to use when students presented material, whether orally or in written form, was also raised by the following teacher who expounded on the challenges regarding the use of English language and, in particular, academic English. As he pointed out:

That was **always**, and always **has** been, a thorn in my side that most universities require a standard of written English which many [students] would never use again in their lives. They return to their home country and have no knowledge of the technical language of the expertise that they have in their own language. It's all in an **English** bank. So they have difficulty in transforming **backwards** into their original language, when they have not those skills to translate those words back into it, or ideas and concepts which are quite complex. So those who became quite fluent in Australian English, when asked to go back and ... actually present in their own language, they couldn't.

They said, 'No, however the struggle it is for everybody, I'd rather do it in English', because the references, the illustrations they have – they found that easier, because to go back, they'd have to **invent** the other words, the constructs, or the ideas in their own language. So that was something I was concerned with. How could they, in fact, **transition**? (Teacher 65M).

Students chose an English speaking university because they wanted to "do it in English", and teachers generally felt that, if students chose an "English university"

(Teacher 29F), then also they *should* "do it in English". There is something self-evident about the students' wanting to "do it in English" and also that, regardless of the type of assessment *game* being played, whether it was sitting an examination, answering a multiple choice question, giving an oral presentation, or writing an academic essay, "doing it in English" would cause "struggles for everybody". But, the previous teacher's concern about how students could "transition" reflects an awareness – if even an unconscious awareness – of the nature of *becoming* and *unfinalisability* through *heteroglossic* struggles in the negotiation of these *academic discourses*, as will be discussed fully in the next two chapters.

Positive outcomes – *becoming*

Despite the "struggles for everybody" as students and teachers negotiated the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of *academic discourses*, a strong sense of *becoming* for many of the participants in this study was evident over time. In fact, it may be that it was not *despite* the struggles but *because* of them, that this *becoming* is so evident. From a Bakhtinian perspective, as Freedman and Ball (2004, p.6) suggest, "the social interactions that are most effective in promoting learning are those that are filled with tension and conflict". And, as Bakhtin points out, "The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous" (Bakhtin, cited in Freedman & Ball, 2004, p.6).

Students' *becoming*

Those students who met and overcame the challenges, agreed that these experiences helped them to *become* in different ways. The following student, for example, reflected on her main challenge – feelings of isolation – because of extreme negative *outsideness*, that is, racism:

> *Maybe sometimes you feel tough and feel sad about some things, but I think everything will come to an end. Every problem will have a solution. It just depends on the time you need to spend to solve the problem. ... I don't think it's overt or obvious racism, but for us, we can feel it. Sometimes you feel that you are different, how the locals treat you.* (Student 19F).

A friend echoed this student's sentiments. Her comments, however, reflect an acceptance through *creative understanding* of this sense of negative *outsideness*, evident in her personal sense of *becoming*:

> *Sometimes we feel quite sad about that, but it is quite normal. Like we are all humans, but we do have different [pause] some people will think that nationality is quite an important thing for them, but we can't change those thoughts about these things and that is also their way of treating different people. So I think we can't blame them but we just can try*

to expect it. (Student 21F).[9]

Other students illustrated their *becoming* in different ways. The following student spoke about *"life"* in a broader context and spoke of three expatriate students who helped him with his *going on*:

> *How to face life? Deal with it myself. But first you need good company of friends.* (Student 82M).

The following comment also illustrates one student's sense of positive *becoming* by overcoming challenges:

> *It's harder for me, but it's like a good challenge for me. I like that.* (Student 15F).

Another student expressed her sense of *becoming* in the following way:

> *I go about things in a different way. I have learned to adapt.* (Student 46.2F).

In response to the interviewer's comment that his early study experiences must have been difficult, the following student smiled and replied:

> *I have passed that time.* (Student 27M).

Many students expressed similar feelings in different ways. One student said that the *"best thing"* about her study experience was that she had *"become more independent"* (Student 79F). Students' views of the world and of themselves as people in it also changed and broadened, as the following student stated when reflecting on his Australian study experience:

> *It broadens your mind, respect, norms and values – and practical things. I have broadened.* (Student 76M).

Successful students

Students' beliefs about what constituted success also changed as they learned to *go on* and *become*. Their aspiration to achieve High Distinctions became less important to them, as the following student commented:

> *My expectations of myself have changed. I don't stress like I did. I am far more relaxed. I feel I have matured. My family still has very high expectations for me, but I go along far more steady than I did.* (Student 18.2F).

Her changing beliefs and attitudes towards high grades – and, perhaps, an understanding of *games* played "with dice" – are also reflected in her comment:

> *... now I think differently. I think because, it doesn't mean – the HD – that you're really good, or something. You're just lucky.* (Student 18.2F).

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[9]Although this student used the word "expect", it is not known if this was her meaning, or if she meant "accept".

While many students still would like to achieve high grades, they came to believe that success was measured in other ways, as indicated in the following comment:

> *I think there are many types of successful students. If you are good at your academic studies, you are a successful student. But there is another successful student. Maybe you are successful in some areas, or maybe you can do your job well after you graduate. Maybe you are not a successful student, but you are a successful man or woman. I think the responsibility of education is to give you ability to be a better or successful man, not so important if you compare successful students and successful men. Like Bill Gates; they are not good students but successful businessmen. That's what I think. But I still admire some people who are good at academic study. But I am not that kind of man!* (Student 17.2M).

Summary and transition

Academic discourses are negotiated by *language*, that is, by *dialogue*, through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. The challenges of negotiating *academic discourses* are exacerbated for students whose first language is not *English* and who encounter *games* and rules which they may not have encountered before. The challenges facing teachers and students are also exacerbated by incongruencies between *unfinalisable* processes (such as teaching and learning) and *finalisable* practices (such as assessment). Students draw on a range of strategies, with varying degrees of success, to help them learn to play the *games* or, at least, to appear to have learned to play them. Over time, students' attitudes to what constitutes 'success' change. Students come to understand that negotiating *academic discourses* is about *playing the games*. It also becomes more important to students that they become successful *players*, rather than winners. Students begin to understand that success is about successful participation – of being *in* the discourse, of being able to *play* the *games*, of being able to *practise* their professions.

In *Chapter 6: Theorising academic discourses: An interpretive framework*, the complexities of *academic discourses* were shown to be an interrelated complex of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which comprise the *teaching*, *learning* and *assessment* practices of a university. In the model of *academic discourses*, however, it was also illustrated that these practices cannot exist in isolation. The complexities of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* become apparent only when they are, to use Schatzki's (2002, p.71) term, "bundled" together as "integral activity bundles". It is then that they also become more clearly recognisable as practices and, in the context of academia, pedagogical practices. From this "bundled" space in time, created by the juxtaposition of Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspectives, the journey of INESB students and their teachers can

now be seen as one which proceeds from *outsideness*, through *creative understanding* and *going on*, to a sense of *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. When a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian model is used to interpret this journey and to interpret *academic discourses* and the complexities of their negotiation through *dialogue*, several implications for theory and practice become evident. These implications are discussed in the next chapter, *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice.*

Part D

Chapter 10:   The research implications:
Theory in practice

Synopsis

In the previous chapter, it was established that the negotiation of *academic discourses* is, for students, about learning to play the (*academic*) *games* through *dialogic* participation and, for teachers, about facilitating students' practice in their chosen professions. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, the journey of INESB students and their teachers can now be seen as one which proceeds from *outsideness*, through *creative understanding* and *going on*, to *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. It may be, in fact, that this sense of *unfinalisable becoming* reflects the journey for all students, not just INESB students. Understanding the journey in this way, however, allows us to comprehend the difficulties for INESB students more clearly. When a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian model is used to interpret this journey and the challenges facing students and teachers as they negotiate the complex of *academic discourses*, a number of theoretical and practical implications emerge. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, for example, certain other theories, perspectives and understandings about INESB students and their teaching and learning, become untenable. Similarly, when the implications for practice are considered from this perspective, certain practices (such as lectures) also become less justifiable. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective which emphasises *dialogic participation* as the means of *going on* and *becoming* (that is, as a means of understanding and learning), *non*-transmission approaches to teaching and learning, and approaches which promote *dialogue*, are advocated. Such approaches, which emphasise *dialogic participation* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes, facilitate students and teachers engaging in the discourses and practices of their chosen professions.

This chapter discusses the *theoretical* implications of the research specifically in relation to the phenomena which were studied, and also discusses the *practical* implications of the theory for the "*'possibilities'* of the phenomena" which were studied (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.42) (author's emphasis). Theory and practice (like *languages*, *spaces* and *games*) do not exist in isolation but co-exist in an interdependent

relationship with each other. Theory informs practice informs theory. To illustrate this interdependency more clearly, theoretical and practical implications are discussed together in this chapter.

This chapter seeks to do a number of things. Firstly, it seeks to disrupt 'common sense' understandings among many teachers in this study (and possibly many teachers elsewhere) about the teaching and learning of INESB students, understandings which, in this research, have been shown to be based on theories of transmission and deficit, and/or misperceptions about the nature of learners from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) (Biggs, 1996).[1] Secondly, based on the theory of *dialogism* which underpins this research and its findings, this chapter stresses the crucial need for *dialogic practice* for students and teachers, and advocates the use of *dialogic practice spaces* to facilitate such practice. Guided by the voices of the participants, informed by theory, and in *dialogue* with the literature, this chapter discusses how theory informs practice and advocates a *dialogic* "praxial approach" (Regelski, 2006, p.295) to university teaching. Thirdly, adopting this *dialogic* "praxial" approach, the chapter offers practical suggestions for addressing some of the challenges which students and teachers face in academic contexts, as identified in this study. These suggestions, though untested in this study, are also offered as suggestions for future research where their efficacy may be tested. Additionally, as a means of opening a *dialogue*, and as a way "To think outside the box" which, "in the beginning, we created" (Teacher 11M), the notion of *creative understanding* is used to consider the form of the academic essay from a Wittgensteinian and a Bakhtinian perspective.

Section One – Knowing and doing

According to Kemmis (2008b, p.16), "educational research ought to be understood as research that feeds the practical deliberation that orients and guides the individual and collective praxis of educators". Practice informs theory and theory informs practice. Theory and practice are interdependent and it is in the *going on* from theory that research can become useful in practice. It is not just the 'knowing' but the 'doing' which is critical, not only in the context of theory informing practice, but also in the context of students *becoming* (one might also say *going on* to *become*) practising members of their

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[1]Students from cultural backgrounds other than Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) were also classed by some teachers as having traits similar to their perception of CHC learners. For example, a teacher commenting about a cohort of Middle Eastern students, said:
    They're good rote learners but they're not very good deep learners. (Teacher 30.1F).

professions. It is in their 'doing' that they demonstrate their 'knowing'. It has been shown in this thesis, however, that it is in some sorts of 'doing' that students encounter challenges. These kinds of 'doing', academic *games*, are different from other kinds of 'doing' like 'practising a profession'. This will be addressed shortly.

In the context of university teaching, there exist *heteroglossic* tensions between ways of knowing (theory) and ways of doing (practice[2]) which, in a way, become two 'masters' which teachers – and, subsequently, students – are trying to serve. These tensions cause challenges for teachers and students as they try to consolidate and reconcile the two. It appears, for example, that much of the teaching, learning and assessment focuses on whether students can answer questions *about* the professions they have chosen, rather than *practising* the particular *language-games* or 'forms of life' of the practice of those professions. As Wittgenstein (1958, p.48) suggests:

> One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.

It may be, in fact, that students do not need 'perfect English' as classified by an IELTS score but, rather, need to *talk* and *write* more about the practices of the professions they are studying, using the English language they *do* have.[3] Also, assessment invariably involves academic writing of some sort, often an essay. This common practice of writing academic essays, however, always misrepresents the *practice* of what the essay is about – at least in the sense that it offers a *representation* of practice rather than *presenting* the practice itself. That is, the focus is generally on *writing about* nursing or accounting or teaching, for example, rather than on *practising* nursing or accounting or teaching. The following student, in a second interview, reiterated her earlier comment about essay writing:

> *What is there to learn from all this essay writing? Essays just tell you how good you are in your English. They don't tell you how well you can perform when you go out in the workforce. As [practitioners in our profession] we are more practical. Unless we are going to be academics, we don't need all this writing. We should be doing more practical things. Essays are for more higher degrees.* (Student 8.2F).

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[2]It should be noted that any discussion about 'practice' here is based on the understanding that "practice can best be understood from the perspective of practitioners' knowledge – that is, what is in the heads of individual practitioners" and that "practice is also socially-, discursively-, culturally- and historically-formed." (Kemmis, 2005, p.5).

[3]It is acknowledged that those students who were more proficient in English language, including the four skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*, faced fewer challenges than those students whose skills were less developed. The point being made here, however, has less to do with English language and more to do with the need to *practise* the *practice*, which is critical regardless of a student's level of English language and, in fact, even if English is a student's first language.

Disciplines as praxis[4]

In his article *'Music appreciation' as praxis*, Regelski (2006, p.2) addresses a problem in the teaching of school music. He suggests that there is a "gap" between "aesthetes who have (unfortunately) sacralized classical music and the public who regard music (even classical music) praxially – i.e. as serving various social needs and 'goods', absorbed listening being only one". In the context of the academic essay, this "gap" to which Regelski refers is not unlike the "gap" which has been identified in this thesis between those teachers who regard the academic essay as a "classical" form and those who regard it as "serving various social needs and 'goods'". The "gap" to which Regelski refers also reflects the "gap" between theory and practice. In seeking to address this somewhat *heteroglossic* problem in school music teaching, Regelski (2006, p.2) asserts that "The solution is to acknowledge music as praxis and thus to adopt a praxial approach to teaching that bridges the gap between 'school music' and music as used meaningfully 'in life'."

Although music as a discipline is not in any way related to this thesis – and 'commons' are advocated rather than 'bridges' – Regelski's (2006, p.2) "solution" may be as effectively applied to any other discipline which *is* related to this thesis. That is, the *heteroglossic* challenges identified in this thesis may also be addressed by acknowledging the actual happening activities characteristic of each of the disciplines, or professions, as praxis. Taking this praxial approach emphasises the need for *participation* to facilitate a student's understanding. As Regelski (2006, p.298) points out:

> First of all, when music is considered as praxis, understanding is a matter of *being able to take part successfully* – meaningfully for self and, where involved, for or with others – in a musical praxis (author's emphasis).

As for "music" and "musical praxis" in Regelski's quotation, so too for any other discipline referred to in this thesis. Regelski (2006, p.298) suggests that, "With the praxial model suggested here of music education as and for praxis, music teachers are instead returned to what they do best: musicking." Likewise, when a praxial approach is adopted to teaching any of the disciplines discussed in this thesis, teachers are facilitated to teach "what they do best" (or what is hoped they do best), that is, to teach their professions as practice. This, in turn, may facilitate students' successful participation in their chosen profession in practice.

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[4]The differences between *praxis* and *practice* are not discussed here. For discussions of these differences, see Kemmis (2008a), *Praxis and practice architectures in mathematics education*, or Kemmis (2005), *Is mathematics education a practice? Mathematics teaching?*

Practice and practising

According to Smeyers and Burbules (2006, p.447), "Part of learning a practice involves *practising*" (authors' emphasis). And, as highlighted throughout this thesis, time and space is critically needed for such practice to occur. Also, in the context of this thesis, *practising* requires *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*. Schatzki (2002, p.73) considers that "A practice is a set of doings and sayings." He also suggests that, "Because these doings and sayings almost always constitute further actions in the contexts in which they are performed, the set of actions that composes a practice is broader than its doings and sayings alone." In providing *dialogic practice spaces*, students and teachers may engage in meaningful *dialogue* about the broader practice of their professions, which is different, of course, from practising the practice itself. Such *dialogic* participation and practice facilitates understanding – or *going on* and *becoming* – for both students and teachers. This approach involves *creative understanding* in recognising and acknowledging the difference between academic practices being taught *about* the practices, and the practices themselves as professional praxis, a distinction reflected in the following student's comment:

> *I do not know how to use my knowledge in practice. I think this is a problem for me. I think if I can solve this problem I will be successful, and if I cannot solve this problem then [this course] is not useful for me. If I cannot use my [course] knowledge in practice, then this course is not useful for me.* (Student 5F).

Thus, there is a distinction between 'doing-knowing' (such as writing academic essays *about* the practices) and 'knowing-doing' (such as practising the professional practices themselves) (Kemmis, 2008b). While this distinction is made, and while the need for 'knowing-doing' (that is, practising the professional practices themselves) has been highlighted as critical for students in *becoming* practising members of their professions, it was revealed in this study that it is in the *doing* that students faced challenges. And, despite the need for participation in order for students to demonstrate their 'knowing' by their 'doing', it was revealed that students faced a range of challenges which hindered their participation, that is, their 'doing' and *going on*. This thesis, while advocating a praxial approach to university teaching, is focusing here on the ways which may facilitate students' participation through *dialogue* by *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts. If students demonstrate their 'knowing' by their 'doing' but face challenges in the 'doing', then ways must be created to facilitate students' 'doing' or, in the context of this thesis, to facilitate their *dialogic participation* which, in turn, facilitates their *going on* and *becoming*.

Disrupting 'common sense'

Laurillard (2002, p.1) maintains that it is the teacher's responsibility to create the conditions in which understanding is possible, and the student's responsibility to take advantage of that, although she also believes that students "have little control over their access" to this understanding. A university's "complex system of departments, curricula, teaching methods, support facilities, timetables" and "assessment" to which Laurillard (2002, p.1) refers, is part of the complex of *academic discourses* which was discussed in Chapter 6, and the negotiation of which posed multiple challenges for both students and teachers. According to Ramsden (1992, p.268), however, identical principles are involved in encouraging students to learn and helping teachers to teach. Therefore, he maintains, "if we understand how to help students, we understand how to improve teaching" (Ramsden, 1992, p.268). In the research reported here, such understandings have been achieved by listening to the voices of students and teachers. In listening to these voices, a certain 'common sense' emerged regarding the challenges students and teachers faced and also regarding certain 'common sense' understandings which students and teachers held about each other. These views, though common, were not always correct or conducive to facilitating mutual *going on* for students or teachers.

Thomas (1993, p.66) suggests that, in order to appreciate difference, 'common sense' needs to be disrupted and unfamiliar objects placed in new contexts. He suggests that, "When this is done successfully, we are rewarded with insights into the culture of study that prompt us to think about our own culture in new ways by searching for analogous concepts that make the alien culture seem more familiar and our own culture seem more alien." Green (1999, p.38) agrees, suggesting that, "it is important … to find other and new ways of doing and thinking education, in what are very different times and conditions". As he reflects, "How to make the familiar strange – for me, that's a major challenge, with regard particularly to our received ways of talking about and practising school, of imagining and working in education" (Green, 1999, p.38). Green (p.38) also raises the counter-challenge: "Complementing this, of course, is the task of making the strange familiar – equally a fundamental challenge today, given these truly (r)evolutionary times."

