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**Expectations, emerging issues and change for
Chinese international students
in a New Zealand university**

A thesis presented in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
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Gillian Ray Skyrme
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Abstract

This study uses a sociocultural framework to trace the experiences of 24 Chinese international undergraduate students studying business and information sciences in a New Zealand university, using community of practice perspectives recognising the university as a site of complex discourses requiring negotiation of new identities and practices. The students' expectations, the issues that emerged and the processes of change they went through to meet their goals were investigated from retrospective and longitudinal viewpoints, using semi-structured interviews supported by schematic representations developed by the researcher and photographic representations compiled by participants were.

The findings suggest that preparation before departure focused largely on expected English demands, rather than wider matters of academic culture, and this was only partially rectified during prior study in New Zealand. Students thus entered the university unfamiliar with its specific discourses and found conditions for resolving difficulties more limited than previously experienced. The anonymity and extreme time pressure pertaining in large first-year classes led to bewilderment about requirements, threats to the sense of identity as competent students which they had arrived with, and often, failure of courses. Nevertheless, the investment, personal and monetary, which this journey represented provided the incentive to persevere. Most students were resourceful in negotiating a fit between their learning preferences and the affordances of the university, resulting in very different journeys for each of them. Measures adopted included those sanctioned by the university, such as developing skills to meet the demands of academic literacies, and others less valued, such as extreme dependence on teacher consultation. Success was gained through personal agency which proved more important than the university goal of student autonomy. Beyond the academic arena, other activities such as part-time jobs were significant in contributing to a sense of identity as competent and educated adults, and to new viewpoints which contrasted with original cultural norms. They continued to identify as Chinese, but in a "third space" owing something to New Zealand influences. The study concludes that entry criteria should include a component of university preparation. It also recommends measures by which the university might enhance the experiences of such students.

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This thesis describes a complex learning journey undertaken by novices to whom many unforeseen complexities were revealed in the course of their years of study. In many ways it has formed a parallel to my own PhD journey, and as with my participants, I have been helped on my way by a range of people, whether their roles be official or otherwise.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. A personal perspective

This study emerged from an initial germ of interest in the general issue of the presence of a non-traditional group of students within a new and potentially challenging academic culture, a germ which was nurtured through discussion, reading and reflection until it reached fruition as a set of specific questions that could be investigated. Major influences on the reflection were my extensive prior experience as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL¹) in New Zealand, a year teaching in a university in the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China), the observations of a parent of the process by which the New Zealand education system acculturates its own young people towards the learning practices of its higher education institutions, and a lifetime's participation in the host academic culture as student and teacher.

The ESOL-teaching experience had introduced me from the mid-1980s to an increasing number of learners from China, and in particular, from the mid-1990s to young international students who were part of the cohort which would be the focus of this study. The period spent in China over 2001 and 2002 intensified my exposure to the cohort, bringing me into contact with very large numbers of young Chinese students, both as a teacher and as an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examiner conducting oral interviews, many of them with young students who aspired to study abroad. These opportunities to observe and listen to young Chinese students made me keenly aware that the educational experiences they arrived in New Zealand with came from a tradition fundamentally different from the academic culture of New Zealand universities as I had observed and participated in it. The learning practices encouraged in the two systems were often very different, and it would seem that some process of adjustment to the new system would be necessary for students to achieve success. This exposure to new learning practices would be against a background of other aspects of unfamiliarity: living within a new culture, living away from family, and establishing new social and support networks.

¹ Acronyms are explained at first occurrence. They are further listed in Appendix 1, 4.

1.2. A historical perspective

1.2.1. International students in New Zealand

In 2003, the year that this study began, there were 1,911 international students, including 1,275 Chinese, among the 8,041 students on the Rutherford² University campus where it took place.

International students were not a phenomenon new to the University. It had had areas of specialisation which had attracted students from around the world since the 1930s, and immediately after the Second World War records show the presence of Chinese postgraduate students. By 1956, overseas students comprised 18% of its total enrolment (*The Asia connection*, 1996, p. 12). Half of these students were Asians, though it is unlikely that by then any of them would have been Chinese, which is only one of the factors that made the situation in 2003 very different from those earlier times. Other factors can best be revealed with a brief historical account.

A useful starting point is 1950, the year of the formulation of the Colombo Plan, a British Commonwealth initiative to promote its influence on developing Asian countries (initially) by providing aid. A major part of this aid took the form of the provision in donor countries of university places for students selected by the governments of countries such as India and Malaya, which led to the arrival in New Zealand universities of a growing stream of non-domestic students with fees, travel and living allowances provided through the New Zealand aid programme.

The discourse around the presence of these students in New Zealand over most of the second half of the twentieth century was not only of support for developing countries, and its potential to counter other influences seen as less benign, but also of benefit to New Zealand, both by bringing cultural diversity and by engendering a sense of good will among young people who were well placed to be future leaders of their countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001). Tarling (2004) quotes T.L. Macdonald, New Zealand Minister of External Affairs, in 1955: “Many strands of personal friendship so formed can be woven into a permanent material that may prove of great protective value in the years ahead” (p. 13).