Section Two – Some particular findings

With the understanding, then, that there is a distinction between 'doing-knowing' (such as writing academic essays *about* the practices) and 'knowing-doing' (such as practising

the professional practices themselves), and based on the understanding that there is a critical need for *dialogic participation* in both 'doing-knowing' and 'knowing-doing', this section discusses some particular findings of the study which have significant implications for theory and practice. One of the findings, for example, is that many of the teachers interviewed for this study, held understandings and beliefs about INESB students as learners which were based on theories of transmission, deficit and Confucian Heritage Culture. Such understandings and theories regard *outsideness* – that is, difference – as problematic rather than as potential.

Theories of learning based on negative *outsideness*

There are many theories of teaching, learning and assessment of INESB students in tertiary settings, whether these relate to the broader acquisition of English language or, more specifically, to the acquisition of academic skills such as essay writing or the development of critical and higher order thinking skills. Based on the data reported in this study, the majority of teachers' views reflect understandings about the teaching and learning, and the nature of INESB students as learners, based on one, or more than one, of the following theories, as reflected in these brief comments:

Transmission

> Most lecturers I know try to teach students like they are teaching students in a high school. 'I put this in your mouth, and in an exam we'll see if you throw out what I've given you', rather than seeing if the students understand the basic principles. (Teacher 11M).

Deficit

> The difficulty I've experienced with some [INESB students] is that it's very hard to judge what their problem is because they have a lack of ability or a lack of language. (Teacher 29F).

Confucian Heritage Culture

> We have a lot of open-book exams which tends to reflect the fact that [Confucian Heritage Culture] students would rather take the material straight out or transpose it rather than thinking about its application. ... If anyone has problems with [plagiarism], it's the [Confucian Heritage Culture] students, because it's a cultural thing. (Teacher 40M).

Views such as these are based on theories and 'common sense' understandings of these students' cultural diversity – that is, their *outsideness* – either as empty vessels which must be filled; as deficits which must be remediated; as cultural diversity which must hinder; or, more commonly, as combinations of these understandings. What these views have in common is that they all reflect, to varying degrees, a view of *outsideness* as

'problematic', rather than as 'potential'. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, however, where *outsideness* is viewed as 'potential', such theories and models of teaching, learning and assessment of INESB students become untenable.

If *academic discourses* are negotiated through *dialogue*, as demonstrated in this study, then teaching, learning and assessment practices based on ideas of transmission are not sustainable. And for students to learn about, understand and use the discourses of their professions as professionals, they must be able to enter into these *spaces* and participate through *dialogue*. A transmission model of teaching which regards 'the lecture' as university teaching *par excellence*, for example, does not facilitate such entry in through *dialogue*. As Landay (2004, p.111) suggests:

> If, as Bakhtin argues, heteroglossia ... is the fundamental condition within which meaning is constructed, then classrooms where didactic instruction is the norm and the teacher the primary speaker are not likely to be effective instructional environments, particularly for those whose background, perspective, and knowledge base differ substantively from the speaker's.

Additionally, from a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective where *outsideness* is regarded as potential, any theory of teaching these students based on deficit or remediation must be deemed inappropriate in this context and eliminated as an effective teaching theory. Furthermore, if it is true, as students from Confucian Heritage Cultures are saying in this study, that the reasons they do not participate and the reasons they resort to surface learning strategies and, sometimes, plagiarism are mainly because of difficulties with English language and pressures caused by time and other factors, then attributing these challenges to their Confucian Heritage Culture backgrounds is also untenable.

The following teacher, however, whose comments reflect a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, recognised the potential of *outsideness* and the outdatedness of theory based on transmission:

> International students bring to the class enormous benefits to the Australians because it brings forward ideas, particularly if it's project based, design work. I like that. Not if you have the old-fashioned methods of 'I've got the information. This is it. I'm transferring it from here to you.' It is no longer about that. I mean, it does go on in the School, but I'm trying to stamp it out. (Teacher 65M).

This teacher's attitude to INESB students, diversity and difference, and his understanding that *outsideness* is potential, are echoed by Morson (2004, p.317), who

also suggests the need for teachers and students to "enter into a dialogue" with their different "points of view":

> It is not merely a transmission of knowledge, but an activity in which whole selves are formed and acquire new capacities for development. We live in a world of enormous cultural diversity, and the various languages and points of view – ideologies in Bakhtin's sense – of students have become a fact that cannot be ignored. Teachers need to enter into a dialogue with those points of view and to help students do the same. For difference may best be understood not as an obstacle but as an opportunity.

Morson's comment not only reiterates the first theoretical implication in relation to the inefficacy of transmission theory, but also points to the second theoretical implication which relates to the crucial role of *dialogue*, highlighted throughout this study as the currency necessary to participate in *everyday* and *academic* discourses, that is, for students to participate in various types of 'Australian culture' and also to participate in various *games* of academia where they learn the discourses and practices of their chosen professions. Morson's comment, however, also refers to "difference ... as ... opportunity", a comment which, in the context of this thesis, could be interpreted to mean 'outsideness ... as … potential'. Such potential is accessible through *dialogue*. In fact, it is only through *dialogue* that *outsideness* can *become* potential. If there is no *dialogue*, *outsideness* (and its potential) remains precisely where it is – outside.

In 2002, the year this research commenced, the University made offers to international students from 70 countries to study on-shore at its campuses in Australia (see Table 10.1). The potential of such *outsideness* is substantial, but only if it is accessed through *dialogue*, as reflected in some ways in the following student's comments:

> *If you can introduce more Australian people to overseas students like, like a meeting or something, then we could make friends with them. And then we could learn English better and then maybe we could help each other to learn from the lecture better. We need to speak more.* (Student 43.1M).

Table 10.1 – Offers to on-shore international students by country

Charles Sturt University – 2002

Country	Offers	Country	Offers
ASIA		**AMERICAS**	
China	35	Brazil	2
East Timor	3	Canada	32
Fiji	3	Columbia	1
Hong Kong	4	United States	18
Indonesia	6	**Sub-Total**	**53**
Japan	6	**EUROPE**	
Korea	10	Czech Republic	1
Macau	1	France	4
Malaysia	62	Germany	6
Papua New Guinea	3	Netherlands	1
Phillippines	1	Norway	2
Singapore	6	Poland	1
Solomon Islands	1	Russia	1
Samoa	1	Slovenia	1
Taiwan	5	Sweden	3
Thailand	6	Turkey	2
Vietnam	1	United Kingdom	6
Sub-total	**154**	Russia	1
AFRICA		**Sub-total**	**29**
Angola	1	**MIDDLE EAST**	
Botswana	2	Bahrain	1
Cameroon	1	Iraq	1
Eritrea	1	Israel	1
Ethiopia	3	Jordan	4
Ghana	13	Kuwait	2
Kenya	11	Lebanon	1
Mauritius	1	Oman	1
Morocco	1	Saudi Arabia	1
Namibia	2	Syria	1
Nigeria	10	United Arab Emirates	2
Seychelles	1	Yemen Arab Republic	1
Sierra Leone	1	**Sub-total**	**16**
South Africa	6	**SUB CONTINENT**	
Sudan	1	Bangladesh	63
Swaziland	1	Bhutan	1
Tanzania	5	India	52
Tunisia	2	Nepal	6
Zambia	7	Pakistan	35
Zimbabwe	15	Sri Lanka	12
Sub-Total	**85**	**Sub-total**	**169**

Total offers = 506
Total countries = 70

206

Accessing the potential of *outsideness*

The finding in this study that there was a dominance of teaching practices and understandings about the teaching and learning of INESB students based on transmission, deficit and understandings about Confucian Heritage Culture, has implications for theory – in particular, the notion of *outsideness* as potential. As discussed in Chapter 6, Bakhtin suggests that "... any culture requires the perspective of other cultures to develop their potential" (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.289).[5] In fact, Bakhtin (1986, p.7) suggests that:

> ... one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*.

All students and teachers, regardless of – and because of – their backgrounds, bring their individual *outsideness* to any *space*. And *outsideness*, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is not only "a most powerful factor in understanding" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7) but is also critical to the generation of *creative understanding*.

The *outsideness* which teachers and students bring to *dialogic spaces* stimulates the negotiation and evolution of new views, new understandings, new meanings, and new ways to mean. Additionally, *outsideness* allows for comparisons, the importance of which, as Shotter (1995, p.6) points out, "cannot be overemphasized". Shotter (1995, p.6) suggests that comparisons "work to create 'dimensions' in terms of which differences can be both noticed and articulated". The idea that comparisons work to create dimensions (Shotter 1995, p.6), also suggests differences interacting creatively. It reflects *outsideness*, *going on* and *creative understanding*. And, just as *dialogue* plays a crucial role in accessing the potential of *outsideness*, so too is *dialogue* instrumental in an individual's *going on* and *creative understanding*. *Creative understanding*, as explained in Chapter 6, is paramount to an individual's *going on*, either in his or her own journey or in a journey with others, especially when cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ. This concept of *creative understanding* adds to Potter, O'Neill and Danaher's (2006, p.8) suggestion that *creative understanding* "is the leap of comprehension that occurs when we achieve new learnings about others and ourselves through our interactions with those others".

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[5]Scollon and Scollon (2001, p.138) note that "Cultures do not talk to each other; individuals do" and assert, therefore, that "all communication is interpersonal communication and can never be intercultural communication", a comment which also reflects the understanding, as taken in this thesis, that cultures are only, and ever, individual boundaries.

The role of *dialogue* in *going on* and *becoming*

Students' learning – their understanding – reflects their *going on*. A student's learning is directly influenced by the *dialogue*, both external and internal, to which he or she is exposed and in which he or she is engaged. As Freedman and Ball (2004, p.6) point out, "In a Bakhtinian sense, with whom, in what ways, and in what contexts we interact will determine what we stand to learn." Bakhtin (1986, p.159) claims that real understanding is a four-tiered process including the physical perception; its recognition; an understanding of its significance in context; and, crucially, an "active-dialogic understanding". Active-dialogue not only facilitates understanding and *going on*, but is also "implicitly creative, and presumes ever-new, and surprisingly new contexts" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.99).

Dialogue, critical and higher order thinking (HORT)

This process of understanding and *going on* for students (and teachers) is about accessing and participating *dialogically* in *authoritative discourses* (such as when interacting with teachers and academic texts) in a richer and more diverse range of *spaces*. It also involves students (and teachers) extending their range of *internal spaces* through practising *internal dialogue* (for processes such as translation and interpretation), and through *internally persuasive discourse* (for processes such as critical and higher order thinking). Bakhtin (1981, pp.345-6) compares internal and external discourses and highlights how *internally persuasive discourse* facilitates *becoming*:

> Internally persuasive discourse – as opposed to one that is externally authoritative – is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with "one's own word."[3] In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition.

Bakhtin (1981, pp.345-6) continues his thoughts about *internally persuasive discourse*:

> It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development [or *becoming*] is just such an intense *struggle* within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is

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[3] "One's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.345).

open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.345-6) (author's emphasis).

Although students in this study emphasised that they wanted to enter into *dialogue* with their teachers and others, a number of factors hindered this. Facility with *languages* was the primary factor. Bakhtin (1981, p.291), however, asserts that "languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways" (author's emphasis). His notion of "intersection" reflects his insistence that cultural entities are, in effect, *all* boundary. Bakhtin (1986, p.2) reiterates his belief that:

> In our enthusiasm for specification we have ignored questions of interconnection and interdependence of various areas of culture; we have frequently forgotten that the boundaries of these areas are not absolute, that in various epochs they have been drawn in various ways; and we have not taken into account that the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity.[6]

The implications of Bakhtin's (1986, p.2) comment are several and significant in the context of this thesis, particularly (but not only[7]) in relation to the *becoming* of individuals, practices, cultures and their associated languages and discourses. If, as Bakhtin suggests, "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries", and if he is right that languages do not exclude each other but, rather, intersect each other in many different ways (Bakhtin, 1981, p.291), then *spaces* are needed which promote and facilitate this intersection of differences. Such intersection – or interaction, perhaps – occurs through *dialogue* and this requires *spaces* of a special sort where *dialogue* is encouraged and, through practice, is "freely developed" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.345-6).

Dialogic practice spaces (Dips)

In the context of this thesis, students and teachers require more, and more inclusive, interaction.[8] Students and teachers require *spaces* for differences – that is, *outsideness* –

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[6]Areas which have "become enclosed in their own specificity" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.2) include *academic discourses* and *discipline-specific discourses*.
[7]It also suggests, for example, cross-disciplinary interaction and *becoming*.
[8]As well as students and teachers, "Others" may also need access to these *spaces*. Referring to what he considers is a lack of communication between academics and English language support staff (that is, Teachers and Others in this thesis), Valdés (2004, p.84) emphasises the need "for communities of professional practice to learn about the work of other professional communities for that dialogues taking place in varied conversations can begin to be part of the same communication sphere". Such "varied conversations" suggest overlapping (or intersecting) disciplines and professional practices in interactive *dialogic spaces*. Such practices also suggest creative potential through inter-disciplinary "interplay across the boundaries" (Shotter, 2003, p.2).

to meet, where *creative understanding* can be evoked, and provoked, through *dialogue* in practice. Potter, O'Neill and Danaher (2006, p.1) refer to a "dialectical, dialogical and discursive relationship between outsidedness and creative understanding". Such a relationship between teachers and students may develop in *spaces* where active *dialogic* interaction is encouraged – not as 'bridges' which try to span "the others and ourselves" – but as 'commons', meeting *spaces* where players connect *dialogically* in the play of interaction. And students, especially, require *practice spaces* where there is no penalty for not 'catching balls that bounce crooked', a notion regarding the assessment of student participation within these *spaces*, as discussed later.[9]

Wasser and Bressler (cited in Potter, O'Neill & Danaher, 2006, p.5) refer to such *spaces* as "the interpretive zone [which] is the crucible where [learners] sift, sort and consider the meaning of their ... work". They also propose "the notion of the 'interpretive zone as the intellectual realm' in which reflective practitioners work when they engage in conversations with one another" (Wasser & Bressler, cited in Potter, O'Neill & Danaher, 2006, p.5). The terms "interpretive zone" and "intellectual realm" (Wasser and Bressler, cited in Potter, O'Neill & Danaher, 2006, p.5) are implicit here in the description of *spaces* where *creative understanding* may be stimulated through active *dialogic* interaction. In such *dialogic practice spaces*, teachers and students, as reflective practitioners, may engage in a joint journey of intellectual interpretation, practice, teaching, learning, assessment, and evaluation of self and others through external and internal *dialogue*. It is in such *dialogic practice spaces* that *languages*, *spaces* and *games*, together with the 'players' who negotiate them, *become*, as 'players' jointly engage in the construction of new knowledge which, as posited in the epistemological position taken in this thesis, "is constructed through dialogue" (Koch, cited in Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p.343). The critical point here is that active *dialogic* participants "jointly engage", and by responding *dialogically* in various ways to one another's *outsideness*, individuals change and *become* while maintaining their own, if changing, *outsideness*. As Bakhtin points out:

> One cannot become a mere duplicate of the other through total empathy or 'fusing' of horizons; that could add nothing truly new. Nor should one 'modernize and distort' the other by turning the other into a version of oneself. Both these alternatives, which are often seen as the only possible ones, reduce two voices and two perspectives to one. But true responsibility and creative understanding are dialogic, and dialogue gives rise to unexpected questions. (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp.99-100).

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[9]See *Chapter 9: Games* for further discussion about 'balls that bounce crooked' and other incongruencies regarding the playing of academic *games*.

In his article, *Rethinking the spatiality of literacy practices in multicultural conditions*, Kostogriz (2004, p.4 & p.6) draws on "Bakhtin's analysis of the 'dialogical' in the production of cultural-semiotic spatiality" to discuss "a model of dialogical interaction" as a means of disrupting "the discourses of binarism". Such a model, Kostogriz (2004, p.6) suggests, might promote "a new understanding of self and the Other, beyond a mere celebration of differences and cultural multivoicedness". Kostogriz (2004, p.5) also points out that this model of "cultural-semiotic spatiality":

> … does not denote this space as fixed enclosure, but rather as the ongoing dialogue between differences which triggers a semiotic motion across real and imagined boundaries created within and between cultures, social groups and ethnic communities.

Kostogriz (2004, p.2) also suggests that the use of "cultural-semiotic spaces" promotes the "production of new transcultural meanings and hybrid literacy practices as a result of interaction between differences". According to Kostogriz (2004, p.8), "These textual practices are features of transcultural becoming and semiotic innovation; they are not English literacy but literacies in English." Bakhtin (1981, pp.304-305 & p.358) refers to "hybrids" and "hybridizations" of language and claims that:

> Such mixing of two languages within the boundaries of a single utterance is, in the novel, an artistic device (or more accurately, a system of devices) that is deliberate. But unintentional, unconscious hybridization [as in the case of INESB students] is one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages.

Dialogue in the spaces

While *dialogic practice spaces* are critical to the *becoming* of the individuals and practices which evolve together through the *spaces*, it is the *dialogue* itself which is far more critical to the process of *becoming* than the actual *spaces*. It is the *dialogue* which facilitates change, not the *spaces*. In his article, *Dialogical imagination of (inter)cultural spaces*, Kostogriz (2005, p.193) highlights Bakhtin's belief that:

> … dialogue is not just a mode of interaction but rather a way of communal existence in which people establish a multifaceted relationship of *mutual interdependence*. (my emphasis).

Shotter (2003) also highlights the critical role of *dialogue* in various contexts. In his article *Dialogue, depth, and life inside responsive orders: From external observation to participatory understanding*, Shotter (2003, p.8) refers to "dialogue seminars" as a means of providing a "third realm, sui generis, of activity" whose primary purpose is for those who participate *dialogically* to come "to share a scenic-sense of the region they all occupy as a dynamic arena full of developmental resources" (p.5). Shotter (2003, p.5)

suggests that such a *space*, or *spaces*, may have "a multiplicity of relational dimensions" which can be thought of as "the dialogically structured intertwining that occurs as an 'orchestration', a complex polyphonic unfolding of many interwoven, co-responsive functions". Shotter (2003, p.5) also suggests that, within these *dialogic spaces*, participants produce between them "a very complex mixture of not wholly reconcilable influences", pointing to the unsettling *heteroglossic* tensions between *centripetal* forces "(inward toward order and unity)" and *centrifugal* forces "(outward toward diversity and difference)". It is through such *heteroglossic* tensions within these *spaces* that individuals and practices *become*. This will be discussed more fully when answering Research Question 4 in the next chapter.

Spontaneous interaction in dialogic practice spaces

This *becoming* for individuals and practices, however, is not only dependent on *dialogue* within the *spaces*, but is also dependent on *spontaneous dialogue* or, as Shotter (2003, p.7) suggests, spontaneous reactions. According to Shotter (2003, p.7), "new shared reactions must first *spontaneously* occur" (my emphasis). As found in this thesis, however, many INESB students, because of difficulties with English language and specifically with *speaking* in this context, are unable to respond as spontaneously as they would like to, a difficulty which may reduce the efficacy of *dialogic practice spaces*. This difficulty, however, may be alleviated through the combined use of *dialogic practice spaces* and *learning journals* where *learning journals* are used by students as a means of "rehearsing" (Shotter, 2003, p.8) in preparation for the *dialogic practice spaces*. This suggestion will be discussed later in the chapter.