This is a rhetoric which arises out of a then more respected concept of university education as a public good. As such, in the first three decades of the Colombo Plan it extended with scarcely a demur not only to the students from South Pacific countries,

² Pseudonym

who were an existing source of diversity within New Zealand universities, but also to even larger numbers of privately funded students from the Colombo Plan source countries. Their fees, though self-funded, were the same as those for New Zealand students, well below the full cost of study.

Some sample numbers over the period will give a sense of the scope of the scheme. The 800th Colombo Plan student arrived in New Zealand in 1961 (Tarling, 2004, p. 18). By 1965 there were approximately 1,000 overseas students (aided and private) in New Zealand who constituted about 5% of the university population, and by 1970, this had risen to over 2,000, and around 7% (p. 35). A considerable number of these privately funded students were ethnic Chinese from Malaysia. However, this was a period during which there was little contact between New Zealand and China itself.

Although the rhetoric of mutual benefit continued at least until the 1990s, counter discourses began to be heard over the period expressing concern that these students might be usurping places more appropriately filled by local students and questioning the wisdom of such a generous government subsidy. An English language test was first required in 1970, “in part to enhance students’ chance of success, but also in part to constrain their numbers” (Tarling, 2004, p. 34). In 1980 a surcharge of \$NZ1,500 was imposed for privately funded non-Pacific students amid an outcry from student organisations and universities alike. Although this surcharge was swept away in a return to the earlier rhetoric under the first Lange-led Labour government, the climate was changing, and by the end of that decade, the second Lange government, in a fervour of “user pays” economic policy and spurred on by reports from Treasury and the Marketing Development Board, introduced a new regime of charging overseas students full fees, operational from 1990. This was presented to publicly funded tertiary institutions as an opportunity to enhance incomes beyond what the government was prepared to pay. There were protests from, among others, the New Zealand University Students’ Association. A report they commissioned around this time expressed fears that standards would drop as the result of the commercial commodification of university education, and suggested that financial effects would be paltry, along the lines of school committee garage sales (Caldwell, 1988?, p. 9). They failed to stop the new regime.

In adopting this policy, the government was paying heed to what was happening elsewhere in like-minded countries. Canada, Britain and Australia had been following this path for a decade or so and seemed to be reaping economic benefits. As a late starter, New Zealand competed on price, but was slow to capture the imagination of the

diaspora of young people setting out on a quest for study abroad. An increasingly large proportion of this diaspora was made up of the children of the growing middle class of the world's most populous nation, China, but by 1994, only 49 of the 3,199 full-fee students in publicly funded New Zealand tertiary institutions were from that source. Although their numbers were increasing in English language centres, it was not until the turn of this century that they focussed their attention on our universities and New Zealand became, in the words of one of my informants, a "hot" destination for degree study. The change was swift. In 1998, 89 university students came from China; in 1999, 457 and in 2000, 1,696. In 2002, they numbered, at 11,700, more than half the 20,767 full-fee international students at public tertiary institutions (Tarling, 2004, p. 223).

International students in New Zealand were predominantly undergraduate (more than eight to one), and almost 40% were enrolled in business-related fields. OECD data indicated that the proportion in such courses was higher here than in any other OECD country (Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand, 2003, p. 21). Thus, although Chinese students made up less than 10% of the total number of students, in some courses they comprised well over half the class and were a very visible presence in a student body unaccustomed to their presence.

1.2.2. Chinese "Study abroad"

If New Zealand's passage towards becoming a marketer of tertiary education forms part of the background to this study, so too must the conditions that led to the wholesale consumption of the product by Chinese students.

China's turbulent twentieth century history saw its emergence after 1976 from the bewildering social conditions and economic stagnation of the Cultural Revolution into a world onto which it was increasingly willing to open its door. It entered a stage of rapid economic development, very often through joint venture partnerships with foreign companies ("JVs"), as it adopted a "socialist market economy." One feature of that was the opportunity for enterprising Chinese to prosper; another was the end of the secure employment of earlier days. Layoffs in a society that does not provide cradle-to-grave welfare support intensified the competition for the highly desirable JV jobs. JV jobs often required English.

China's existing tertiary education system was initially not adequate to supply the expertise to maintain its development. Adams, Stivers, and Bin, (2004, p. 71) cite World

Bank (1997) concern about the low rate of post-secondary education in China (2% of those over the age of 25 in 1995, compared with 11% in Hong Kong and 45% in USA), and the need for “a critical mass of highly trained personnel” to sustain economic development (p. 66). Zhang (2003) suggests that the government was not averse to the idea that this training should occur overseas: “The work principle for studies abroad is, at the present phase, ‘support studies abroad, encourage returning to China, and freedom to come and go’” (p. 53), though preferably with fully funded scholarships.