The role of gesture in going on

As noted earlier in this thesis, *dialogue* is a form of social action which, in principle, requires some kind of 'reply'. As Bakhtin points out, "If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of dialogue and enters systemic cognition, which is essentially impersonal" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.168). It is in the response that understanding is activated. In fact, Bakhtin (1981, p.282) suggests that, to some extent, "primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding." Within such *dialogic practice spaces*, where interaction between teachers and students is face-to-face, simple gestures, such as pointing or tone of voice, help interlocutors understand each other and the concepts being discussed. Shotter (2003, p.7) refers to the "crucial

importance" of "the use of gestures" and quotes Wittgenstein (1966, p.2), who, commenting about the teaching and learning of certain words, also highlights the importance of "gestures and facial expressions". It is in the reply, the feedback, including non-verbal feedback in such simple actions as the nod of a head or a "tap on the shoulder" (Student 4.1F), that *going on* for both students and teachers is facilitated. Face-to-face interaction in *dialogic practice spaces* facilitates *going on* and *becoming*, as reflected in the following student's comment:

> *... writing down everything in an assignment, all the paragraphs, is a really big problem. Sometimes the lecturer cannot understand. Face-to-face we can use our body language [to explain].* (Student 20F).

In fact students recognised other and multiple benefits of working in *dialogic* groups together with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, as they reiterate in their following comments:

> *Group work has definitely many advantages, especially when the groups have mixed races.* (Student 77M).

When asked what sorts of teaching activities she thought would help her to understand concepts, the following student explained what she saw as the advantages of working with others, and also highlighted the need for *dialogue*:

> *Brainstorming, I **love** brainstorming because it has topics and sub-topics. Students and lecturers. Because I need someone to explain to me. Then I understand more deeply and remember. I can't study on my own. I can read and read and read, but if someone explains to me I say, 'Oh, OK, right, I get the idea!'* (Student 47.1F).

When asked how he "learned best" another student said it was through 'talk' and 'explanation', as he, himself, explained:

> *It's best when I talk to someone and someone talks to me and also writing it down and explain it to someone. I learn more when I explain something.* (Student 60.2M).

The following student's comment also reflects his aspirations regarding his chosen profession and highlights his understanding of the importance of 'talk':

> *I just want more 'common sense' and description about [my profession] ... just to talk, talk, talk.* (Student 17.1M).

In reconsidering the points made in this chapter so far, and as discussed in Chapter 6, it has been established that *dialogue*, as the starting point of language, is critical in the successful negotiation of the complex of *academic discourses*, and is the currency necessary to participate in the discourses and practices of students' chosen professions. Additionally, it is *dialogic* participation which facilitates students' achievement of their aspirations regarding their Australian experience in *academic* contexts, namely, to learn English language, to understand the concepts, and to achieve high grades. Similarly, it is

dialogic participation which facilitates students' aspirations to experience 'Australian culture' in *everyday* contexts. Furthermore, *dialogue* is the critical factor in accessing the potential of *outsideness* which, in turn, is essential in the stimulation of *creative understanding*, and *going on*, and in the *becoming* of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* together with the individuals who negotiate them. If *dialogue* is the currency necessary for participation, then *spaces* need to be provided where *dialogic practice* can occur.

Section Three – Revisiting hopes, expectations and aspirations

Students came to Australia with hopes, expectations and aspirations regarding their Australian experience. Apart from wanting to graduate with a degree from a Western university, students wanted to improve their English language, understand the concepts being taught, and achieve high grades. They also expected to experience 'Australian culture[10]', an experience which they thought would include meeting Australian people and interacting with them, both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts. Apart from experiencing 'Australian culture' in this way, students reasonably expected that interaction with Australians would help them improve their English language. For reasons already discussed, however, meeting and interacting with Australians, both on- and off-campus, was not always as easy, successful or pleasant as they had expected. Consequently, many students found themselves interacting with members of their own cultural and linguistic groups, which provided little opportunity for experiencing 'Australian culture' or practising English language. In *academic* contexts, students had little interaction with local students which, again, not only confined their *dialogue* to members of their own ethnic groups or other non-Australians, but also hindered their learning as they tried to transfer study skills and strategies which had been successful in other contexts to this new context. This practice also, was often not easy, successful or pleasant.

Whether or not these students' hopes, expectations and aspirations were reasonable or realistic, the findings at this point have something to say to these students after they arrive and begin their Australian experience. This study can tell students, for example, something about how they can understand that experience as being about learning new *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. It can tell them that the English language which they came to learn is not *one* language, but many *languages* which are used in different

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[10] 'Australian culture' in all its diverse forms has not been, nor will be, defined in this thesis.

ways, in different contexts for different purposes. Similarly, it can tell them that there is not *one* Australian culture to be experienced, but a *heteroglossic* mix of cultures both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts. The study can also tell students that *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* is the currency which allows them access to and participation in these contexts, or *spaces*, and it can alert them to the fact that ways of doing and ways of knowing may be different in these *spaces* from ways they have known in other contexts. Additionally, the study can tell students that they will be required to play certain sorts of *games*, using different sorts of *languages* in different sorts of *spaces* and that these *games*, though similar to *games* they may have played in other places, may have different rules, different expectations, and differently shaped playing fields. These differences will present challenges which can cause students considerable angst. This study, however, can also tell students that, while they will experience both positive and negative *outsideness*, and while their reality may be totally incongruous with their expectations, if they can learn to *"recover very quickly"* (Student 18.1F) and if they can *"keep going until it turns around and becomes a positive thing"* (Student 80M), then it may be that their Australian experience becomes a positive one – one which reflects the notions of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. Getting to this point, however, requires a student's tenacity and the University's support.

Academic support

Recognising that INESB students face challenges in *academic* contexts, the University provided a range of services through the International Office, the English Language Centre, and Student Services.[11] Such services, particularly those relating to students' academic work, are provided by most universities around Australia generally based on a moral and professional 'duty of care' which acknowledges "that adequate support needs to be provided to non-native speakers of English so that they can attain the proficiency needed to succeed in their studies" (Reid, 1996, p.76). While agreeing with this ethic – and not in any way suggesting the removal of or reduction in these vital student support services – this thesis encourages a change in thinking about how, and in what ways, these students and their teachers might be supported so that their aspirations regarding teaching and learning (and, possibly some other aspirations as well) may be achieved.

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[11]While this research was being undertaken, a number of major changes occurred at the University which impacted on the provision of services to INESB students. These included the closure of the International Office and the English Language Centre. These changes also included a restructure of Student Services which minimised the provision of services provided specifically to INESB students. Because this thesis and the practical suggestions presented here are about *going on*, however, this discussion focuses on possible future services.

The following suggestions for practice are examples of what universities might now do to support students and teachers in light of the findings of this research. That is, they are suggestions for practice which show possible ways forward – how to *go on* for both students and teachers – which have been found through the research reported in this thesis.

Suggestions for practice

The practical suggestions here, are offered as possible ways which may provide opportunities for students to meet Australians (at least in *academic* contexts), to practise their English language through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts, to practise deep learning, to demonstrate their understandings in practice, and to develop critical and higher order thinking skills. Supporting students and their teachers to practise the *games* in the ways suggested, may help students ultimately to fulfil another of their initial aspirations, namely, to achieve high grades.

Lectures

Advocating a *dialogic* praxial approach, lectures, which in this study are the dominant methods for 'transmitting knowledge', might be avoided or, at least, relied upon less.[12] Ramsden (1992, p.267), in his book *Learning to teach in higher education*, suggests that "good teaching in higher education may be defined by the quality of learning it encourages". He (1992, p.167) suggests that "the best general advice to the teacher who wants to improve his or her lecturing is still 'Don't lecture' (Eble, 1988, p.68)". His advice is just as applicable today.

In Section One of this chapter, it was suggested that *dialogic practice spaces* be created where teachers and students can engage as reflective practitioners, teaching and learning the practices of their professions through interactive *dialogue*. As mentioned, students were sometimes unable to participate spontaneously in *dialogue* because of difficulties with English language, especially *speaking*. While students do not need 'perfect'

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[12]An alternative may be to change the format of lectures from 'monoglossic' to 'dialogic', as in the one case reported in *Chapter 8: Spaces* (p.162):

> *Even with a large class size, the lectures were more interactive. We had group work in lectures, question and answer periods in lectures, and could ask a question any time, pretty much. It was almost like having two tutorials instead of a lecture and tutorial per week. I enjoyed the interaction – I felt it was more effective than having someone stand at the front of the room ...* (Student 50F).

English to participate in *dialogic practice spaces*, they especially need encouragement to participate – to take risks – using the English language they *do* have. In *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures*, Zamel and Spack (1998, p.x) refer to "interlanguage", a linguistic term they use "to represent the transitional but logical stage of a learner's growing understanding of language as well as subject matter". Zamel and Spack (1998, p.x) say that they "have come to appreciate interlanguage as the mark of the kind of risk taking that is necessary in order for learning to take place". Allowing and encouraging the use of interlanguages, "hybrids" and "hybridizations" of language (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.304-305 & p.358) in *dialogic practice spaces* where they can be practised without penalty or recrimination, may facilitate the students' development of English language as well as discipline content knowledge. The use of interlanguages may also facilitate the spontaneous interaction to which Shotter (2003, p.7) refers earlier. As was also suggested in Section One, the benefits of *dialogic practice spaces* may be enhanced if used in conjunction with *learning journals* which may also facilitate *dialogic* spontaneity by giving students time and space to prepare for the *dialogic* interaction.

Learning journals (Crackers)

Dimensions of language

A *learning journal*, as discussed here, is simply a notebook of some sort in which a student can write as an adult learner who is responsible – in partnership with his or her teacher – for his or her own learning. *Learning journals*, which encourage students to use the English language they do have in a type of 'free writing', may facilitate the teaching and learning process in a number of ways. *Learning journals*, which focus on *reading* and *writing*, could be used as a form of continuous, *non-gradeable* assessment – a means of combining teaching, learning and assessment – for undergraduate, and even postgraduate, students, especially in the early semesters of their study. It is worth noting again that students and teachers generally agreed that advanced levels of academic writing were less necessary for undergraduate students than postgraduate students. With this in mind, writing tasks which progressively develop students' academic writing skills from undergraduate to postgraduate levels may ease some of the challenges facing undergraduate students. *Learning journals* could be used across disciplines, providing a *dialogic* baseline from which students, teachers, and other staff members (such as academic support staff) could negotiate, allowing strategic targeting of the needs of individual students or whole cohorts.

If used as non-gradeable, compulsory 'assessment tasks', *learning journals* may provide students with another space to practise and learn without their grades being jeopardised. *Learning journals* which provide *spaces* to use "interlanguage" as advocated by Zamel and Spack (1998, p.x), or "hybrid constructions" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.304) of 'Englishes', may help students improve their general English and develop discipline-specific English, without (yet) having to meet the demands of formal academic writing. Encouraging students to express their ideas and understandings freely without worrying about language form, may facilitate students' deeper learning and the development of critical and higher order thinking skills as they consider and write down questions, thoughts, ideas, understandings, reflections and personal revelations. As Macrorie (1988, p.2) suggests, rather than worrying about punctuation or spelling, adult students should concentrate only on telling some kind of truth.

Learning journals may encourage students to draw on their own realities, their existing knowledges and skills, and to write in ways which suit their styles of thinking and learning. While students should use English in their *learning journals* – since the purpose *is* to improve their English language – they should not be discouraged from also using other languages as a means of clarifying their thought processes and understandings. Allowing students to use their own languages, as well as Englishes and "hybridizations" of language (Bakhtin, 1981, p.358), is a way of acknowledging students' prior knowledge and does not "discount the diverse literacy practices that students bring" to the University (Reid, cited in Hirst, 2002, p.2).

The type of 'free writing' and interlanguages used in *learning journals* would also release students from the obligation (at this stage) to use referencing. This would not only alleviate plagiarism in this context, but also allow students the time they request to learn what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Relieving students of this responsibility at this point may also provide the time students need to translate and understand content and concepts in another language. *Learning journals* may also allow teachers to track students' progress more accurately, helping to identify whether later, more formal writing tasks are, in fact, the students' own work.[13]

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[13]It may be worth considering the teacher's comment regarding plagiarism in the visual arts. He considered that students who were taught to copy the 'master' produced work which was not so much plagiarised as "just not ... very original" (Teacher 39M). If this is the case, then perhaps 'creativity' could be encouraged among students in *all* disciplines, instead of teaching them how to regurgitate 'the master's voice' using various forms of paraphrasing and referencing. If *creative understanding* were encouraged in this way, then plagiarism may be minimised.

Learning journals may help students to improve their English in functional, non-threatening ways, while learning the language specific to their discipline. As students become familiar with discipline-specific discourses and more comfortable with the types of thinking and academic conventions required of them, other forms of assessment could be introduced, such as descriptive writing, reflective opinion papers and more formal academic essays. According to Fazal Rizvi (2003, pers. comm., 13 December), however, *learning journals* are far more useful, pedagogically, than essays ever could be – that is, unless what actually constitutes an academic essay is reconsidered, as suggested in Section Three of this chapter.

Dimensions of understanding

Learning journals may allow students the time and space they need to rehearse and formulate questions they want to raise in *dialogic practice spaces*. This practice may encourage 'quiet' and 'reticent' students to participate more actively. Questions raised in *learning journals* could also be used by teachers to generate discussion during collaborative group work, helping teachers to identify weaknesses in students' understandings and guiding 'where to *go on* from here'. This may also help teachers 'assess' students' understandings, particularly if students are given opportunities to explain their understandings orally. This practice (together with the written *learning journal*) may allow more accurate tracking and assessment of students' thought processes and understandings than some other forms of assessment, such as essays or examinations.[14] *Dialogic* interaction in *dialogic practice spaces* may help clarify concepts and understandings for both students and teachers. Such interaction may also strengthen students' *listening* and *speaking* skills, which can be overshadowed by volumes of academic *reading* and *writing*.

Learning journals may give students opportunities to think about how new concepts might be applied and situated in their own countries and/or other contexts, leading to generalisation and transferability to other, more relevant, contexts. As Macrorie (1988, p.8) points out, "free writing … finds for us genuine voices, in which we can speak with authority". Permitting and encouraging students to write about new concepts, with their own voices, in their own contexts, allows them to write with authority. Allowing students to use 'I' puts the onus on the students to take responsibility for their positions.

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[14]It is acknowledged that some courses (for example, law and accountancy) are governed by Australian societies and institutions which prescribe the examination of prospective members (that is, students) as part of their degree. Many lecturers, however, advocate invigilated examinations, seeing them as a means of overcoming plagiarism, overcoming collaboration, and finding out 'what's actually in the students' heads'.

The use of *learning journals* may not only help develop written language skills, but may also facilitate the development of students' voices, opinions and points of view, a foundation for critical and higher order thinking.

Dimensions of achievement

As non-gradeable components of *dialogic practice spaces*, *learning journals* could be 'assessed' or 'viewed' during *dialogic practice spaces* when students are present and have opportunities to *speak* and *read* their work. Shotter (2003, p.8), referring again to "the dialogue seminars", suggests that students be given opportunity to "read aloud". While this strategy may initially make some students feel uncomfortable, the use of *learning journals* may allow students to rehearse prior to these informal, ungraded 'presentations' where they could then practise their oral skills in a 'risk free' (as far as their grades are concerned) environment.

Other considerations

There are other considerations regarding the use of *learning journals*. For example, when, where and how often could or should *learning journals* be used? Could, or should, *learning journals* be used for every subject? How might *learning journals* impact on a teacher's workload? Would *learning journals* accurately reflect students' understandings? Nevertheless, writing in such non-threatening (or perhaps more importantly for the students) non-gradeable practice *spaces* not only facilitates growing fluency in English and creativity of thought but, when used in conjunction with *dialogic practice spaces*, may also enhance the clarification of concepts, all factors which may increase the likelihood of students achieving higher grades in later, more formal assessment tasks.

Dips and Crackers

As alluded to in the headings introducing them, there is another consideration regarding the combined use of *dialogic practice spaces* and *learning journals*. As suggested throughout this discussion, the two strategies complement each other and should be used together. *Dialogic practice spaces* enhance *listening* and *speaking* skills, while *learning journals* enhance *reading* and *writing* skills. In practice, they overlap and, when used together, *dialogic practice spaces* and *learning journals* have the potential to enhance students' English language, among other things.

The use of acronyms and other forms of abbreviation and, at times, the use of even more

obscure 'lengthenings' of word which appear to have cryptic and unrelated meanings is common in Australia, as was highlighted by the students. This common practice is drawn upon here. If *dialogic practice spaces* were referred to as *Dips*, then *learning journals* could be referred to as *Crackers*. Used together, this combined teaching and learning strategy could be called *Dips and Crackers*. *Dips and Crackers*, like acronyms, are also common in Australia. Thus, I have relied on a common Australian dictionary, *The Macquarie Concise Dictionary* (1998) which focuses on the Englishes of Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia, to explain these words as follows: *Dips* are "a soft savoury mixture into which biscuits, potato crisps, or the like, are dipped before being eaten, usually served with cocktails" (*The Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, 1998, p.313) and *Crackers* are, among other things, "a thin, crisp biscuit" (*The Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, 1998, p.258).[15] Just as the use of the word *games* in the context of this thesis does not imply that academic practices are frivolous or fun, nor does the use of the term *Dips and Crackers* detract from their potential as a powerful means of facilitating positive outcomes in teaching and learning – and, while rarely frivolous, they may be fun. And besides, *Dips and Crackers* is much easier to say and write than *dialogic practice spaces and learning journals*.

Frivolity aside, from both a theoretical and a practical point of view, there is something quite compelling about the use of *Dips and Crackers* in this context. In addition to the metaphoric use of the terms, food is a powerful resource for stimulating *dialogue*, especially between people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Food, like the "secret weapon" one teacher used to break down barriers and encourage talk between Indians and Pakistanis,[16] can transcend difference. Students frequently referred to food in various ways and contexts. The potential of using *Dips and Crackers* in multiple contexts, in multiple ways, for multiple purposes, should not be underestimated.

Other suggestions

Contextualising writing tasks

Bakhtin distinguishes between *znachenie* (which he uses to mean "abstract [or dictionary] meaning") and *smysl*, which he uses to indicate "contextual meaning", or the

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[15]Other meanings of the word "crackers" include: "a kind of firework which explodes with a loud report; ... something which has a particular quality in a high degree" and, when used colloquially, "crazy." (*The Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, 1998, pp.258-259).

[16] "Yeah, well, the secret weapon that I use with the Pakistanis and Indians is 'cricket' – we manage to talk cricket. [laughs] And they'll talk about it to each other." (Teacher 26M).

sense of a situation (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.126). "Contextual meaning" and "the sense of a situation" are also useful concepts when considering how to contextualise students' knowledge and their understandings as expressed in academic essay writing. For example, by allowing students to write from their own relevant contexts, content can become contextualised, or situated, as the following teacher explained:

> ... everybody's got a story. Like a journalist, get the story out of them and share the story and weave the subject through their story. And that's how you'll contextualise it. (Teacher 26M).