Available tertiary education was highly stratified, a dual system of “key-point” schools and universities which provided successful students with privileged education (Dooley, 2001), below which were more vocational institutions referred to by my informants in English as “colleges,” in a society in which “the stratification of learning by academic results often leads to social stratification as well” (Gao, 2006, p. 72). Those who missed out on places in the higher echelons of this hierarchy had little hope of scoring well paid jobs. The prospect of gaining a “foreign” degree in a location which promised the simultaneous acquisition of English, “synonymous with better job prospects, [and] more promotion opportunities” (Gu, 2005, p. 85), seemed to offer more chance for a prosperous future than Chinese college diplomas.

In my discussions in China with young students aspiring to study abroad, I frequently came across a belief that education in the west³ was superior to the Chinese model. In particular they believed western education to be more practical and to espouse more modern ideas. The possibility of moving from student status to employment and even possibly migration into the host country was another attraction to the children of parents whose early memories were of a disrupted community and who were very much aware of the greater welfare provisions of a country like New Zealand.

The aberrations during the Cultural Revolution notwithstanding, Chinese culture has always attached enormous value to education, and many among the growing middle class, not just the very wealthy, were willing to make considerable sacrifices to support their sons and daughters in the very expensive decision to study abroad. The students who took part in my study were making that decision in the early years of this century, when prices here were made particularly competitive by the low New Zealand dollar. Most undergraduate degrees being three-year qualifications, New Zealand seemed like a quick, economical option. One other feature in its favour: it allowed entry into

³ For a note on the use of this terminology, see Appendix 1, 3.1

preparatory English language centres without a minimum IELTS standard, unlike Australia. When the tide turned in this direction, it turned in flood.

1.2.3. Globalising or internationalising?

The decision to allow for, indeed encourage, the enrolment of full fee students was taken in New Zealand at a time when “the market” had been anthropomorphised into a being that was able to shake out the dross from any situation and settle for itself what would be for its own ultimate benefit. Under such a philosophy, there sometimes seemed to be a temptation to shelve responsibility for long-term viability and principles such as public good. The market would decide such matters for us.

This was not a purely local phenomenon, and within the international literature, to counter the unbridled enthusiasm for filling the coffers and classrooms of educational institutions with the results of successful marketing, discussion took place about how this phenomenon should be integrated into an internationalised outlook which would take account of huge changes in the way the world operated under new technologies and economic structures, but do so in a way that was sustainable and reciprocal. Welch (2002) makes a distinction between the rather quantitative connotations of the term *globalisation* and the more holistic *internationalisation*. Internationalisation refers to an institution-wide process of reflection and improvement with an international outlook involving “genuine mutuality and reciprocal cultural relations” (p. 439), which Federico Mayor, director of UNESCO, claimed “must be one of the basic functions of the universities” (cited in Knight & de Wit, 1995, p. 12), rather than “a marginalised endeavour” of recruitment (Callan, 1998, p. 56). Rudzki (1998) describes internationalisation as:

a process of organisational change, curricular innovation, staff development and student mobility for the purpose of attaining excellence in teaching, research and the other activities which universities undertake as part of their function. (p. 16)

True internationalisation, therefore, is seen as multi-faceted and university-wide, and student mobility as not just inwards. In relation to those students who are recruited, it is based not simply on an expectation that they will buy an existing product and fit neatly into practices and curricula designed for a local audience, but seeks staff buy-in through university support to adjust to new demands. Institutional response to these students

needs to extend beyond academic activity, though, to the provision of specialised pastoral care, even special activities designed to promote the integration of international and local students (Welch, p. 434).

The aim of supporting an international outlook brings potential for tension in publicly funded institutions should it conflict with what is generally seen as a government's primary responsibility, that of meeting the education needs of its own citizens, and the question might therefore be asked why a university should go through such an exercise. There are many answers to that, not least of which is that since it is in the nature of disciplinary allegiances to be international as well as local, the exercise is in many ways natural to a university. Another answer that has often been proffered has been the vulnerability for institutions in becoming dependent on fees from their international students without attending carefully to the quality of the experience being provided. Harris (1997), for example, describes a vicious cycle in which income constraints may lead institutions to seek this kind of international injection, lowering price and entry requirements to encourage enrolment, but thus leaving themselves in no position to meet the costs of adequate support for these very vulnerable students, the inevitable result being dissatisfied consumers and lowered reputation, neither of which is conducive to maintaining market share.

The manner of New Zealand's entry into the market certainly led to concern on this front. Early voices calling for a concentration on niche areas of specialisation and research (Tarling, 2004) were ignored, and the highest uptake was for the more general commerce-related degrees. In 2003, Robert Steven, the CEO of Education New Zealand, noted that the medium-term result was that "New Zealand is not generally perceived as being positioned at the premium end of the market, has students concentrated in a limited range of fields of study and is highly dependent on a few source countries" (Tarling, p. 231). A similar concern is expressed in the Asia 2000 report, *The export education industry: Challenges for New Zealand* (2003):

The focus of public discussion on export education has been predominantly on its potential as a revenue earning industry, with less attention devoted to international students as a human resource. (p. 4)

The report continues on a note of cautious optimism:

This is changing. For New Zealand to reap full potential benefits, continued efforts will be needed to ensure a quality experience for international

students, not only educationally but also in terms of pastoral care and social interaction. (p. 4)

1.2.4. The word on the street

When I returned from my sojourn in China in 2002, I found there was a great interest in Chinese international students from many quarters, which showed no sign of abating as the study began. This interest can readily be explained by the figures given above: institutions were still reeling from their sudden appearance. The interest expressed itself on many fronts and issues raised in the previous section were clearly pertinent.