Contextualising content to the students' stories may give students "the sense of a situation" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.126) allowing them to write with more authority and making the writing more relevant and transferable to other contexts. Giving students their own voice by allowing first person writing may also help students to write with more authority as they draw on their own knowledges and 'common sense' of situations. As Holquist (2002, p.28) suggests in a creative metaphor, "'I' is the needle that stitches the abstraction of language to the particularity of lived experience." Additionally, the use of first person supports the development of critical and higher order thinking skills as students use *internal dialogue* and *internally persuasive discourse* to consider and question their own realities and their own *outsideness*. As Bakhtin (1981, p.348) points out,

> 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.

In their article *Becoming a professional (and other dissidents acts): Language and literacy teaching in an age of Neoliberal reform*, Doecke and Kostogriz (2008, p.78 & p.80) highlight the "value" of "students … writing their narratives", suggesting that:

> ... the narratives the students produced … showed them endeavouring to see further than they could see before, and approaching a professional ethic that might acknowledge the existence of others and not seek to deny their humanity by pretending to comprehend completely and thus contain them (cf.Critchley, 1992:284).

Using students' stories, or *outsideness*, in this way also has the potential to facilitate intercultural understanding – particularly if these stories emerge during *Dips and Crackers* as "read aloud" (Shotter, 2003, p.8) moments or informal presentations – as reflected in the following teacher's suggestion:

> ... I tried to engage with [the students] on their differences. ... it was to try and differentiate and make them individuals by asking, perhaps, for them to present where you are from. ... So it is confidence building on both sides [INESB students and local students]. … So it was to get it right out in front, and to break down barriers between them – that these people are all the same, they look all the same though they might be

from 12 different language groups. And, **no**, they are **not** the same. They come from **entirely** different backgrounds. And they're all within this class. And each has got a story. (Teacher 65M)

The same teacher explained how he used each student's "story" in assessment:

... and you bring this [story] into – not as a sit down coffee thing – but as part of their projects of what they're doing in the classroom. So you link this as soon as you can within the actual subject as an assessable item.[17]

Giving students opportunities to engage with – and grapple with – subject content in ways that allow them to draw on their own personally situated contexts may prepare them, more appropriately, for those contexts in which they intend to practise professionally. Gee (2001, p.45) considers that "Situated meanings are crucial to learning; without them, learning is either too general or too specific and therefore useless for any 'critical' or 'deep' purpose."

More simple language

Difficult language used in academic texts caused challenges for most students, as did the use of obscure language in assessment and examination questions. Participants, including students, teachers and other support staff members, consistently raised this issue, pointing to the need for more simple language, especially in written texts. Van Lier (2004, p.150), in discussing the problems of simplification of language and content, suggests that the challenge "is to improve access and to stimulate engagement while keeping the content constant". As reported in *Chapter 4: Understanding*, however, this study revealed that *students did not find discipline-specific language challenging*. That is, students did not find 'content' language problematic. What *did* cause challenges for students, on the other hand, was the use of verbs like 'elicit' or nouns like 'mainstay' which are neither *everyday* nor *academic*, but typical of the types of 'educated' languages used in the idiom of written assignment and examination questions.[18] Writing assignment and examination questions using a combination of *everyday* languages and *discourse specific* languages (and avoiding the use of 'educated' and 'idiomatic' languages) may help to alleviate this challenge.

Textbooks and academic readings which are written in more simple language without compromising the content and concepts would also be useful for these students. In fact,

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[17]This teacher's 'throw-away' comment regarding "sit down coffee", however, could be another way of engaging students in *dialogic spaces*. As highlighted already, food and drink can be powerful resources for stimulating *dialogue*. In fact, it was his comment which triggered the idea of *Dips and Crackers* – or the name, at least, and its subsequent connotations.
[18]See *Chapter 5: Achievement* (p.100) for further discussion.

the use of more simple language may also be helpful for *local*, *English speaking* students, based on the following teacher's comments:

> … I've written assessment items and [INESB students] just don't understand the question – lack of English skills and lack of understanding of the material as well. But I have that problem with Australian students as well. (Teacher 13M).

A suggestion by the following student regarding academic readings and more simple language may also be worth considering:

> *Student:*   *See, we could have another assignment question. This assignment question could be provided for the Australian people and we could have another set of questions just for overseas students.*

> Interviewer: Just explain what you mean.

> *Student:*   *Um. Say this is the [assignment] question. Say I couldn't understand this article and comment on it. Maybe because all my other [INESB] classmates have trouble with the same question, we could do the same assignment but with an easier article.* (Student 43.1M).

Small, weekly tests

A number of students suggested that the use of small, weekly tests may facilitate the teaching and learning process, as reflected in the following comments:

> *Small tests are good and useful. Small questions are good.* (Student 79F).

While this student was referring to graded tests, the following suggestion is made instead. Weekly tests which are ungraded and self-assessed, say online, may help students learn concepts and content without jeopardising their grades. This would allow students to track their own progress in preparation for graded assessment tasks, allowing them to establish for themselves 'what they have so far become'. Such *"timely feedback"* (Student 81F) via ungraded tests of this type may also be time-efficient from the point of view of teachers whose time is being increasingly encroached upon. As one of many teachers said in different ways:

> I'm not a great believer in over-assessing. Apart from anything else, I'm too busy. (Teacher 39M).

Apart from helping students to learn specific aspects of their subject, the use of these sorts of ungradeable tests in conjunction with *Dips and Crackers* and, say, two gradeable assessment tasks of different types may help students achieve the high grades they want, and relieve teachers of the time-consuming task of marking, grading and scaling multiple assessment tasks.

Repudiating continuous graded assessment

All teachers in this study used continuous graded assessment which took place several

times during the *finalisable* course of teaching and learning. In all cases, the assessment tasks had a summative function by contributing to the students' final grades (Ritter & Wilson, 2001). While continuous graded assessment may offer students "opportunities to recover from failure" and may also decrease students' stress levels by "avoiding a single crucial moment of assessment at the end of a semester" (Ritter & Wilson, 2001, p.8), the use of continuous graded assessment also places demands on students' time management skills (Ritter & Wilson, 2001). In the case of INESB students who require extra time to complete reading and writing tasks associated with their subjects and who also request time to learn and develop specific skills (for example, how to use referencing in academic writing, or how to think critically), the use of continuous graded assessment exacerbates the challenges these students face. As such, and as a form of assessment which adds multiple layers to a teacher's workload, the use of continuous graded assessment is repudiated. Continuous *ungraded* assessment, on the other hand, as suggested here, may relieve some of the challenges facing students and teachers and facilitate the outcomes they are hoping for.

Peer assessment

The use of peer assessment in some contexts – for example, as illustrated in *Chapter 9 Games*, (p.192) where small panels of students assessed their peers' presentations – may enhance *dialogue* between students, engage students more effectively with the process of assessment and also relieve teacher workload (Ritter & Wilson, 2001). Such assessment, primarily a means of *dialogic* feedback, could also be non-graded.

Other assessment types

Examinations

Some students in this study indicated that they performed well in examinations because of previous conditioning in earlier contexts. Examinations as a means of assessment may be useful if they are used in conjunction with other teaching and learning strategies such as those suggested here. A number of considerations, however, would facilitate students' success in these test conditions, including the use of simple language in the formulation of the examination questions, and ensuring that sufficient time is allowed for students to complete the examination, bearing in mind the extra time involved for many INESB students in the complex process of translation.

Multiple choice

Many teachers preferred multiple choice tests over other forms of assessment because

such tests are easy to mark and time-efficient. Among students, however, there were differences of opinion regarding multiple choice tests. The majority of students said such tests were "really confusing" (Student 8.1F), generally because of the way in which the questions were worded and the difficult language used. Two students, however, as noted in Chapter 5 (p.109), said they preferred multiple choice tests because less writing was required. If multiple choice tests were designed using simple language and clear statements (for example, avoiding double negatives), and if students understood the 'rules of the game' (that is, multiple choice means *one* choice of answer, not multiple choices), then this method of assessment may suit both teachers and students.

Short answer questions and dot point responses

The use of short answer questions was found to overcome issues of plagiarism in at least one faculty (Commerce)[19] and NESB students were found to perform well with short answer questions in another faculty (Science and Agriculture).[20] Coupled with dot point responses, this method may facilitate the assessment of students' understandings in ways which support the task for both students and teachers.

Research projects

A number of students suggested that research projects helped them learn and understand more deeply while learning discipline-specific language. Some students said that they preferred research projects because such projects helped them learn *"narrow and deep"* about a topic, as the following student explained:

> *… I would prefer to do research, rather than attend to class. Because it's really different doing research. You have to tighten [your focus] and you know what the things that you have to concentrate on and you just look for information on the topic. But because, in [my] degree, you study general things, general meaning, you have to touch everything, so it's rather broad and shallow. But broad is a problem because you have to touch everything. So you have to understand everything. [pause] I don't really enjoy study and attending classes. Ah, this is my problem! … I'd rather choose research; that's why I continue for my honours project, because honours is different – narrow and deep.* (Student 18.1F).

These comments reflect what was reported in *Chapter 4: Understanding* (p.87) where a number of students commented on what they perceived to be a broad, surface-level coverage of many topics, as opposed to a narrow, but deeper, coverage of fewer topics. Bearing in mind time restraints for students and teachers, broad *and* deep learning may be an unrealistic aspiration, regardless of whose aspiration it is. The following student

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[19]See *Chapter 9: Games* (p.187) for further discussion.
[20]See *Chapter 5: Achievement* (p.101) for further discussion.

raised her concerns about deep learning and broad coverage of subjects. She said that feedback on assignments generally had comments such as "You need to cover this in more depth." The student's frustrations are reflected in her further comment:

> *We do four subjects in three months – how can we do it in more depth?* (Student 8.2F).

Broad coverage of many topics in the time available is likely to result in shallow and surface learning. Research projects with a narrow focus of, perhaps, the student's choice, may provide the means for students to learn the skills and processes of deep learning, as reflected in the following student's comment:

> *It's my experience, if I found something very attractive, I will pay a lot of time, attention and energy and time to finish that. And after I have finished that, I am very happy because I can learn something and I have achieved my goals through doing the **process** to doing this.* (Student 14F).

The following teacher demonstrates his *creative understanding* in how and why he allows local and INESB students to choose the focus of their research projects:

> So [the students] go out and are allowed to 'pick' something from another culture, whatever that thing is, so they choose something that is inclusive of all these things [assessment criteria]. So the Australian students say, 'Oh, can I do …?' And the answer is, 'Of course you can.' So, instead of having to choose from a banal list of things, they might be doing the interiors of mosques when they go home for holidays, and then suddenly it's, 'Can I do churches?' or someone's interested in Buddism, or Feng Shui. And I say, 'Yes, of course you can.' And suddenly it's widening because you **allow** it to widen. But all this is done in relation to the subject if possible, because it makes it real, rather than a 'chat' which goes nowhere, but actually try and bring it to an outcome. (Teacher 65M).

Although this teacher's subject curriculum 'widened' because he 'allowed it to widen', the tasks for each student became narrower, deeper and more relevant to the student. The negotiation of the assessment tasks facilitated the students' *going on* and, as students later shared their findings and understandings *dialogically* with others, facilitated their own and others' *going on* and *becoming*, raising further questions in the *unfinalisable dialogic* learning process.

Section Four – *Creative understanding* and the academic essay

So far, this chapter has discussed the implications of this research for theory in practice, advocating a *dialogic* praxial approach through the use of *Dips (dialogic practice spaces)* and *Crackers (learning journals)*, and has presented a range of practical suggestions which may support the endeavours of both teachers and students. In this section, a more creative approach is taken by drawing on Wittgenstein and, primarily, Bakhtin to present a different way of viewing the academic essay. This way of viewing

is presented as a creative suggestion which may stimulate further thinking and *dialogue* about the academic essay as a form of writing and, implicitly, its usefulness in assessing students' understanding.

Of all methods of assessment recorded in this study, the academic essay caused the greatest challenges for students and teachers, both in its writing and in its assessment.[21] Because of its popularity as the second most favoured method of assessment after the examination, the academic essay is discussed again here. It is also discussed again because the essay encompasses – and impacts on the achievement of – the three overarching aspirations of INESB students, namely, to learn English language, to understand concepts, and to achieve high grades.

As reported in the data, different models of academic essay are considered appropriate – or 'acceptable' or 'good' – across faculties and disciplines. In part, these differences reflect the "precision" of the "sciences" and the "depth" of the "humanities" (Bakhtin, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.98), but they also reflect the personal preferences and purposes of individual teachers, as reflected in the following comment:

> I can understand how confusing it must be [for students] because I get markers who make the comment, 'Use [dot] points' or 'You could have put this in point form', and I might be inclined to say, '**Don't** use so many points.' Some people would say, 'Don't use points at all.' Even amongst markers in one subject, unless you keep a very tight control there's no consistency of expectation. The whole Assessment Policy is helping [teachers] to question what they want – what they are trying to achieve. (Teacher 37F).

For the purpose of stimulating *dialogue* regarding the purpose and form of the academic essay, two additional perspectives based on the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Bakhtin are presented here. When reading these perspectives, it is critical to consider the *purpose* of the academic essay, which in the context of this thesis was, primarily, to assess a student's understanding of a given topic (Kember, 1991, p.140). That is, there was never an explicit purpose to improve a student's writing skills, although this may have been a desired outcome of the process.

A Wittgensteinian perspective of the academic essay

Academic essays are written according to specific models and rules. The *dialogue* of academic essays also involves the use of specific types of language, different from languages used for *dialogue* in *everyday* and other contexts. These differences cause

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[21]Students' challenges with essay writing were reported in *Chapter 3: English Language* (pp.64-65) and *Chapter 5: Achievement* (pp.110-116). Teachers' challenges with essay writing were reported in *Chapter 5: Achievement* (pp.102-106). What is regarded by teachers as 'good' or 'acceptable' academic writing was discussed in *Chapter 5: Achievement* (pp.102-104).

heteroglossic tensions which add to the challenges students face in learning to play this particular *game*. Wittgenstein (1958, p.2), critiquing Augustine's model of language[22] observed:

> Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word.

Wittgenstein (1958, p.2) went on to point out that:

> If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself.

Wittgenstein suggests (1958, p.3) that, while Augustine "does describe a system of communication; ... not everything that we call language is this system". And then, as he points out:

> ... the question arises 'Is this an appropriate description or not?' The answer is: 'Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe.'

Wittgenstein's observations reflect, to some extent, the contestations and tensions surrounding academic essay writing, including:

"differences between kinds of word" (*everyday* and *academic languages*)

> *Lecturers are after words. I used to say, 'That's not good enough', but my teachers say, 'You mean, "That's not so good".' You can understand me, but that's a problem. How to explain?* (Student 4F); or,

> *[Academics] can use some simple words to present their ideas, but they prefer to use some difficult words, to, to – I don't know what they want!* (Student 17.1M);

"thinking primarily of nouns" (a focus on grammar)

> I've had problems with [some teachers]. They were obsessed – and this is my personal view – with grammatical issues and not obsessed with the actual learning coming out. (Teacher 9M); or,

> ... more than two or three errors [of grammar, spelling, or punctuation] in an assignment would cause me to say, 'This is not good enough'. I fail students on these grounds. (Teacher 29F);

"appropriate description" (or discussion/explanation/argument, etcetera)

> *Here, all the questions are always: describe, discuss, explain, argue, yeah?[23] The*

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[22]Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8 (cited in Wittgenstein, 1958, p.2).

[23]In teaching English as a Second Language, the directive "describe" requires lower level language skills than more complex directives such as "discuss", "explain", "argue", etcetera, which require more developed levels of English language. This may be a consideration when designing writing tasks for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. In his article *Bakhtin and Wittgenstein: Dialogicality and (a poetic approach to) the understanding of culture*, Shotter (2004, p.8) quotes Wittgenstein (1981, no. 314), whose comments reflect similar difficulties between "description" and "explanation". Part of this quotation, with Shotter's emphases, is included here:

> "the difficulty – I might say – is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it … This is connected, I

language requirement is different. Because we are not used to speak, read and write in English all our lives, our vocabulary is limited. (Student 60.2M); and,

"narrowly circumscribed region" (*discipline-specific discourses*)

> [We] need multi-faceted dictionaries for each discipline. [And] simpler texts. Some texts [like] 'The Dummies Guide to [the discipline] ... (Other 58F).

Later, Wittgenstein (1969, p.25) also observed that:

> In general we don't use language according to strict rules – it hasn't been taught us by means of strict rules, either. *We*, in our discussions on the other hand, constantly compare language with a calculus proceeding according to exact rules.

Bernstein (2003, p.123) also discussed language as a set of rules and highlighted the need to make a distinction between language and speech. He suggests that:

> To begin with, a distinction must be made between language and speech. Dell Hymes (1961) writes: 'Typically one refers to the act or process of speech, but to the structure, pattern or system of language. Speech is a message, language is a code.'

This distinction – that speech is a message and language is a code – has not been made in this thesis. Rather, the four skills of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*, together with their verbal, non-verbal, internal and external cues, compose *dialogue*, which is the starting point of *languages*, the purpose of which is communication. 'Messages' and 'codes' are implicit in this concept which is more a juxtaposition of Wittgenstein's (1958, p.11) term *language-game* which he used "to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life", and Bakhtin's belief that "To be means to communicate dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252).

While this holistic concept of the purpose and use of language has been adopted for this thesis, Bakhtin also made a distinction between language and speech which is critical when considering the academic essay. For Bakhtin, the written sentence was "a unit of language (in the traditional sense)", while the spoken utterance was "a unit of 'speech communication' (*rechevoe obshchenie*)" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.125).

A Bakhtinian perspective of the academic essay

This notion of the sentence as a unit of language and the utterance as a unit of speech communication is a powerful concept with relation to the assessment and the possible

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> believe, with our wrongly expecting an <u>explanation</u>, whereas the solution to the difficulty is a <u>description</u>, if we give it the right place in our considerations.

This belief is reinforced in the following teacher's comment:

> We need to do more than just memorise things – there needs to be understanding. That's why [students] need to describe it. (Teacher 13M).

form of the academic essay. If language is *dialogue*, which can be entered into via *listening, speaking*, *reading* or *writing*, and the purpose of *dialogue* is to communicate, then a written sentence, as a traditional unit of language, can also be interpreted as a *dialogic utterance*, that is, as a unit of speech communication. In such an interpretation, the primary focus of the written unit of language, that is, the *sentence*, is *communication* rather than surface features governed by sets of rules. For those teachers (or assessors) who focus more on language as a set of rules, it may be that their focus is more on the *sentence* as a unit of language than on the *utterance* as a unit of speech communication.

By adopting a Bakhtinian perspective of the *dialogic* nature of language, the academic essay could be regarded as an *utterance*, or a series of *utterances*, comprising units of communication rather than a *discourse* comprising traditional units of language. If this were the case, the focus would be on the content (or message) being communicated, rather than on the system (or form) used to communicate the content or message. Such a focus would require that the *utterance* was read with *creative understanding* because, as Bakhtin (1986, p.92) points out, "The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance." A focus primarily on the *system* deprives the *utterance* of these *"dialogic overtones"*.

Reading with *creative understanding* requires similar skills to those required for *listening* with *creative understanding*, as illustrated by adapting the following observations of an academic skills support person:

> The listener [or reader] needs to go beyond just listening [or reading]. You need to be tolerant with listening [or reading]. The person listening [or reading] needs to take into consideration where [the speaker or writer is] coming from and what he's meaning and fill in all of that. (Other 2F).

Understanding, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is not merely a matter of decoding (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.128). Traditional models of communication (such as Saussure's 'telegraphic' model) were criticised by Bakhtin because they represent a 'message' which is formulated by the speaker/writer, encoded, and then decoded by the listener/reader (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.128). This type of transmission model was rejected by Bakhtin and is also rejected in this thesis, as already stated. As Bakhtin (1981, p.281) points out, "A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all, it is only the abstract aspect of meaning." Listening or reading with such un*creative understanding* is, he says:

> … understanding [that] remains purely passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the

word – even such an understanding never goes beyond the boundaries of the word's context and in no way enriches the word.

Bakhtin's *dialogic* perspective, on the other hand, "represents readers as shaping the utterance as it is being made" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.129). This requires a listener or a reader to read between the lines and between the words. To illustrate, consider Wittgenstein's (1958, pp.2-3) example of the use of language:

> I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper ...

Wittgenstein considers at length the process of interpretation necessary for the shopkeeper to fill the order correctly which, presumably, he does despite the lack of words and lack of sentences on the "slip". The "slip" was a 'unit of communication', not a 'unit of language', and the shopkeeper made the three words a meaningful communication by filling in the gaps. Similarly, academic essays may be read with *creative understanding*, not focusing on the lack of words, or 'deficits' from a stylistic or systemic perspective, but on the content being communicated. Mutual *dialogic* negotiation (using *creative understanding*) of both listeners/speakers and readers/writers is necessary for meaningful communication. Utterances, whether spoken or written, can belong to their speakers (or writers) "only in the least interesting, purely physiological sense"; but, as meaningful communication, they always belong to (at least) two people, the speaker (or writer) and his or her listener (or reader) (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.129).

The following *utterance* by Bakhtin (1986, pp.74-75) elaborates the cause of challenges when assessing essays comprised of sentences as units of language as opposed to units of communication:

> The sentence as a language unit is grammatical in nature. It has grammatical boundaries and grammatical completedness and unity. (Regarded in the whole of the utterance and from the standpoint of this whole, it acquires stylistic properties.) When the sentence figures as a whole utterance, it is as though it has been placed in a frame made of quite a different material. When one forgets this in analyzing a sentence, one distorts the nature of the sentence (and simultaneously the nature of the utterance as well, by treating it grammatically).

He continues, now highlighting the concept of the sentence as an *utterance* and, thus, as a unit of communication:

> A great many linguists and linguistic schools (in the area of syntax) are held captive by this confusion, and what they study as a sentence is in essence a kind of *hybrid* of the sentence (unit of language) and the utterance (unit of speech communication). One does not exchange sentences any more than one exchanges words (in the strict linguistic sense) or phrases. One exchanges utterances that are

constructed from language units: words, phrases, and sentences. And an utterance can be constructed both from one sentence and from one word, so to speak, from one speech unit (mainly a rejoinder in dialogue), but this does not transform a language unit into a unit of speech communication.

Bakhtin's observation that "an utterance can be constructed both from one sentence and from one word" is pertinent in discussing academic essay writing. If students, as they report, do not have the words or vocabulary to write the types of sentence required in academic essays, then utterances which are constructed from words, for example, as dot points, rather than being constructed from traditional sentences, may help students and teachers in the processes of writing and assessing academic essays.[24] The form or definition of an academic essay, as teachers reported in this study, changes depending on the discipline, the purpose and, at times, the preferences of the teachers. Most commonly, however, the form of the academic essay is governed by what traditionally constitutes acceptable academic writing but, as Wittgenstein (1958, p.85) reminds us:

> (Remember that we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.)

Bakhtin, if his own writing style reflects his thoughts about the structure of academic essays, would most likely have agreed with Wittgenstein. In fact, according to Emerson (1984, p.xxxi), the creativity and compelling nature of Bakhtin's writing style may be enhanced because his ideas and their explanations were not confined to form. As he explains:

> ... the idea and its exposition are not easily separated in Bakhtin. Much of the compelling quality of his voice has to do with the peculiar organizing principles of his prose, and these are perhaps best approached through a disclaimer: Bakhtin did not write "essays." The formal structure and streamlining of the critical essay, at least as we know it in the English speaking world, is simply not his mode. He is often at his most provocative in the tiny fragment, in his jottings for future projects not yet worked out or beyond hope of publication; on the other hand, his longer worked-out pieces seem loosely structured, even luxuriously inefficient. (Emerson, 1984, p.xxxi).

Bernstein (2003, pp.4-5) in his book *Class, codes and control: Volume 1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*, told how he undertook a number of "teaching ventures". Bernstein felt that he was not "a born teacher" and said that he "had to learn

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[24]The practice of using dot points may alleviate challenges of "cultural value" (Reid, 1996, p.75) which lie beneath "the surface of tertiary literacy". Reid (1996, p.75) refers to a research paper by Hinkel (1994), who "shows that discourse traditions influenced by Confucian and Taoist values lead non-native English speakers to interpret texts quite differently from native speakers". As Reid (1996, p.7) reiterates, "Rhetorical criteria associated with western logic, such as clarity, specificity, supporting argument and relevance, often seem completely alien to many whose reading and writing habits tend to be regarded as problems of literacy in our universities."

by *sensing* that structure of meanings which were *latent* in the speech and writing" of his students (my emphasis). In a powerful illustration of *creative understanding* and rethinking "poetics,[25] linguistics and stylistics in the most radical way" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.123), Bernstein (2003, pp.5-6) experimented with a piece of a student's writing:

> One day I took a piece of a student's continuous writing and broke it up into its constituent sentences and arranged the sentences hierarchically on the page, so that it looked like a poem. The piece took on a new and vital life. The gaps between the lines were full of meaning. I took a Bob Dylan ballad and produced a second version in which the lines were arranged continuously as in prose. I invited the students to read both versions. I then asked whether they felt there was any difference between the two versions. Yes, there was a difference. Poetry *among* other things has something to do with the hierarchical, and so spatial, ordering of lines. ... The space between the lines was the listener or reader's space out of which he created a unique, unspoken, personal meaning.

While Bernstein's experiment may have been for other purposes, it stimulates potential when considering the purpose, form and assessment of the academic essay. The outcome of this experiment for Bernstein (2003, p.6) was that he "…became fascinated by condensation; by the implicit". As he explained:

> In more teaching I covered a range of contents and contexts, and yet, despite the variations, I felt that here was a speech form predicated upon the implicit.

Bernstein, it seems, became fascinated by the potential in texts such as "five red apples".

By using *creative understanding* to consider an academic essay written in dot points, with a series of utterances arranged, perhaps, hierarchically on a page, one can begin to sense in the implicit, in the space between, the structure of meanings that are latent in the speech and writing. It may be, in fact, that those expected features of an academic essay such as argument, logic and cohesion may be better served and more easily achieved if students could write their understandings in dot point form in a type of 'quasi-essay' which combines the 'precision' of the sciences and the 'depth' of the arts. By imposing upon students the need to explain their understandings in complex sentences using academic English, while adhering to a formal traditional essay structure,

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[25]Two further Bakhtinian concepts may be useful in discussing the academic essay, namely, "prosaics" (a neologism coined by Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp.15) and "poetics". Bakhtin regarded poetics as an ideology of language, grounded in the same concept of language that has informed linguistics and stylistics (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.124). The traditional form of the academic essay, it could be said, is based on "poetics". Poetics, Bakhtin suggests, while meaning more than one thing, is always only "single-voiced", while prose, by contrast, always contains more than one voice, and is therefore dialogised (Emerson & Holquist, 1981, p.434). In arguing against poetics, linguistics and stylistics, Bakhtin stressed that he did not want simply to "add" a dialogic dimension to their descriptions of language. Rather, Bakhtin "considered their inability to appreciate the nature and importance of dialogue as reason to rethink them in the most radical way" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.123).

meanings may be lost in an "ornamental coping that supports nothing" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.85).

Summary and transition

This chapter has presented theoretical and practical implications which arose from the research. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, the 'common sense' view of students is now able to evolve and *become*. That is, new understandings about these students are able to become the new 'common sense' which promotes the understanding that these students are like all students, but with special challenges in learning to play the *games* and enter into the *dialogic spaces* of academia. Interpreting the data from students and teachers, it appeared that it was commonly believed among teachers that INESB students had inadequate levels of English language, were passive or rote learners, and lacked critical and higher order thinking skills. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, however, theories about ways in which these students learn, such as Deficit, Transmission, and Confucian Heritage Culture theories, become untenable. For students to learn about, understand and use the discourses and practices of their professions as professionals, they must be able to enter into these *spaces* and participate through *dialogue*. Transmission models of teaching do not facilitate such *dialogue*. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, the negotiation of *academic discourses* is not about mastery and coverage. For students, it is about learning to play the *games* through *dialogic* participation. For teachers, who also have to play the *games* of the academy, it is about facilitating students' practice in their chosen professions. To have achieved this perspective, is to have undermined models of teaching as transmission (for example, via lectures), perceptions of diversity as 'deficits', and 'common sense' understandings about learners from Confucian Heritage Culture and some other non-English speaking backgrounds. From a theoretical perspective based on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, these models of teaching, perceptions and understandings become untenable.

This chapter has also shown how theory and practice, like the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of *academic discourses*, cannot exist in isolation but are dependent on each other. If either must precede the other, then it must be practice. As Bakhtin points out:

> Only by beginning from the act itself, and not from its theoretical transcription, is there an exit into its meaningful content (Morson & Emerson, cited in Min, 2001, p.11).

In presenting theory together with implications for practice and practical suggestions, another aim of this thesis has been fulfilled, at least modestly, namely to inform pedagogical and support practices.

This chapter discussed theory *in* practice and offered practical suggestions which may be useful in alleviating some of the challenges facing students and teachers as they negotiate *academic discourses*. Suggestions include the provision of *Dips (dialogic practice spaces)* where teachers and students can engage in meaningful discussions as reflective practitioners, teaching and learning the practices of their professions. Other suggestions included the use of *Crackers (learning journals)* as non-gradeable practice *spaces* which may facilitate students' written *dialogue*, their understandings of concepts, and their critical and higher order thinking skills. Further suggestions based on teachers' and students' comments were also presented as ways which may support teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. These suggestions include a *dialogical* praxial approach to teaching which avoids the use of lectures as a means of transmitting information; the contextualisation of writing tasks including the use of students' own 'stories'; the use of more simple and clear language in assessment and examination questions; the use of small, ungraded, self-assessed weekly tests; the use of multiple choice questions also designed with simple, unambiguous language; the use of short answer questions and dot point responses; and the use of research projects to facilitate students' deeper learning. Additionally, drawing on the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, a creative view of the academic essay has been presented with a view to provoking *dialogue* about the *becoming* of this form of academic writing.

While most of these suggestions may not be entirely new, the *ways* in which they are practised and the purposes for which they are practised *could* be new, especially to many university teachers unfamiliar with the works of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein. When practised with the understanding that *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* is the key to participation in each discipline as praxis, and when the concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming*, and *unfinalisability* inform the practices, then these practical suggestions take on additional dimensions which may facilitate *dialogue*, and ultimately facilitate the attainment of aspirations for students and teachers.

Part D
Chapter 11: The unfinalisability of conclusions

Synopsis

The primary aim of this research was to identify and explore the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers, as these students undertook their studies in an Australian university. Undertaking their studies in an Australian university required students to learn to negotiate the multiple discourses and practices that make up the social and academic *spaces* of the University. It also required students to learn to play a range of academic *games*, including ways of thinking, ways of knowing, and ways of doing in various contexts and for various purposes. It has been shown that major challenges facing students and teachers, related to *language* (English language), *understanding* (teaching and learning) and *achievement* (assessment), and that these challenges were exacerbated by time. A second aim of this research was to examine what these challenges and negotiation processes revealed about institutionalisation (such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) and diversification (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy). This will be discussed later in the chapter.

This chapter presents answers to the research questions, discusses key findings and draws on the literature and theory to negotiate some *unfinalisable* conclusions. It summarises the implications for theory and practice, makes recommendations for practice, and suggests further research in the field. It re-situates the study in a global context, reiterates the significance of the research in the field of international tertiary education, and extends a challenge for universities, globally, to provide *Dips (dialogic practice spaces)* and *Crackers (learning journals)* as a means of increasing *dialogue* between students and teachers. The chapter 'concludes' with an afterword from one teacher and one student, together with closing comments from Bakhtin and Wittgenstein. To continue this discussion, I have borrowed the words of Morson (2004, p.331) who said, "Let me draw some inconclusive conclusions, which may provoke dialogue."

Revisiting and recontextualising the research

In Part A of this thesis, *the research problem* was presented. This problem related to the

challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (INESB students), and their teachers, as these students undertook their studies in an Australian regional university, namely, Charles Sturt University. Part A also presented *the research process*, explaining how the research problem was explored, and the data analysed and interpreted. This process became *The Hermeneutic Helix* which will be reflected on later in this chapter. In Part B, the voices of students and teachers identified and presented the challenges they faced as they negotiated *academic discourses*. These voices provided a naturalistic backdrop for further exploration of the research problem which revealed, among other things, a lack of *dialogue* between students and teachers. Part C presented a theorised, interpretive model and definition of *academic discourses*. It explained key theoretical concepts – the overarching concepts of *languages*, *spaces* and *games*, and the underlying concepts of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. It discussed the complexities and interrelationships of *academic discourses*, and highlighted the critical need for *dialogue* in their successful negotiation. Part C also re-presented the challenges presented in previous chapters, interpreted now as *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. Part D reconsidered and discussed the challenges facing students and teachers as they negotiated *academic discourses* and presented implications for theory and practice. This 'final' chapter now draws together the threads from each of the four Parts and ties them off loosely, presenting findings and answers to the Research Questions and opening the way for continuing *dialogue*.

Section One – Answering Research Questions 1, 2 and 3

The primary aim of this research was to identify and explore the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers, as these students undertook their studies in an Australian regional university. This aim shaped the first research question, namely:

1. What are the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (INESB students), and their teachers, as they negotiate *academic discourses* in an Australian regional university?

To answer this question fully, it was necessary to answer two further questions, namely:

2. What are *academic discourses*? and

3. How are *academic discourses* negotiated?

Answering these questions allowed a further question to be answered, namely:

4.   What do these challenges and negotiation processes reveal about institutionalisation (such as, *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) and diversification (such as, diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy)?

Each of these research questions has been progressively answered in various ways throughout the thesis. Here, the answers are summarised.

Research Question 1, which aimed to identify the challenges facing INESB students and their teachers, was answered by listening to the voices of the students and teachers and allowing them to speak for themselves in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The challenges they faced were identified as being related, primarily, to *English language* (everyday and academic), *understanding* (teaching and learning), and *achievement* (assessment).

Research Question 2, which sought to define *academic discourses*, was answered by drawing on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, together with relevant literature, and deep, prolonged immersion in the data. By using *The Hermeneutic Helix* as a process to analyse and interpret the *dialogue* (data), a model of *academic discourses* emerged from which a definition was created, positing that:

> *Academic discourses* are the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* which comprise the *teaching*, *learning* and *assessment* practices of a university.

This definition also suggests that *academic discourses* involve a complex of:

languages of teaching	and	teaching of languages
languages of learning	and	learning of languages
languages of assessment	and	assessment of languages
spaces of teaching	and	teaching of spaces
spaces of learning	and	learning of spaces
spaces of assessment	and	assessment of spaces
games of teaching	and	teaching of games
games of learning	and	learning of games
games of assessment	and	assessment of games

Research Question 3, which sought to determine how *academic discourses* are negotiated, was answered using similar processes as for Research Question 2. Additionally, by listening to the voices of students and teachers again, and by drawing on the philosophies of *language* and *dialogue*, primarily of Bakhtin but also of

Wittgenstein, it was 'concluded', at this provisionally *finalisable* point in an *unfinalisable* discussion, that:

> *Academic discourses* are negotiated by *dialogue*, that is, through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes.

Answering the first three research questions provided information which, together with further reflection and interpretation of the data, facilitated a response to Research Question 4. Before this response is presented, however, the findings of the first three research questions will be expanded upon. These findings emerged from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 where the students and teachers spoke.

In Chapter 10 it was suggested that 'common sense' understandings of INESB students need to be disrupted. The findings from this research, which may facilitate these disruptions to 'common sense' understandings, are encapsulated here. Qualifying comments about these findings, which appear throughout the thesis, are not repeated here. Rather, broad generalisations are made which reflect the findings within the context of this study.

Findings from the data

1. International students from non-English speaking backgrounds came to Australia with hopes, expectations and understandings regarding their Australian experience, both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts. Apart from wanting to graduate with a degree from a Western university and to experience 'Australian culture', international students had three basic aspirations regarding their academic experience in Australia. Firstly, these students hoped, and expected, to improve their English language skills. The improvement of *academic* English, however, was not mentioned as an aspiration by any student. Secondly, students wanted to understand what they were learning. That is, they wanted to experience deep learning and develop critical thinking, as opposed to surface learning by rote and memorisation. While these students hoped and wanted to understand the concepts, however, they did not necessarily expect to do so, acknowledging difficulties that may prevent this, such as language problems and time restraints. Thirdly, students not only wanted to pass their subjects, but they hoped, and often expected, to achieve high grades.

2.   Teachers also had hopes, expectations and understandings regarding these students which, initially, appeared to be the same as the students', namely that students would improve their English language, understand the concepts they were being taught, and pass their subjects. It was found, however, that there were substantial differences in the extent to which students and teachers hoped, expected and understood these things. Firstly, while teachers hoped students would pass their subjects and even hoped they would achieve high grades, teachers did not necessarily expect this. Secondly, while teachers hoped their students would understand the concepts being taught, that they would experience deep learning and start to think more critically about what they were learning, generally, teachers did not expect that either. Thirdly, however, and something that teachers *did* expect, was that students would improve their English language, and in particular, that they would improve their written *academic* English.

3.   Thus, while it initially appeared that teachers and students wanted the same outcomes, it was found that there were significant differences in the extent to which students and teachers hoped for and expected these things, as well as mismatches between their expectations and understandings about how these outcomes might be achieved.

4.   These mismatches often occurred because of misunderstandings on the parts of both students and teachers – each of the other – especially in relation to ways of teaching and what constitutes learning in an Australian university, and different understandings about students' and teachers' roles and responsibilities and their expectations of each other in the teaching and learning process.