Against a continuous background of articles extolling the economic windfall they brought to New Zealand, with headlines like “Profit in foreign student boom” (Weir, 2003), and claims such as that “the goldrush that is the Chinese students wanting to study ... is showing little sign of abating” (Browne, 2003), there were others indicating that systems were straining. Concerns came from all participants in the university encounter: international students, domestic students and academic and pastoral support staff. For example, in a Rutherford University publication in mid-2002, concerns were expressed by international students that there was inadequate support in place for them, claims upheld by the president of the students’ association: the university, he said, “puts a lot of money into recruitment but at the other end, support systems don’t seem to be in place” (Martin, 2002a). Domestic students also raised complaints, in this same article suggesting that the extra attention required for international students detracted from the quality of teaching for them. A year later, as the second semester of 2003 began, the local newspaper proclaimed that “crammed classes” had Rutherford students “up in arms” (Hurley, 2003), and a few days later an article reported the calculations of a senior staff member that although the percentage of international students university-wide was 9.5%, in business courses they were 46% overall, and in some first year courses more than 70% of students were international (Matthews, 2003a).

Of real concern to staff in universities nationwide was the possibility of a drop in standards. This concern arose partly from the enrolment of students whose English level at entry was perceived to be inadequate for the demands of study (e.g., Armfield, 2002). In fact, as a result of “aggressive marketing of its business degrees” (Matthews, 2003b), Rutherford University had entered into an agreement with a Chinese agency, Wideweb⁴,

⁴ Pseudonym

allowing students with existing business qualifications in China (generally college diplomas) to enter business courses with a lower than normal English requirement (IELTS Band 5.5 instead of the usual Band 6) and to cross-credit some courses. This meant that some of those with this extra limitation on their English could choose to enter second-level courses in their first semester of study at the university.

In late 2002, the president of the academic staff union warned that “Universities are so eager to get the students’ revenue that they risk making serious compromises,” including manipulation of pass rates: “teachers have reported being pressured to pass students whom they did not think should be passed” (Martin, 2002b).

There were, too, external events contributing to media interest in the situation, interest which inevitably affected the experience of the students themselves. Over this period, several distressing incidents in both New Zealand and Australia testified to the potential risks of a situation in which young people found themselves, without their usual systems of support, in a culturally alien and challenging environment. These included reports of a high incidence of abortion among international students, problem gambling, and cases of extortion, kidnapping and even murder. Strong media reaction to such cases fed sensationalism in New Zealand, which was shaming for law-abiding young students, and was picked up by the Chinese media, leading to serious undermining of one of New Zealand’s traditional marketing points, its safety, and to anxiety among the relatives of students already studying here.

Another of the marketing planks was also under serious threat at this time: New Zealand’s competitive price. A recent surge in the value of the New Zealand dollar had had a marked impact on the costs to students’ families and was causing great concern to many. This was against a backdrop, too, of a decline in the cultural capital of the overseas degree itself. It was becoming difficult for returning graduates to find jobs:

In China, as many families support their children to study abroad, a foreign academic degree is not valued much by employers nowadays. (Personal communication from a Chinese graduate seeking work in Shanghai, February, 2004)

A report commissioned by the Ministry of Education published in 2004 (Ward & Masgoret) on the experiences of Asian students in New Zealand was a little lukewarm in its enthusiasm. Signs of a downturn in this particular market were clear.

It is important to complete this account by reporting that alongside negative accounts of the situation, both in public arenas and in the e-mails and corridor encounters of its

participants, there was intense discussion about how the quality of the experience for all concerned, and for international students in particular, could be improved. The staff member who released the figures showing the proportions in business courses above, for example, was at pains to point out his concern for the students themselves: “I take my hat off to them. They are miles from home and studying in a second language. They deserve the best we can give them” (Matthews, 2003a). Responses came from teachers and support staff, institutions and the government, with motivations no doubt both altruistic and self-interested, but in any case tending towards optimising the situation. University staff responded through professional bodies such as ISANA (support staff) and TESOLANZ (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Aotearoa New Zealand), but also through the individual sharing of experiences and the implementation of action groups. Butcher, Lim, McGrath, and Revis (2002), though, found that the business model that applied to this intake of students had reduced the incidence of community group involvement in their integration.