5.   An initial, general misconception among most teachers was that INESB students were from wealthy backgrounds, a misconception mentioned here because of its impact on most students' academic endeavours. Most students in this study, however, were not from wealthy backgrounds. While some of these students may have been relatively well-off in their own countries, exchange rates meant that the majority of these students struggled financially, in some cases, to the point where they could not afford to buy textbooks. Financial concerns increased the pressure on students to succeed and exacerbated some of the challenges they faced. Often, these students needed to find employment which also resulted in them having less time to focus on their studies.

6.   Other misconceptions existed among teachers, because of predominant stereotypes of INESB students and Asian students in particular, about the ways in

which these students studied and learned. These misconceptions and preconceptions included the view that, because of cultural backgrounds and conditioning, these students were rote and surface-level learners who lacked critical and higher order thinking skills.

7.   While cultural background (that is, conditioning) did influence some students' behaviour to a degree – for example, in their reluctance to question the opinions of authority figures or to participate in classroom discussions – students consistently attributed this perceived reluctance to difficulties with English language more than any other factor. Students also emphasised that they wanted to become more independent learners and more critical thinkers, but *time* restraints and pressures to pass their subjects hindered the development of these skills.

8.   It was found that there was a lack of *dialogue* (and opportunities for *dialogue*) between teachers and students, and between INESB students and local students. It was also found that students were hindered from participating *dialogically* in various contexts, primarily because of difficulties with English language, but also because of feelings of exclusion. Lack of participation hindered students from achieving their aspirations in both *everyday* and *academic* contexts.

9.   Challenges facing students and teachers were exacerbated in *academic* contexts when students had no background knowledge, or what they regarded as 'common sense', of the subjects. Additionally, in cases where students had been granted advanced standing (or transfer credits) for previous study in other countries, these students often did not have the prerequisites or *academic* skills required at those higher levels of study. While advanced standing was meant to help these students complete their courses more quickly, in reality, it often exacerbated the challenges facing these students and their teachers.

10.   Mounting pressures caused students to realise that some of their aspirations may have been unrealistic, or unachieveable, within the time available and because of challenges they faced with English language. Students had to quickly re-prioritise their aspirations and reconsider their options for how these might be achieved. Students drew on a range of strategies, with varying degrees of success, to try to overcome the challenges they faced.

11.   Students realised that they may have to relinquish some of their aspirations, for example, to experience deep learning and achieve high grades. For these students, 'passing their subjects' now became the most important aspiration – and most costly if they failed – in terms of both economics and 'saving face'. Thus, in order to

maximise their chances of at least passing their subjects, some students resorted to those study strategies which they had proven successfully in the past, such as rote learning and memorisation.

12.   Assessment, however, involved multiple methods of assessment. While the examination was the most common method of assessment, the next most common was the academic essay which caused major challenges for students in the production of them, and teachers in the assessment of them.

13.   While many students were unfamiliar with the concept of plagiarism when they commenced their studies in Australia, students agreed with the principles of referencing but requested time to learn these skills. It was primarily because of difficulties with English language, of finding the number and types of words needed to complete their assignments, when coupled with increasing pressures to pass their subjects, that students sometimes resorted to plagiarism when trying to produce academic essays. While some students began to manipulate the *games* and test the boundaries in order to win, that is, to pass, a general stereotype of these students rests on a few cases. It may be, in fact, as one teacher (Teacher M6) suggested, that INESB students do not plagiarise to a greater extent than local students but, if and when they do, it is more obvious.

14.   Teachers' misconceptions of these students as rote and surface-level learners who lacked critical and higher order thinking skills, and who plagiarised, were reinforced on those occasions when teachers observed students using these strategies. These observations, together with similar experiences for these teachers with similar sorts of students in the past, perpetuated teachers' misconceptions about these students. These findings challenge teachers' preconceptions about the nature of these students as rote and surface-level learners, about students from Confucian Heritage Culture backgrounds, and about pedagogies based on transmission and deficit.

15.   Over time, as students understood more about the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of the *academic discourses* they were negotiating, their attitudes about what constituted success changed. They began to understand that being a successful student meant more than achieving high grades (although they still wanted to achieve high grades). Rather, students came to realise that success was more about; (a) participating in the discourses; and (b) practising their chosen professions.

16.   Participating in the discourses and practising the chosen professions (as with negotiating *everyday* and *academic discourses*) occurs through *dialogue* by

listening, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing* in various combinations and contexts for various purposes. If *dialogue* is hindered, as was revealed in this study, then participation is also hindered and aspirations cannot be achieved.

A response to Research Question 4

Having listed some of the main findings from the data, a response to the fourth research question will now be offered. This response contributes to the findings listed above, by adding further layers of complexity in a less linear way. Research Question 4 asked – What do these challenges and negotiation processes reveal about institutionalisation (such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) and diversification (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy)? At this point, it is necessary to consider what constitutes institutionalisation and diversification. In the context of this study, those things which become institutionalised include *languages*, especially ways of using languages in academic contexts; *spaces*, especially discipline-specific *spaces*, ways of teaching and learning about and within these *spaces*, and ways of knowing about and practising within these spaces; and *games*, especially ways of assessing, including grading and scaling of results, and ways of completing assessment tasks. That is, the practices of teaching, learning and assessment, together with English, the "unitary language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.271) and common medium which binds them and drives them internationally, are all part of and subject to institutionalisation. Diversification, on the other hand, is represented by the many individuals from increasingly diverse linguistic and academic backgrounds, who engage in these institutionalised practices. In the context of this thesis, these individuals include teachers and students who, together, face individual and multiple challenges as they seek to understand and negotiate between expectations and achievements – of themselves, of each other, and of them by others, including the University and other significant stakeholders such as fee-paying parents. The diverse ways in which teachers and students face these challenges, including the many and varied unofficial Englishes or "literacies in English" (Kostogriz, 2004, p.8) used to negotiate and engage in the practices, also represent diversification. Diversification also includes the many disciplines and professions represented at the University, together with the different ways of knowing and ways of doing in each – that is, diversification also refers to the different kinds of knowledge, the different ways of learning and the different kinds of language used in specific ways to represent the knowledge in each of the diverse and specialist fields.

Research Question 4 did not seek a definitive answer as did the previous three questions which asked 'What?' and 'How?' questions. Rather, knowing what was now known about the challenges and the negotiation process, this question sought to consider what this knowledge revealed about institutionalisation on the one hand, and diversification on the other. This question, therefore, cannot be answered as succinctly as the first three research questions, and it is acknowledged that the response offered here is also only *an* answer of many possible answers even though it is referred to as *the* answer.

This answer emerged as the research progressed and as the complexities of the challenges and negotiation processes became clear. The answer also emerged through a deeper, hermeneutic spiraling into the philosophies of Bakhtin (especially his notion of *heteroglossia* with its competing *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces), and Wittgenstein, whose juxtaposed philosophies created the overarching theoretical framework and interpretations of *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. With the new knowledge about *academic discourses* as the teaching, learning and assessment practices of a university, and knowing now that these practices are negotiated through *dialogue*, deeper reflection on the challenges and the processes of negotiation revealed that institutionalisation and diversification are subject to *heteroglossic* tensions.

It must be pointed out here, that tensions were evident without the need for any deep, hermeneutic spiraling into the data. These tensions, to repeat Wittgenstein (1958, p.42), were "already in plain view". In fact, it was evidence of these tensions which prompted this research in the first place. The difficulty arose, not so much in *identifying* the tensions, but in knowing how to interpret and explain them. It was the deeper spiraling into the data, and the deeper reflection on the challenges and process of negotiation of *academic discourses* from a Wittgensteinian and Bakhtinian perspective, that ultimately provided a way to interpret and explain the tensions and respond to Research Question 4.

Of critical importance in this response is the understanding that *dialogue* refers to English language, which binds together and permeates the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* in the context of this research. English is a unitary language and, as Bakhtin (1981, p.271) points out, "...the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a 'unitary language', operate in the midst of heteroglossia" and constantly competing *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces.

Centripetal forces tend towards sameness and stability in *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. They preserve traditions and resist change. They use *non-creative understanding* to maintain unity. They tend not to recognise potential in *outsideness* but may view *outsideness* as deficits which need remediation in order to fit existing moulds. *Centrifugal* forces, on the other hand, tend towards difference and change. They recognise potential in *outsideness*. They use *creative understanding* to find ways of *going on* with this *outsideness*, of accessing the potential, and of using that potential to facilitate their own and others' *becoming*. They prosper in accommodating diversity. Institutionalisation is drawn by strong *centripetal* forces. Diversification, on the other hand, is driven by the *centrifugal* forces which, as Holquist (1981, p.xix) points out, "are clearly more powerful and ubiquitous".

Holding with Bakhtin's insistence that *centrifugal* forces are stronger than *centripetal* forces, *centrifugal* forces prevail over time, creating change. As Bakhtin (1981, p.272) explains:

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work: alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.

This ongoing process of *becoming* and change, however, is neither straightforward nor easy. For the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of *academic discourses* and for the teachers and students who negotiate them, their process of *becoming* and change is, as Bakhtin (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.144) suggests, "not systematic, but messy, produced by the unforeseeable events of everyday activity".

With this philosophy in mind, and with the understanding that *heteroglossic* tensions permeate the *everyday* and *academic discourses* which individuals strive to negotiate, it is suggested that, over time and through ongoing *heteroglossic* struggles, *languages*, *spaces* and *games*, and the teachers and students who negotiate them, change and *become* – that is, they evolve. If so, then they are not stable, unchanging or finalised; and, if so, how could a teacher think they were? It is also suggested that this messy process of change, *becoming* and evolution for the languages, practices and the individuals who negotiate them, is reflected through the conceptual and continual process of *outsideness*, *creative understanding*, *going on*, *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. Furthermore, as highlighted in *Chapter 9: Games*, it is suggested that this change occurs, not *in spite of heteroglossic* tension and conflict, but *because of* it.

***Becoming* of individuals (not vessels becoming full)**

If students and teachers are understood as people entering into the negotiation of *academic discourses* through *dialogue*, and if *academic discourses* are understood as being a complex and evolving maze of interpenetrating relationships between the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of the teaching, learning and assessment practices of a university, then students and teachers will be understood as individuals who are also evolving through the process of negotiation. It is this process of negotiation, in fact, which *is* the tension and the ongoing *heteroglossic* struggles which exist between institutionalisation and diversification. Through this process of *going on* and *becoming*, teachers and students continually find new ways of thinking, new ways of speaking, new ways of understanding, new ways of knowing, new ways of doing, and new ways of being. Through the *dialogic* mixing of *outsideness*, *creative understanding* and *going on*, new identities evolve and *become* over time as do the students' (and teachers') knowledge of and proficiences in the various *discourses* in which they engage.

The following teacher, for example, illustrates his own *becoming* as he highlights his acceptance of the *becoming* of *languages* and the *becoming* of *games*, particularly those involving *academic writing*:

> I'm always prepared to accept that non-English speaking students might actually be learning and creating a different kind of English than those who are native speakers. For example, last semester I did have a Japanese student ... and ... I could hear in her written essays what is called 'Jenglish', the Japanese English which is different from 'Chinglish' which is Chinese English which is different from, you know, German and French and Portuguese and other sorts of Englishes.
>
> When a person from another linguistic background learns English they learn it in a way that adapts to where they come from. So you hear them speaking differently, with a different accent we call it. Equally, that accent – when it's translated into language practice – means that the language is inflected in a way. So I am quite happy to sacrifice grammatical correctness for an expressive or an intellectual or an interpretive subtlety. But that is a difficulty because there are people that think a student knowing English from a non-English background has to learn totally fluent and correct English and if it isn't, it's not correct. Well, I don't take that view. (Teacher 41M).

The sense of personal *becoming* for the following teacher is evident as he reflects on the outcomes of a teaching, learning and assessment task which he negotiated with his INESB students.[1] His comments also suggest the *becoming* of students – and the *becoming* of academic *spaces* and *games* – as they are "let ... move" within a "very loose framework":

> I can remember coming back here [to my office] and saying to people, 'I just had a powerful learning experience' and, in fact, over my teaching career, which is quite long, you have every now and then an outstanding learning moment of teaching where you say,

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[1]For further discussion of this teaching and learning experience, see *Chapter 8: Spaces* (p.166-167).

'Hey, this was amazing'. You didn't plan it; it just happened. I've seen lessons where you put all this effort in and it just ... [shrugs shoulders] but for the most success you just create a very loose framework and let everybody move within that and that's what I saw there. (Teacher 26M).

Illustrations of students' *becoming*, evident as their hopes, expectations and understandings changed and they realigned their aspirations with the realities of their experiences, have been provided throughout this thesis and, more explicitly, in Chapter 9. Here, however, the following students' comments, as they reflected on their Australian experiences, add further dimensions to their sense of *becoming*. As the following student explained:

> *It was very difficult [at first]. I was so lonely. I cry a lot. Everyone lives separate here. At home six people live in one room. We live together. I feel very isolated here. [But] if you keep going – it's good to keep going until it turns around and becomes a positive thing. It was a big turn around for me. It's changed me from a Chinese boy to an international student.* (Student 80M).

Another student illustrated her sense of *becoming* in a different way:

> *I have a lot more balance in my life now. At first I was very stressed, but I realised that I was only living for study and didn't even want to talk to anyone else. Now I make sure I have a balance of work and relaxation. I'm never very motivated to do much heavy study on weekends. I still want to do well, for my family's sake, but it is less important to me that I achieve at very high levels. My [research project] supervisor [name] worries about me now. Before it was **me** who worried!* (Student 18.2F).

A further student explained how his sense of *becoming* was something which happened over time and in a way which was difficult to describe:

> *Mmm, ah, you know something you learn is very hard to say. It has integrated into your life. You cannot be aware of it. I can see something different compared to traditional Chinese when I come back to China. I have been back to China twice. I can feel the difference, but I cannot just say it out, because those differences have integrated with my thinking, my – my – my – sometimes I cannot say it out. [Pause] Maybe I have learned to cook barbecue here [laughs uproariously]. My roommate have taught me how to cook barbecue – just throw the beef on the cooker! [laughs]* (Student 17.2M).

Becoming **of** *languages*, *spaces* **and** *games*

In ways such as those illustrated above, the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* in *everyday* and *academic* contexts evolve over time together with the animate players passing through the *spaces* as they learn, and play, the *games*. The *becoming* of *languages*, *spaces* and *games* is most productive in those *spaces* where multiple boundaries – *outsideness* – intersect and interact *dialogically*. It is within these *heteroglossic* teaching and learning *spaces* that the *academic discourses* (which are not only *languages* but also practices which reflect particular ways of knowing and doing) evolve and *become* through *dialogue*. In these *spaces*, traditions of language and practice also evolve

(MacIntyre 1988, cited in Kemmis, 1995, p.108). Changes occur over time "by tiny and unsystematic alterations" and the process "is always ... and at every moment ... opposed to the realities of heteroglossia or other centrifugal forces" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.30). Bakhtin (1981, pp.291-292) reminds us that all languages – which are also *spaces* and *games* – "struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia":

> … all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. … these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia.

And just as the languages in *everyday* life struggle and evolve in environments of *social heteroglossia*, so too do the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* in *academia* struggle and evolve in environments of *academic heteroglossia*. The *heteroglossic* nature of *academic discourses* means that there can be little agreement on how any discipline, be it in the Arts, Commerce, Education, Health, or the Sciences, is to be interpreted once and for all. None of these *spaces* or discourses is 'pure' or 'neutral', but each is a *heterglossic space* and each is continually changing and evolving under the stronger influence of *centrifugal* forces. As Bakhtin (1981, p.293) points out:

> ... in language, there are no "neutral" words and forms – words and forms that can belong to "no one"; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.

The many *games* of assessment discussed in this thesis are also *becoming* over time. *Games* change, for example, as teachers who regard the form of the academic essay "as serving various social needs and 'goods'" (such as Teacher 11M[2]), prevail over those teachers who have "sacralized" (Regelski, 2006, p.2) the form of the academic essay (such as Teacher 29F[3]). Change also occurs as teachers and students recognise and accept that there are *dimensions of languages*, *dimensions of understanding*, and *dimensions of achievement*.

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[2]"Structure? Who cares about structure? I just want dot points. I want to know the students understand the concepts. I am not concerned with their English." (Teacher 11M).
[3]"... more than two or three errors [of grammar, spelling, or punctuation] in an assignment would cause me to say, 'This is not good enough'. I fail students on these grounds." (Teacher 29F).

Thus, when now considering Research Question 4 – which asked: What do these challenges and negotiation processes reveal about institutionalisation (such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy) and diversification (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy)? – a possible response is this:

> It was revealed that *heteroglossic* tensions and conflicts exist between the *centripetal* nature of institutionalisation (such as *academic discourses* and traditional ways of doing things in the academy), and the stronger *centrifugal* nature of diversification (such as diversity, change and creative ways of doing things in the academy). These *heteroglossic* tensions and conflicts facilitate change in individuals and, subsequently, in the *academic discourses* which comprise the teaching, learning and assessment practices of a university. Change occurs, not *in spite of* these *heteroglossic* tensions and conflicts, but *because of* them. That is, *heteroglossia* facilitates change through *outsideness*, *creative understanding* and *going on* in an *unfinalisable* process of *becoming* for individuals and for practices (*languages*, *spaces* and *games*). Through *dialogue*, by *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*, individuals and practices evolve in a *heteroglossic* process of *becoming*.

The following table, *Academic Heteroglossia*, though far too rigid and tidy to illustrate the 'messiness' of *heteroglossia* or the complexity of the relationships and contestations between and among the points listed, serves to indicate where some of the tensions exist between institutionalisation and diversification, as revealed in this study. Despite its uncreative format, the table may, in some way, reflect the ideological *centripetal* and *centrifugal* struggles, forces and tensions inherent in, and which facilitate, the process of *becoming* for individuals and practices. The points listed should not be read as distinct binary oppositions, or even as opposite ends of a continuum. In fact, according to Morson and Emerson (1990, p.30) it may, in principle, be "impossible to draw a sharp line between the centripetal and the centrifugal" since "these categories are themselves subject to the centrifuge". The lists are not exhaustive.

Academic heteroglossia

Ideological struggles inherent in the *languages*, *spaces* and *games*
of *academic discourses*

Academic Discourses	*Institutionalisation* *Centripetal forces*	*Diversification* *Centrifugal forces*
Languages English language Dimensions of language	-monologue -literacy -systems -unitary language -authoritative discourse	-dialogue -literacies -non-systems -hybrid languages -internally persuasive discourse
Spaces Teaching and learning Dimensions of understanding	-precision -objectivity -surface learning -reciting by heart -transmission	-depth -subjectivity -deep learning -retelling in own words -representation
Games Assessment Dimensions of achievement	-non-creativity (convergence) -traditional ways of doing -limiting -reproducing -permitting no play/practice	-creativity (divergence) -non-traditional ways of doing -enabling -transforming -encouraging play/practice

Table 11.1 – Academic heteroglossia

This table seeks to illustrate that *academic discourses* comprise *languages*, *spaces* and *games* within the ongoing tensions and *heteroglossic* struggles which exist between institutionalisation and diversification. *Languages*, *spaces* and *games* which represent the processes of teaching, learning and assessment through the medium, in this study, of *English language*, are interrelated and reflect dimensions of language, dimensions of understanding, and dimensions of achievement. The *languages*, *spaces* and *games*, or the *teaching*, *learning* and *assessment* practices, are continually subject to competing *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces reflective of either more traditional ways of knowing and doing (institutionalisation), or more creative ways of knowing and doing (diversification), for example, unitary language as opposed to hybrid languages, transmission as opposed to representation, or reproducing as opposed to transforming. Because *centrifugal* forces are stronger, the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* evolve and *become* over time.