Rutherford University produced various institutional responses as well, including internal reviews of the First Year Experience and of ESOL provision within the university, making pertinent recommendations which led to changes such as a slight increase in the English language entry requirements. Later in the year, as fee increases for 2004 were planned, the university decided to “grandparent” the fees of existing students, so they could continue at the level that had existed at their time of enrolment (albeit inflated by the higher value of the dollar). The following year, a process of closer monitoring of academic progress, especially for first year students, was implemented to allow for intervention to assist those for whom the transition seemed overwhelming.

An important aspect of the government’s response was the mandatory application of the *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* (Ministry of Education, 2003), the original version of which was introduced in 2001. The government had been painfully reminded that in spite of the development of the current regime under a market-driven mantra, dissatisfaction among students (for example, the collapse of a number of English language centres leaving students out of pocket) left government-to-government relationships very vulnerable.

1.3. A human perspective

The process of internationalisation or globalisation of the university comes about through decisions made by governments and university governing bodies, and as a result of prevailing economic conditions; it is lived, though, by the students (local and international) and teachers who encounter each other in classroom relationships that are fundamentally affected by those decisions, and which evolve in ways that are new to all participants. It is lived, too, within the community, on campus and beyond, where understanding of it is coloured by the kind of media discussion recounted above, as well as by individual experiences. It is the nature of these encounters and experiences, what they meant to a group of Chinese international students studying business studies and information sciences and how they managed to negotiate personal understanding and perhaps academic success which is the focus of this study.

It should not be forgotten, though, that the people encountering each other in the classrooms and community in and around Rutherford University between 2003 and 2006 were *all* involved in a process of adjustment to a situation of which they had had scant previous experience, and inevitably the pages that follow will reflect their part in the process as well.

Chapter Two: Learning in complex situations

2.1. Introduction

This is a study that touches upon a wide range of human experience, and inevitably the research questions needed to take into account more than simply academic success. It was necessary to understand something of what the students brought from their prior experience, as well as the effects of the multiple engagements of the new experience. In developing my research questions, the work of earlier researchers in a range of fields has provided lenses which have proved invaluable. The literature cited here is necessarily selective, but I hope representative of those aspects which have greatest pertinence for my study.

This is above all a story of learning, but not everything that was learnt was in the curriculum of the courses the participants enrolled in. This chapter will begin with some ways of theorising learning and adjustment in complex situations. It will then move to a particular site of learning, the western university, looking first at the university's own goals for student learning before noting some general patterns of student engagement with it. The following chapter will move to a focus on the experience of non-traditional students themselves, finishing with a special focus on Chinese students.

2.2. Perspectives on learning

2.2.1. Sociocultural perspectives

There has been much interest in recent decades in models of learning that render prominent interpersonal activity in social contexts. Two of these have been particularly influential for considering the experiences of second language learners encountering target language communities, those arising from the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, and those considering entry into complex “communities of practice” associated with the work of Lave and Wenger (e.g. 1991). These are extensively described elsewhere and the account given here will be brief and focus on the aspects that have proved significant to the study.

2.2.1.1. A neo-Vygotskyan perspective

Lantolf (2002) succinctly sums up the essence thus: “the human mind is always and everywhere mediated primarily by linguistically based communication” (p. 104). Vygotsky saw learning as occurring on two planes. Initially it occurs through interaction between a learner and another person in possession of more expertise “through the mediating function of culturally constructed artefacts including tools, symbols, and more elaborate sign systems, such as language” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 6). Then, in a move from “other-regulation” to “self-regulation,” “once these processes are internalized, they become part of the [learner’s] independent developmental achievement” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). The area of activity immediately beyond what the learner can currently achieve unaided but in which new activity can be achieved with the aid of the more expert other is known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and the function of the expert in supporting the new activity has become known as “scaffolding,” and can take any of these forms:

1. *recruiting* interest in the task,
2. *simplifying* the task,
3. *maintaining* pursuit of the goal,
4. *marking* critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution,
5. *controlling* frustration during problem solving, and
6. *demonstrating* an idealized version of the act to be performed. (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, cited in Donato, 1994, p. 41, italics in the original)

Kinging (2002) makes the point, though, that this process is not to be seen as a matter of transmission from expert to novice, but that the dialectical process involved allows for new forms and meanings to emerge: it is “a process that inevitably leads to transformation of both the learner and the material” (p. 247).

More recently interest has turned, too, to the potential for peer mediation:

Working collaboratively, people are able to co-construct distributed expertise as a feature of the group; individual members are then able to exploit this expertise as an occasion for learning to happen. (Lantolf, 2002, p. 106)

For second language learners, this peer mediation often occurs in their first language (L1), allowing for deeper investigation of the task (p. 108).

Salient features of this model, then, are that learning is firmly embedded in a cultural and social context, and that learning advances when willing experts share expertise in a dialogic relationship with the novice and scaffold learning in steps that relate to their readiness to learn, their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.2.1.2. *Communities of practice*

The work of Lave and Wenger and others attempts to explain how newcomers are inducted into membership of complex organisations. They specifically exclude the “intentional instruction” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40) which might seem to be the business of a university, as a focus of their interest, but their work proves valuable in considering how learners appropriate the implicit learning practices that will allow them to operate within such an institution. The university can be seen as a community of practice (or, considering the boundaries between its units, such as schools and colleges, as a complex of communities of practice) since it displays “dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74), operating over a time span sufficient to allow participants to develop “shared histories of learning” (p. 86).