Section Two – Implications for theory and practice

Implications for theory and practice which arose from this research were discussed at length in the previous chapter, *Chapter 10: The research implications: Theory in practice*, where it was emphasised that theory and practice do not exist in isolation but coexist in an interdependent relationship with each other. Any implications for theory, therefore, have implications for practice, and vice versa. Thus the implications summarised here, relate to theory *in* practice. Firstly, there are implications for theories and practices of teaching and learning based on transmission, deficit and Confucian Heritage Culture, and for 'common sense' understandings about the nature of INESB students as learners. Secondly, there are implications for the practice of theory *in* practice where students 'practise the praxis' of their chosen professions, as opposed to the theory *of* practice where students 'learn *about* the praxis' of their chosen professions. And thirdly, implicit in the two preceding implications is the critical role of *dialogue* in implementing any theoretical implications in practice.

Theories and natures of INESB learners

From a theoretical perspective based on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, theories and practices of teaching INESB students based on transmission or deficit, and common understandings about the nature of these students as surface and rote learners who lack critical thinking skills, become untenable. From a Bakhtinian and Wittgensteinian perspective, common practices of teaching as transmission (for example, via lectures), common perceptions of diversity as deficits, and 'common sense' understandings about learners from Confucian Heritage Culture and some other non-English speaking backgrounds are able to evolve and *become* new 'common sense' understandings. Teachers should not believe, for example, that INESB students lack existing, well-developed academic skills. On the contrary, these students have considerable and highly-developed skills, some of which may not be transferable to, or useful in, a Western university context. Nor should it be believed that these students are surface learners who lack deeper – or higher order – and critical thinking skills, or who do not want to understand the concepts they are learning, or worse, that they lack the ability to do so. Rather, these students value deep and meaningful learning highly, but are often under pressure from a number of sources to produce what an assessment task requires within a limited time. Learning styles, it appears, do not differ significantly between cultures, but rather different educational systems condition students to adopt certain study strategies to achieve certain ends. Additionally, students choose those learning strategies most likely to meet the demands of assessment. These students want

to experience deep learning and develop critical thinking, as opposed to surface learning by rote and memorisation. These students are not only capable of more active forms of learning, but they also want them. Students need time to learn and, if teachers are serious about wanting students to experience deep learning, then students need time and space to do so.

Practice and practising

It has been highlighted that tensions exist between theory and practice in academic contexts. The predominant use of examinations and academic essays as assessment methods seems to reflect pedagogic practices which focus on whether students can answer questions *about* the professions they have chosen, rather than *practising* that particular profession. It may be, as suggested in Chapter 10, that students do not need higher IELTS scores but, rather, need more practice of their professions using the English language they *do* have in order to clarify and understand concepts, and develop those English language and discipline-specific discourses necessary for competence in their chosen professions. These implications regarding the theories and natures of INESB learners and for *practising* the *praxis*, evoked a number of practical suggestions for applying these implications in practice as summarised here under *Recommendations*.

Recommendations

In addition to practical suggestions made for practice as presented in Chapter 10, two major recommendations are made as a result of this research. These relate to *Dips (dialogic practice spaces)* and *Crackers (learning journals)*.

Dips and Crackers

As highlighted above, and throughout this thesis, time and space is needed for increased opportunities for *dialogue* between teachers and students where students can practise their existing English language while also practising the practice of their chosen professions. Practising requires *dialogue* through *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*. It is recommended that *Dips (dialogic practice spaces)* which focus on *listening* and *speaking*, and *Crackers (learning journals)* which focus on *reading* and *writing*, be implemented as non-gradeable *dialogic practice spaces*.

The establishment of *Dips* where teachers and students can engage in meaningful discussions as reflective practitioners, teaching and learning the practices of their

professions, would provide *spaces* where dimensions of difference may be recognised and valued. These differences, which are seen in the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* of *academic discourses* (see Table 11.1), include dimensions of languages, dimensions of understanding, and dimensions of achievement. Used in conjunction with *Crackers*, which may facilitate students' written *dialogue*, their understandings of concepts, and their critical and higher order thinking skills, *Dips and Crackers* may facilitate the teaching and learning process in multiple ways, possibly alleviating some of the challenges facing students and teachers and facilitating the achievement of mutual aspirations. By using *Dips and Crackers*, the *heteroglossic* nature of the *languages*, *spaces and games* could be emphasised by teachers while offering ways for students to practise the *dialogue* of the *spaces*, in the *spaces* – that is to say, in real or simulated practice – by making discourses accessible to students by practising the *dialogue* and *dialogising* the practice.

Morson (2004, p.329) refers to "... a dialogic approach to the curriculum, one that respects different cultures, values, and ways of life". It would be, he says, "to adopt Carol Lee's concept, a 'hybrid language approach'". This "hybrid language approach", which suggests the *becoming* of languages, is reflected in Bakhtin's (1981, p.271) comment:

> What we have in mind here is not an abstract linguistic minimum of a common language, in the sense of a system of elementary forms (linguistic symbols) guaranteeing a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication. We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life.

Of particular note in Bakhtin's (1981, p.271) comment is his reference to "practical communication", where the term "practical" is taken here to mean 'what is to be done'. It reiterates his emphasis on the "act" or the "practice", rather than the "theory". In his concluding comments to his article *Dialogue, depth, and life inside responsive orders: From external observation to participatory understanding*, Shotter (2003, p.9) points to differences between Western and Eastern philosohies regarding theory and practice, and also emphasises the need for "a Practical Philosophy of practices". As he points out:

> Rather than socially refined and sensitive ways of acting effortlessly (as in Confucianism), ever since the Greeks, we in the West have valued individual, reflective thought prior to planned effortful action. We have thus had an obsession with theories and theorizing, with the belief that only true theories can give rise to

right action. However, in recent times, as Toulmin (1990) points out, "the problems that have challenged reflective thinkers on a deep philosophical level ... are matters of practice ..." (p.186). We are now beginning to see the recovery of a Practical Philosophy of practices (which needs a theory-centered philosophy to be interwoven into it).

This research, together with the recommendations made here, has endeavoured to 'recover' "a Practical Philosophy of practices" with a "theory-centered philosophy ... interwoven into it" (Shotter, 2003, p.9).

Areas that warrant further study

The academic essay

In Chapter 10, it was suggested that the traditional form of the academic essay could be reconsidered in ways which encourage, say, the use of dot points, and in ways which acknowledge the sentence as 'a unit of communication' as opposed to 'a unit of language'. With the understanding that the *academic essay* is an example of a traditional form of "authoritative discourse", Bakhtin's (1981, p.344) following comments open the way for *dialogic* negotiation of new ways of thinking about and doing an *academic essay*:

> Authoritative discourse can not be represented – it is only transmitted. Its inertia, its semantic finiteness and calcification, the degree to which it is hard-edged, a thing in its own right, the impermissibility of any free stylistic development in relation to it – all this renders the artistic representation of authoritative discourse impossible. ... It is by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced; it cannot enter into hybrid constructions. If completely deprived of its authority it becomes simply an object, a relic, a thing. It enters the artistic context as an alien body, there is no space around it to play in, no contradictory emotions – it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life, and the context around it dies, words dry up. (my emphasis).

A Bakhtinian perspective of the *academic essay* facilitates the *becoming* of academic writing and the evolution of traditional forms of essay writing, by considering the possibility that essays may be regarded as a series of *utterances*, comprising *units of communication* rather than a *discourse* comprising *traditional units of language*. The potential of such an evolved form of the *academic essay* as a means of developing English writing skills, minimising plagiarism, enhancing critical thinking skills, and developing skills for use in other contexts, is worthy of further study.

Other possible areas of research

This research has raised questions which may also warrant further study. Briefly, as dot points, these include:

- the characterisation of *languages*, *spaces* and *games*
- the process of *becoming* in an individual
- assessment as *unfinalisable* points in an individual's *becoming*
- the regime of continuous assessment
- the use of pastoral systems for INESB students
- non-gradeable degrees

Methodological reflections

Part of the significance of this research lies, not only in the answers to the Research Questions, but in how those answers were reached. The research process, which became *The Hermeneutic Helix* as described fully in *Chapter 2: The research process*, allowed the Research Questions to be answered in multi-dimensional ways. Also of significance, is the realisation that both the research process and the learning process are reflected in *The Hermeneutic Helix*. That is, both processes proceed from *outsideness*, through *creative understanding* and *going on*, to *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. In this research, *The Hermeneutic Helix* can also be regarded, among other things, as a link between theory and praxis. As Bleicher (cited in Schwandt, 1994, p.121) points out, the hermeneutic circle here is an "*ontoglogical* condition of understanding; ... [it] proceeds from a communality that binds us to tradition in general and that of our object of interpretation in particular; [it] provides the link between finality and universality, and between theory and praxis" (Schwandt's emphasis).

Unfinalisable conclusions

A number of conceptual ideas have been used in this thesis to help understand the phenomena. The first three overarching concepts have been used to understand the nature of *academic discourses* which have been interpreted and conceptualised as *languages*, *spaces* and *games*. This conceptualisation, based on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, allowed the investigation of the teaching, learning and assessment practices of a university, in ways which led to a model and a definition of *academic discourses*. An additional five underlying concepts which overlap and intermingle, have been used in multi-dimensional ways. These include their use in *The Hermeneutic Helix* to reflect the research process, and their use in various ways throughout the thesis to interpret the phenomena and to illustrate and highlight different things. Briefly, these include:

outsideness

- dimensions of diversity and its potential (positive *outsideness*);

- feelings of isolation and exclusion, such as racism (negative *outsideness*);

creative understanding

- multi-dimensional ways in which individuals respond to various challenges;

- ways of *listening* and *speaking* which facilitate understanding;

- experimenting with new strategies to achieve certain ends;

- innovative and/or desperate ways of continuing a process;

going on

- negotiating ways of understanding other individuals;

- giving and taking by interlocutors, so individuals know how to continue;

- learning about learning and knowing how to continue from this point;

becoming

- learning and understanding – not just remembering – what is being learned;

- evolving, changing and growing in multiple ways, of people, languages and practices;

unfinalisability

- knowing that the process of change does not finish while life lasts;

- understanding that the more that is understood, the more there is to understand, and the more that is learned, the more there is to learn. Also, in some cases, the belief that the more I *become*, the more the need for me to *become* more.[4]

These concepts have been used to reflect the journey of INESB students and their teachers as they negotiate *academic discourses*. This journey has been interpreted as one which proceeds from *outsideness*, through *creative understanding* and *going on*, to a sense of *becoming* and *unfinalisability*. Similarly, these concepts have been used to understand the evolutionary process of *becoming* for individuals and the *languages*, *spaces* and *games* they negotiate through *dialogue* in different contexts.

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[4]As, for example, the student who said:
  … I am learning to be a better daughter for my parents and I have to learn to be a better student for my lecturers. (Student 18.1F).

In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx (1845) wrote:

> The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it. (my emphasis).

By maintaining a critical stance throughout this hermeneutic and, thus, highly interpretive research process, I have tried to make a contribution to the field which is more than so many interpretations. Rather, in listening to the voices of the students, teachers and other participants, informed by the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, and in dialogue with other writers in the field, I have presented theoretical perspectives of *academic discourses* and their negotiation which are useful in interpreting and explaining the phenomena I encountered and, possibly, similar phenomena encountered in other contexts. Also, I have offered practical suggestions which may alleviate some of the challenges facing students and teachers as identified and discussed in this thesis.

Additionally, I have tried to emphasise the fact that creativity and change can come about only by interaction between the *outsideness* of ourselves and that of others. Engagement with *outsideness* releases the potential for creativity and change in ourselves, others, and the practices in which we engage. This kind of engagement can be encouraged through the provision of supportive environments, such as *Dips (dialogic practice spaces) and Crackers (learning journals)* as advocated in this thesis. Change, however, is not simply a matter of putting theory into practice. As Shotter (1996, p.295) points out:

> ... if Wittgenstein is right and we cannot change ourselves simply by 'putting a theory into practice', it is only by a re-ordering of our practical relations to the others around us, i.e. by developing new practices, that we can change ourselves – and this is not often easy to do.

Shotter's (1996, p.295) idea of "developing new practices" reflects a further aim of this research, which was to inform the design of pedagogical and support practices that are potentially effective for a greater number of stakeholders. This aim also required a critical stance. As foreshadowed in Chapter 2, the reason a critical stance has been maintained is that this research might contribute more than an 'insightful description' of the challenges facing the students and teachers at the University in this study. Although "more difficult and riskier" (Thomas, 1993, p.68), I want to raise the critical implications of this research in theory and in practice, in order to challenge some of the "established characteristics", "cultural meanings and their forms of transmission" including established practices in the "culture" (Thomas, 1993, p.5) – that is, in the University.

To revisit briefly a less subjective dimension of this research which was presented in Chapter 1, income from international education in Australia as at November 2008 had exceeded $AUD14.2 billion (Australian Education International, 2008a). That is, income from international education in Australia has almost trebled in dollar terms since this research commenced when the industry contributed $AUD5.030 billion to the Australian economy in the 2003 calendar year (IDP Education Australia, 2004). While this growth is forecast to continue, the international education market is highly competitive with many countries contending for fee-paying international students. Growth patterns in the Australian market cannot be taken for granted. Apart from its implications for theory and practice, and together with its recommendations for practice, this study has significant implications for the marketing of international education in Australia which may also result in increased numbers of INESB student enrolments.

To reiterate what was stated in the first chapter of this thesis, the focus of this research has been on what is considered to be the far more critical social, cultural and humanitarian implications of this research's findings for the students, their families and societies, and for the teachers of Australian universities given their avowed commitment to the educational, social and cultural benefits of student exchange and international students' contributions to Australian higher education and its students. If INESB students' experiences of 'Australian culture' both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts are generally positive, then these are the sorts of experiences that students will take with them back to their own countries and talk about to others. As the following teacher asked:

> When is [the University] going to realise its best marketing tools are its students? (Teacher 9M).

Students had similar feelings, as reflected in the following comments:

> *…maybe [the University] could try to understand us. Maybe that's the way they really should do. I think they should put on more helpful people for us – because we pay a lot of money. We pay $12,000 per year, so we expect more than that.[5] We just don't get what we want. They get our money. It's unethical.* (Student 43.2M).

In a market which is highly dynamic and competitive, comments such as these from teachers and students should, perhaps, be heeded.

However, I will now return to the challenge raised earlier which seeks to question some of the "established characteristics", "cultural meanings and their forms of transmission" (Thomas, 1993, p.5) and some of the established practices in the University. To support

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[5] At the time of this study, tuition fees for international students at Charles Sturt University ranged from $A10,500 to $A14,500 per annum.

this challenge I have drawn on the philosophies of Bakhtin and Wittgenstein to provide a powerful theoretical and interpretive framework which has allowed multi-dimensional explorations and interpretations of the data which have, in turn, informed theories and practices of teaching and learning in tertiary settings in multidimensional ways, especially where the cultural, educational and linguistic backgrounds of both teachers and students are becoming increasingly diverse. In presenting this challenge, however, I have also presented implications for theory in practice which may open the way for *dialogue* concerning the critical implications of the research findings. As Thomas (1993, p.61) points out:

> Critical thinking does not stop when a single research project ends, because it is a way of life. The insights and knowledge gained from research extend into other realms beyond simply professional interest. They draw attention to how preexisting cultural formations shape behavioural opportunities and life chances; how cultural participants re-affirm, challenge, or accommodate to existing cultural formations; and how culture is re-created continually with every word, gesture, and act.

It is only through *dialogue*, however, and *creative understanding*, perhaps, that the potential of the research findings can be accessed and may *become* useful to future students and teachers. The same student who just commented about the cost of his course made a further comment in this research. He was speaking to me about the time taken to undertake this research, the contributions made by himself and other INESB students, and the possible action taken by the University as a result of the findings. He said:

> *I mean you spend a lot of time on this [research] and then we contribute and they'll say 'pass' and they're never going to do anything. Then what? It's still the same. I hope not. Because I want ... I hope the new generation that comes over has some benefit.* (Student 43.2M).

Just as this research may only *go on* and *become* useful through *dialogue*, it is only through *dialogue* that individuals and the practices in which they engage in *everyday* and *academic* contexts can also *go on* and evolve in the interminable process of *becoming*. In a text published under the name of one of Bakhtin's colleagues, Medvedev (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p.22) wrote:

> In reality, real-life intercourse is constantly generating, although slowly and in a narrow sphere. The interrelationships between speakers are always changing, even if the degree is hardly noticeable. In the process of this generation, the content being generated also generates. Practical interchange is full of event-potential, and the most insignificant philological exchange participates in this incessant generation of the event.

For Bakhtin, as Morson and Emerson (1990, pp.415-416) point out, it was important to "perceive the world as an *emerging event*" which "... cannot be reduced to a ready-made or underlying abstract system, extends over time and across all cultural spheres, and continually produces the new". As Morson and Emerson, (1990, p.55) suggest, "The process of dialogue may itself create new potentials, realizable only through future activity and dialogue." Through *dialogue*, by *listening* to, *speaking* with, *reading* and *writing* about others' and our own *outsideness* with *creative understanding*, interpretive combinations of past historical and current realities can identify possibilities for future change and contestation, *going on* and *becoming* in the *unfinalisable* process of creating ever new ways to be.

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Afterword

It may be, despite the well-intentioned efforts of people like myself, that teachers and students continue their dialogue in different languages and with different understandings of each other while ever teachers and students continue to be. Consider, for example, the following teacher's comments:

> ... the students from overseas become very adept at certain levels of language operation and usage that are different from the levels of language and operation of local students. For example, the idiomatic facility of local students is more pronounced than the idiomatic facility of overseas students. Nonetheless an overseas student can often add a very, very particular, and finely tuned critical sense ... because of being able to move between different languages in a quite sophisticated way. (Teacher 41M).

The sophistication of idiomatic facility and the finely tuned critical sense of being able to move between different languages are illustrated, perhaps, in the following student's final diary notation:

> I missed the bus this morning, so i had to walk. On the way, i was attacked by a swarm of blowies[6], chased by a vicious mother duck, and i was late for class. Did i forget to mention that i was wearing heels? I was so snappy, grumpy & grouchy when i attended the Christmas dinner organized by dining hall. But all turned out to be good. After a cup of beer, i won a shake maker during the raffle. ☹ sad face + beer = ☺ happy face. (Student 49F – diary entry, 9th November, 2004).

The teachers and the students have had their say – for now.

At this 'final chapter' point, it is perhaps fitting that, of all the voices which have contributed to this dialogue, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who have both influenced this thesis and my own outsideness, creative understanding, going on, becoming and unfinalisability beyond measure, should have the last say in this unfinalisable dialogic chain.