Acquiring the practices of a community occurs through a process of participation alongside old-timers who “open” the practice, a process that is not purely cerebral, but which “always involves the whole person, both acting and knowing at once” (Wenger, 1998, p. 47). More centralised participation leads to a sense of membership, and “involves the construction of identities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). It involves continual negotiation of the meaning inherent in practices, as a result of which both the community of practice and the newcomer are to some degree transformed: they are “mutually constitutive” (p. 117). Importantly, in the range of relationships available within a community, learning does not depend only on those with complete mastery, and “the importance of near-peers in the circulation of knowledgeable skills” is acknowledged (pp. 56-7). The extended temporal aspect of this process means that learning can be a protracted journey, and that ways of engaging with it include, as well as the current growing sense of membership, imagined future memberships and identities which can help maintain a sense of trajectory.

A key concept in this model is that of the *legitimacy* of peripheral practice, or “partial, increasing, changing participation within a community” (Lave & Wenger,

1991, p. 56). However, participation can be blocked, providing potential for the newcomer to be placed in a marginalised position instead:

As a place in which one moves toward more-intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering position. As a place in which one is kept from participating more fully – often legitimately, from the broader perspective of society at large – it is a disempowering position. (p. 36)

2.2.1.3. *Language identity, agency and investment*

Bringing these ideas more firmly into the arena of second language learners, Norton and Toohey (2002) trace influences on their theories of language from Bakhtin (e.g. 1981), Bourdieu (1978) and Kress (e.g. 1993), on their theories of learning from Vygotsky (1978) and Lave and Wenger (1991), and on their theories of the learner from the poststructuralist feminist, Weedon (1997). Language learning is seen as essentially involving a process of negotiating identities in new contexts of use, which provide or deny affordances for participation in language use, with participation seen as an essential process for the development of expertise in the second language (L2).

2.2.1.3.1. Identity

Norton (2000) describes identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). This understanding is developed in the face of “larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” and which impact on the relationship (p. 5). This is a view of identity which is not “static and one-dimensional but ... multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 116).

The role of language in the enactment of identities is highlighted:

it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to -- or is denied access to -- powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. (Norton, 2000, p. 5)

Toohey and Norton (2003) assert that “the conditions under which language learners speak are often highly challenging, engaging the learners’ identities in complex and often contradictory ways,” ways which bring questions of power into strong focus (p. 68).

Giddens' (1991) often quoted reference to "the reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (p. 5), brings together the dynamism which Norton emphasises with an underlying sense of connectedness. This sense can be undermined for L2 learners by the difficulty of presenting an identity which accords with that developed in L1 contexts: "As social actors in a new cultural and linguistic environment, language learners find themselves at a great disadvantage to construct a real self that approximates the ideal they uphold" (Pellegrino Aveni, 2004, p. 148). Thus, one of the authors of Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi (2002) finds an "English 'me'" that is "much quieter, more reserved, and less confident" (pp. 303-304), and Shen (1989), in an American academic setting, had to imagine himself "looking at a world with my head upside down," and "climbing out of one skin and into another" (pp. 461-2).

The concept of the *negotiation* of identities and the salience of *relationship* in Norton's description above emphasises that identity is anything but solipsistic. It is intensely susceptible to affordances offered or withheld by those with power in any context. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) put it, citing the Positioning theory of Davies and Harré (1990), the negotiation of identity amounts to "the interplay between reflective positioning, i.e. self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to position or reposition particular individuals or groups" (p. 20). Harklau (2000) uses the term *representations* to convey a similar perspective. She sees "the images, archetypes, or even stereotypes of identity with which students are labelled" as a heuristic "to hold a heterogeneous and ever-evolving social world still long enough to make sense of it" (p. 37), a tendency which does not take into account the evolving nature of identities.

Although positioning by others can exercise constraints on one's possibilities, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) make the important point that it is subject to contestation; it is through personal agency that such resistance can be exercised.

2.2.1.3.2. Agency

Agency is the quality that allows one to act on one's environment to further one's own cause. It is "never a 'property' of a particular individual; rather, it is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). Agency is an important concept in understanding the differentiated experiences of individual learners in similar

circumstances. For example, Eva and Julia, the main subjects in Toohey and Norton (2003), are able to overcome inequities in their respective contexts by setting up “counter-discourses in which their identities could be valued, thereby enhancing opportunities for shared conversation” (p. 68). Others are unable to do so (for example, a South Asian student in Julia’s class).

2.2.1.3.3. Investment

A related question is that of investment. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) metaphor of cultural capital, Norton Peirce (1995) looks at students’ investment in learning:

If learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital.

The notion of investment ... attempts to capture the relationship of the learner to the social world. (p. 17)

She finds this concept more useful than that of motivation to explain the contextualised variability in the choices language learners make about using their second language. She nevertheless uses it alongside the notion of motivation: "All the participants in the study were highly motivated to learn English" (p. 19). Whereas investment relates to “the ongoing production of a learner's social identity" (p. 20) in real-world situations of differential power, motivation seems to refer to a more abstract psychological state of desire that may be rendered inactive where those situations carry too great a threat to the presentation of self.

The exercise of agency is inevitably linked to the learner’s investment.

2.2.1.4. Entering new Discourses

Gee’s work has developed the concept of entering new communities as participation in social practice with particular focus on language issues. He talks of entering “‘big D’ Discourses”: “When ‘little d’ discourse (language-in-use) is melded integrally with non-language ‘stuff’ to enact specific identities and activities, then I say that ‘big D’ Discourses are involved” (2005, p. 7). These, he claims, involve:

(a) situated identities; (b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities; (c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times; (d) characteristics [sic] ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-

gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening
(and, in some Discourses, reading-and-writing, as well). (p. 33)

He has elsewhere, with greater linguistic economy, referred to this last item as “being-and-doing” an identity (e.g., 2004, p. 26). This view of language use is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s insight about the “power to impose reception” (1977, p. 648): “Practical mastery of grammar is nothing without mastery of the conditions for adequate use of the infinite possibilities offered by grammar” (p.646).

In applying the concept to educational institutions, Gee (2004) points out that some learners, whom he calls “false beginners,” arrive with previous experiences (such as home and prior education) that prepare them better for entering the Discourse of the new academic culture than others, the “authentic beginners.” False beginners are in a position to read the implicit messages of the new environment and adjust quickly to being-and-doing a good student. The unfortunate consequence is that the true beginners are seen as deficient in not being able to keep up with them, and the actual advances that they are making are often not recognised. What is more, “their induction often skips things that teachers assume they ‘should’ already know because, in fact, ‘false beginners’ already take these things for granted” (p. 14). Gee raises questions about the ability of authentic beginners to achieve full membership of such Discourses.

In terms of New Zealand universities, the prior experience of Chinese learners in different academic contexts can be supposed to place them very much in the role of authentic beginners, with language challenges going well beyond questions of vocabulary to understanding expectations of language *use* within the new environment.

2.3. Perspectives on western higher education

If communities of practice and those who enter into them are mutually constitutive, then understanding the nature of the experience of the participants in my study necessarily involves some examination of the culture they were entering. One of the manifestations of a community of practice is a movement from negotiation of meanings to the reification of meanings that have been negotiated and agreed upon into “fixed formulae” (Wenger, 1998, p. 60) which are the tips of the iceberg indicating “larger contexts of significance realized in human practices” (p. 61). This section examines some of the reifications established in higher education which seek to prescribe the

trajectory of those who enter it, with an initial look at points of tension that these can create with newcomers who are authentic beginners.

2.3.1. Core values

It is a theme of the literature that many of the most challenging requirements of higher education, even those which seem to have the status of core values, are rarely made explicit but firmly underpin its relations with its increasingly diverse student body. Nevertheless, explicit statements of the role of the university can be found.

My first example is from a textbook written for business students and widely used by those at Rutherford University (Emerson, 2005). In his contribution, Rudzki (2005) calls on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956) to describe the nature of learning at the university. At the highest end of the learning scale analysis, synthesis and evaluation are to be found. The following explanation is given:

Evaluation is the final stage in that not only can you apply your knowledge in new ways, but you can also evaluate it (criticise it), find out what its strengths and weaknesses are and make suggestions as to improvements. In other words, you are able to make informed judgements (based on your analysis and synthesis) as to how good (or bad) something is. (p. 13)

Individuals who progress through the six stages will be able to identify and solve problems. "Furthermore, such individuals are able to create new knowledge through research and new approaches through innovations" (Rudzki, 2005, p. 13).

My second example is directed not to students, but to their teachers, but reiterates the point. Nightingale and O'Neill (1994) align with Barnett (1992) in asserting that the 'bottom line' of university education is "fostering high order intellectual capacities in students" which means being "able to form and substantiate independent thought and action in a coherent and articulate fashion" (Barnett, cited in Nightingale & O'Neill, p. 8). It is further operationalised by the authors as a transformative process resulting in "autonomous, critical, reflective and articulate students" who are empowered and enhanced to a degree that allows them to critique their experience and themselves (p. 10).