Firstly, Bakhtin (1984, p.252):

> To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end.

And now, Wittgenstein (cited in Shotter, 2001, p.4):

> Disquiet in philosophy might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly, seeing it wrong, namely as if it were divided into (infinite) longitudinal strips instead of into (finite) cross strips. This inversion of our conception produces the <u>greatest</u> difficulty. So we try as it were to grasp the unlimited strips and complain that it cannot be done piecemeal. To be sure it cannot, if by a piece one means an infinite longitudinal strip. But it may well be done, if one means a cross-strip. – But in that case we never get to the end of our work! – Of course not, for it has no end.

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[6] "Blowies" = colloquial for 'blowflies', large, disgusting flies common during Australian summers, especially in dry, regional areas and especially prevalent at barbies.

Record of interviews

No.	Student	Teacher	Other	Faculty	Level	Gender
1			O			M
2			O			F
3	S			E	UG	F
4	S			C	PG	F
5	S			C	PG	F
6		T		S		M
7		T		S		M
8	S			H	UG	F
9		T		S		M
10			O			F
11		T		S		M
12		T		S		M
13		T		S		M
14	S			C	UG/EX	F
15	S			S	UG	F
16	S			A	UG	F*
17	S			C	UG	M
18	S			S	UG	F
19	S			S	UG	F
20	S			S	UG	F
21	S			S	UG	F
22	S			S	UG	F
23		T		C		M
24			O			F
25	S			E	UG	F
26		T		S		M
27	S			S	PG	M
28			O			F
29		T		A		F
30		T		H		F
31		T		H		F
32		T				F
33	S			E	UG	F*
34	S			E	UG	F*
35	S			A	UG/EX	F
36_2		T		S		M
37		T		C		F
38		T		H		M
39		T		A		M
40		T		C		M
41		T		A		M
42		T		A		M
43	S			C	UG	M
44	S			C	UG	M
45_2	S			C	UG	M
46	S			H	UG	F
47	S			H	UG	F
48	S			A	UG	M
49	S			S	UG	F
50	S			E	UG	F*
51	S			C	UG	F
52	S			E	PG	F
53		T		S		M
54_2	S			H	UG	F
55_2	S			C	PG	F
56_2	S			H	UG	F
57_2	S			H	UG	F
58			O			F
59_2	S			C	UG	M
60	S			H	UG	M

No.	Student	Teacher	Other	Faculty	Level	Gender
61			O			F
62₂		T		H		F
63		T		H		F
64₂	S			S	UG	F
65		T		A		M
66	S			C	UG/EX	F
67₂	S			S	UG	F
68			O			F
69₂	S			H	UG	M
70			O			F
71		T		E		M
72	S			S	PG	M
73	S			H	UG	M
74	S			S	PG	M
75	S			S	PG	M
76	S			C	UG	M
77	S			S	PG	M
78	S			C	PG	F
79	S			C	UG	F
80	S			C	PG	M
81	S			C	UG	F*
82	S			C	PG	M
83	S			S	UG	F
84	S			C	PG	M
85	S			S	PG	M

KEY

Participants = 74   **Gender**
S = Students (43; M=16; F=27)   F = Female
T = Teachers (22; M=16; F=6)   M = Male
O = Others (9; M=1; F=8)

Faculties = 5   **Levels of study**
A = Arts   UG = Undergraduate
C = Commerce   PG = Postgraduate
E = Education   EX = Exchange
H = Health
S = Science and Agriculture

Interviews = 85
Students (43; M=16; F=27)
      9 second interviews (M=3; F=6)   = 52 student interviews
Teachers (22; M=16; F=6)
      2 second interviews (M=1; F=1)   = 24 teacher interviews
Others x 9 (M=1; F=8)   = 9 other interviews

Other symbols
#₂   = second interview
*   = ESB (English speaking background) international students. While these students were not the focus of the study, their input adds another dimension to the data.

Interviews took place over a period of 19 months from 13th February 2004 to 24th September 2005.

Initially, the above table of participants indicated countries of origin for each participant. In the interests of de-identification – more pressing in the case of teachers than of students – countries of origin have been removed. To give some idea of the diversity of participants, however, the following table indicates the countries represented and the number of participants, including students, teachers and others, from each country.

Participants' countries of origin

No. of participants	Country
18	Australia
1	Brazil
1	Burma
3	Canada*
10	China
1	Dubai
1	Fiji
2	Germany
1	Hong Kong
6	India
1	Indonesia
1	Japan
2	Kuwait
10	Malaysia
1	Middle East
2	Nepal
1	Nigeria
1	Pakistan
1	South Africa*
2	Sweden
1	Thailand
2	Undisclosed
4	United Kingdom
1	United States*
Total participants 74	**Total countries 23**

* = ESB (English speaking background) international students. While these students were not the focus of the study, their input adds another dimension to the data.

Appendix 2 – Initial letters to students outlining research

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
School of Education

Dear Student,

My name is Dianne Jonasson and I am currently undertaking my PhD with this University. As part of my PhD, I am studying the experiences and challenges facing International students as they undertake their degrees, in English, at Charles Sturt University. In particular, I want to know more about the processes by which International students make more or less successful transitions into the expert language of their discipline in ways that meet their hopes and expectations. I also want to understand the processes by which their teachers help this transition and assess the outcomes, and the challenges they face in doing so.

This is very important research as it will help inform Charles Sturt University's policies, procedures, teaching and assessment practices concerning the education of International students. In turn, this will help to ensure that International students not only have an enjoyable and positive experience while studying in Australia, but also that the education they receive is of the highest possible standard.

I would be very grateful if you would help me with my research by talking with me about your expectations and experiences. In this way, you will be making a personal and valuable contribution to the improvement of international education.

If you are willing to talk with me, please contact me on the telephone number below, or email me at djonasson@csu.edu.au

With many thanks,

Dianne Jonasson
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PS: Please feel free to contact me if you would like to know more about my research ☺

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Appendix 3 – Confidential contact sheets for students

CONTACT DETAILS

First or preferred name_____

Family name _____

Country _____

Contact details _____

_____

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences while you are studying at CSU.
I appreciate your help very much!

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Dear Colleagues,

Research Project:
Negotiating academic discourses in Australian universities: Challenges facing International students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers

When students come to university, they experience different ways of learning, different ways of approaching problems, different ways of communicating, different ways of writing, different expectations, and different values and attitudes about a wide range of issues. Additionally, within an Australian university, there are different cultures, contexts and languages - or academic discourses - which vary within faculties and disciplines. For many students, even English speaking students, learning these academic discourses is a challenge. However, for international students whose first language is not English, the challenge becomes even greater, not only for the students, but also for their teachers.

Considerable research has been done on the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds as they undertake their studies in Western universities. However, far less research has been done on the double challenge of learning in English as a second language, while also learning the academic discourse of a particular discipline. My research aims to explore this challenge, with special reference to international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, studying on-campus in Australia. With your support, I want to understand the processes by which international students make more or less successful transitions into the expert language (or academic discourse) of their discipline in ways that meet their hopes and expectations. I also want to understand the processes by which their teachers help this transition and assess the outcomes, and the challenges they experience in doing so.

This research is critical for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will help inform policies concerning the education of international students in Australian universities. Additionally, it will help inform effective teaching, assessment, and support practices for both students and their teachers. This, in turn, will help to ensure that the hopes and expectations of international students are met in terms of their academic achievement and study experience in Australia. Finally, this research has the potential to promote positive communication as students, and universities, learn to 'negotiate' the complexities of academic discourse on a broader, perhaps global, scale.

1

In order to undertake this research, I need to gather information from both teachers and students in a variety of ways. Questionnaires will help to identify some of the *challenges* facing students and their teachers, while interviews will help me to understand the *processes* of learning academic discourses. I anticipate that there will be two questionnaires for students that will each take 20-30 minutes to complete - one at the beginning of semester, and one at the end of semester. There will also be three, half hour, informal interviews during a semester - one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. Some people may want to talk to me more often, for shorter or longer periods. Perhaps several students might prefer to speak to me as a group. I would like to record our conversations to ensure my notes are accurate. I am also hoping that two or three students and teachers will agree to keep an informal, reflective journal. This would provide a wealth of information at a deeper level and may highlight important issues not otherwise evident.

My research will be published as a thesis for my Doctor of Philosophy with Charles Sturt University. I may also publish other books, chapters or articles. As this will be a public document I will use code names and pseudonyms to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality. Also, please be assured that everything you tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and privacy, and nothing will be passed on to your teachers. All records will be securely stored for five years and then shredded.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to participate in this research. Participation is, of course, entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty or discriminatory treatment of any kind. If you feel you can only complete the first questionnaire, or speak to me on one occasion, I would still value your participation very much.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to know more about my research.

Yours sincerely,

Dianne Jonasson
PhD Student

NOTE: Charles Sturt University's Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

 The Executive Officer
 Ethics in Human Research Committee
 The Grange
 Charles Sturt University
 Bathurst NSW 2795

 Tel: (02) 6338 4628
 Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

2

CHARLES STURT
U N I V E R S I T Y

INFORMATION STATEMENT

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Dear Colleagues,

Research Project:
Negotiating academic discourses in Australian universities: Challenges facing International students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers

When students come to university, they are required to learn a set of complex relationships involving different ways of learning, different ways of approaching problems, different ways of communicating, different ways of writing, different expectations, and different values and attitudes about a wide range of issues. Additionally, within the Anglophonic 'society' of an Australian university, there exist different cultures, contexts and languages - or academic discourses - which vary among, and within, faculties and disciplines. For many students, even Anglo-Australians, learning to negotiate and use these academic discourses represents a challenge. However, for international students whose first language is not English, the challenge becomes even greater, not only for the students, but also for the academics who teach them.

Considerable research has been done on the challenges facing international students from non-English speaking backgrounds as they undertake their studies in Western universities. However, far less research has been done on the double challenge of both learning in English as a second language, while also learning the academic discourse of a particular discipline. My research aims to explore this challenge, with special reference to international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, studying on-campus in Australia. With your support, I want to understand the processes by which these students make more or less successful transitions into the expert language of their discipline in ways that meet their hopes and expectations in terms of academic achievement and development of graduate attributes. I also want to understand the processes by which their teachers facilitate these processes and assess the outcomes, and the challenges they experience in doing so.

This research is critical for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will help inform policies and practices concerning the education of international students in Australian universities. This, in turn, will help to ensure that these students' hopes and expectations are met, a vital consideration if the international education market is to be strengthened and sustained. However, this research also has practical implications regarding the teaching and assessment of these students, and will help inform effective pedagogical and support practices for both academics and students. Finally, this research has the potential to promote positive communication as students, and universities, learn to 'negotiate' the complexities of academic discourse on a broader, perhaps global, scale.

1

http://www.csu.edu.au

In order to undertake this research, I need to gather information from both teachers and students in a variety of ways. Questionnaires will help to identify some of the *challenges* facing students and their teachers, while interviews will help me to understand the *processes* both parties undertake as they 'negotiate' academic discourses. Assessment tasks will be a point of focus for observing these processes, and I would be especially interested in looking at one or two assessment tasks from your discipline, and talking about any elements of the professional and academic discourse which may present difficulties to these students. I anticipate that there will be one questionnaire for teachers that will take 20-30 minutes to complete, and three, half hour interviews during the course of one semester. Some people may want to talk to me more often, for shorter or longer periods. Perhaps several academics might prefer to speak to me as a group. I would like to record our conversations, simply to ensure my notes are accurate. I am also hoping that two or three academics and students will agree to keep an informal, reflective journal. This would provide a wealth of data at an even deeper level and may highlight pertinent issues not otherwise evident.

My research will be published as a thesis for my Doctor of Philosophy with Charles Sturt University. I may also publish other books, chapters or articles. As this will be a public document I will use code names and pseudonyms to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality. Also, please be assured that anything you tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and privacy and nothing will be passed on to the students. Likewise, anything disclosed by students, will remain strictly confidential. All records will be securely stored for five years and then shredded.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to participate in this research. Participation is, of course, entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the project at any time. If you feel you can only complete the first questionnaire, or speak to me on one occasion, I would still value your participation very much.

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2

Appendix 6 – Consent form

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CONSENT FORM

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RESEARCH PROJECT:
Negotiating academic discourses in Australian universities: Challenges facing
international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their teachers.

I ... ... consent to my participation in the above
research project. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the research at any
time and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment. The
purpose of this research has been explained to me, and I have read and understood the
information sheet given to me. I understand that the research does not include any risks or
discomforts to any participant.

I understand that any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research
about me are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be
used or published without my written permission.

Charles Sturt University's Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this study. I
understand that, if I have any complaints or concerns about this research, I can contact:

Executive Officer
Ethics in Human Research Committee
The Grange
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst NSW 2795

Phone: (02) 6338 4628
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Research Participant's signature   ... ...

Telephone number   ... ...

E-mail address   ... ...

Date: .   ...

As noted in *Chapter 2: The research process*, although all questions were answered, not all students answered all questions. Also, not every student was asked the same questions as the questions evolved over time.

An opener
Australian customs
What have you noticed about ways of doing things that are different here that seem to you to be odd and strange?

Previous study experiences

Why did you choose to study overseas/in Australia/at Charles Sturt University?
What did you do before you came to Australia? (Study? Work?)
Tell me about your school/college/university experiences at home.
How does your previous study experience compare with CSU? (e.g., course structure?)

Hopes and expectations

What were your hopes and expectations when you came to Australia?
What are/were your hopes and expectations of your study experience at CSU?
Have your expectations been met so far? Why? Why not?
Have your expectations changed since you started? How? Why?
What are your expectations of yourself/your teachers/the University?
What are your family's expectations?
Have your expectations been met so far? Why? Why not?
If everything went just how you would like it to, what would be your ideal experience?

English language

When did you start learning English?
How important is it to you to improve your English language skills?
How important is it to you to improve your Academic English skills?

Teachers

What have you noticed about your teachers here? (e.g., behaviour/dress)
What do you think about the different modes of address?
Are your teachers approachable and helpful?
How do you feel about approaching your teachers for help?

Courses/pedagogy

What sorts of teaching methods are usual at home?
What do you think about the teaching methods here?
How do they compare with home? (e.g., is there more or less independent learning/reading/face-to-face teaching?)
What do you think about the way the course is structured?
What sorts of teaching methods do you prefer? Why?

Study habits and strategies

Tell me about your study habits/strategies at home.
Do you/will you use the same habits/strategies here?
Do you think the same strategies will work here? Why? Why not?
How many hours do you spend studying? Is that more or less since you started?
How do the assessment tasks influence your study strategies?
What motivates you with your study?

Successful students

What do you think are some qualities of a successful student?
Were you a successful student at home? What made you successful/less
successful? What study habits/strategies did you use at home to be a successful
student? Do you think the things that made you successful at home will make
you successful here? What do you think makes a successful learner here?
Have your thoughts about success changed since you started? In what way?

Deep versus surface learning

How important is it to you that you understand the concepts? (i.e., not just
remember them). Why is it important/not important to you?

Teaching and learning

What sorts of teaching activities do you think will help you to understand the
concepts?
What sorts of assessment tasks do you think will help you to understand the
concepts?

Assessment

What sorts of assessment methods do your prefer or least prefer? Why?
Which assessment task is causing you the most concern? Why?
Do you face any special challenges regarding assessment that you did not
expect? What are they? How do you deal with them?

Negotiation of assessment tasks

Do you feel that there is room for negotiation of assessment tasks?
Would you feel comfortable talking with your lecturer about
- the way you are taught?
- the things you are taught?
- the way you are assessed?

Academic writing

What do you think are some features of 'good' and acceptable 'academic'
writing in your discipline area?
Have you been to any academic writing workshops? Were they helpful? In
what way?

Essay writing

Do you have any essays to write? In what subjects?
How will you approach the task? How do you think about it?
What do you do if you cannot understand the question?
Tell me how you research for it/structure it/write it/reference it/present it.

Plagiarism

Do you know what plagiarism is? How do you feel about plagiarism?

Feedback

What sort of feedback have you received on your assignments? Was it helpful?
What sort of feedback would you like to receive/would be helpful?

Grades and results

How did you do in your examinations/assessments?
How did your results compare with your expectations?
How did your results compare with other students? (local/international)
Did you use the same strategies as you would have used at home?

Student Support

Do you know what student support services are available to help you? Do you use them? Why? Why not?

Debriefing

Who (where and when) do you talk to about your problems?

Closing
Greatest challenge
What has been the worst thing (the greatest challenge) about your experience so far? How have you dealt with it?

Best thing

What has been the best thing about your experience so far?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Would you recommend this course to anyone else? Why? Why not?

Experiences
What has been your experience with INESB students?

Benefits
What are some of the benefits of having INESB students at this university?
For you personally? For other students? For the University?

Challenges
What are some of the challenges you have experienced with INESB
students? How have you dealt with these challenges?

Ethics
Are there certain things that you do (or refuse to do) for some or all of your
students?

Teaching and learning
What have you noticed about INESB students with regard to their ways of
teaching and learning? How does this compare with local students?

Assessment
For you, what is the most important thing about assessment?
What is your preferred method of assessment?
Do you face any special challenges when assessing INESB students?

Negotiation of assessment tasks
Do you feel there is room for negotiation of assessment tasks with students?
In what ways? To what extent?

Internationalisation
How do you cater for the cultural diversity in your classroom with regard to
subject content?

Academic writing
What do you consider constitutes 'good' and 'acceptable' academic writing
in your discipline area?

Plagiarism
How do you feel about plagiarism?
Have you noticed any differences between INESB students and local
students regarding the use of plagiarism?

Other comments
Are there any other comments you'd like to make regarding INESB
students?

Interview questions for other participants varied depending on the division or centre in which the participants were employed, for example, Administration, Student Services, the International Office, the English Language Centre, and the Centre for Enhanced Learning and Teaching. This list includes a range of questions which were asked.

Experiences, benefits and challenges
What has been your experience with INESB students?
What are some of the benefits of having INESB students at this university? For you personally? For other students? For the University?
What are some of the challenges you have experienced or witnessed, when dealing with INESB students? How have these challenges been dealt with?

Cultural awareness
What have you noticed about cultural awareness among teachers, other staff members, and other students?
Have you ever witnessed any racism - overt or covert - in any way?

Internationalisation
Is there an interest among teachers to internationalise their subjects? Are teachers internationalising subjects and, if so, to what extent?

Students' entry to university
What can you tell me about the IELTS test with regard to this University?

Assessment
Can you tell me about the range and density of assessment tasks across Faculties and Schools?
How common are certain assessment types across disciplines?
Have you noticed any differences across disciplines with regard to what constitutes an essay?
Are you aware of any special challenges or considerations regarding assessment of INESB students?
Do you feel there is room for negotiation of assessment tasks? In what way?

Support for INESB students – *everyday* and *academic*
What support networks are available to help INESB students, both in *everyday* and in *academic* contexts?

Strategies for helping students and teachers
What strategies do you feel might help INESB students and their teachers overcome some of the challenges?

Any other comments?

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