The thrust of the chapter from which these quotations are taken is that these values are under assault from the introduction of a business model, and the inevitable change arising out of diversification of the student body. Concurrent with the recruitment of large numbers of international students has been greater access across the western world

for domestic students who are not part of the intellectual (and generally socio-economic) elite who had been its traditional students. Nightingale and O'Neill make an impassioned plea for the bottom line to remain in spite of inevitable change:

Regardless of the many variations possible within the diverse systems of higher education developing throughout the world, there is one overarching purpose that all share – fostering higher order intellectual capabilities in their students no matter who they are and at what stage of their studies. (p. 11)

The notion expressed, then, is that diversification is not in itself antithetical to those who fiercely guard what John Henry Newman in the nineteenth century wrote of as “the idea of a university” (1854/1976), but that there exist core values which can be assailed only at the cost of desecrating that idea. We can see the same concern in a great deal of writing about higher education, for example, McInnis (2001):

Meeting diverse needs will accelerate the changes already underway to enhance teaching and learning in universities but there are considerable obstacles in the way of major changes to curriculum design and delivery, including the underlying tensions inherent in the core values of academics. (p. 113)

Indeed, some assert that this desecration is already occurring, and the claims of “dumbing down” that were being voiced in the New Zealand media as international student numbers surged find echoes in more scholarly texts:

it is now notorious common knowledge (though seldom admitted openly) that academically inadequate students, especially those who pay fees, are too often graded above their merits, and that those who fail such students will be subject to disapproval from above and below. (Coady, 2000, p. xii)

2.3.2. Core values as ends *and* means

Complications lurk within Nightingale and O'Neill's (1994) statement of purpose above, two of which are particularly germane to this discussion. The first is in the assertion that there is a shared purpose of “fostering higher order intellectual capabilities in their students no matter who they are and at what stage of their studies” (p. 11). The desired qualities are not simply an end goal for graduates, but are the means by which that end is to be attained. Nichols (2003) makes this point with reference to critical thinking:

Critical thinking occupies an interesting position in current discussions about diversity. It is discussed both as an outcome of a university education and as an essential pre-requisite for success. (p. 140)

The other complication is the phrase, “the diverse systems of higher education developing throughout the world.” The assumption that these are goals that are universally seen as appropriate (both as end and means) is widely questioned in the literature. For example, Haggis (2006), discussing similar values, says:

Though embedded within many research accounts as an obvious good, these ideas are not neutral ‘truths’ about learning, and their use in educational theory has generated an enormous amount of debate in other arenas (e.g. Brookfield, 1993). As statements of value, however, such ideas reveal much about what is encouraged and rewarded in higher education. (p. 524)

It would be valuable at this point to look at the aim of producing “autonomous, critical, reflective and articulate students” in the light of such comments, by locating accounts of each concept from the literature, and considering its universality. The aim in doing so is to ponder the likely readiness of students entering higher education via non-traditional routes to wield such tools in a manner seen as appropriate by their teachers. I have conflated two of the adjectives, critical and reflective, into one notion, *critical thinking*. The issue at hand is not in distinguishing these two types of cognitive activity from each other, but in examining whether they represent a universally accepted means towards the end of undergraduate study as Nightingale and O’Neill (1994), and others, assume that they do.

2.3.2.1. *Autonomy*

Autonomy is widely seen as a major intended outcome of western higher education (e.g., Boud, 1988; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Haggis, 2006). Beyond that, though, it is also aspired to as a method by which to engage in the educative process:

it cannot be denied that some of the attributes of the autonomous learner are required by anyone if they are to be effective learners in higher education, or indeed anywhere else. (Boud, p. 21)

Obviously, the goal of most learning is that students should be able to use it when no longer supported by their teachers (Littlewood, 1999). But the claims laid for autonomy are often grander than that. Pennycook (1997), for example, borrowing words from Young (1986), describes it as being author of one’s own world, and Fazey and

Fazey (2001) talk of acting “within a personal belief system” (p. 346). Gibbs (1979 cited in Boud, 1988) sees it as having both internal and external aspects:

an autonomous individual must have both independence from external authority and mastery of himself and his powers. He must be free from the dictates and interference of other people, and free also from disabling conflicts or lack of coordination between the elements of his own personality. (p. 18)

Autonomous people are, according to Fazey and Fazey (2001, p. 345), “intrinsically motivated, perceive themselves to be in control of their decision-making, take responsibility for outcomes of their actions and have confidence in themselves.” Littlewood (1997, p. 82) adds the important point that there are dual aspects: *willingness*, arising from motivation and confidence, plus *ability*, arising from knowledge and skills. The picture thus painted is of an independent learner confident that his or her individual activity will be accepted and applauded within the learning context.

Higgs (1988) makes the point, though, that the choice involved in decision-making might lead the learner to less independent modes of working. He concludes the activity of autonomous learners “is best thought of as the pursuit of whatever learning activities the learners consider would best help them to achieve their learning goals” including “‘passive’ seeming roles such as listening to lectures” (p. 48).

Examining this wider view of what autonomy might mean, Littlewood (1999) describes two kinds of autonomy, *proactive*, where the student takes charge, determines objectives, sets aspects of the learning agenda and affirms their individuality, but also *reactive*, which, “once a direction has been initiated [perhaps by a teacher], enables learners to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal” (pp. 75-76). They might, for example, work through exam papers on their own, or set up a study group. He sees this as potentially a first step towards proactive autonomy, but also a goal on its own. He also discusses the idea of “autonomous interdependence” in which autonomy might be expressed in response to a human need of “relatedness” by working with a group independently of a teacher (p. 74, citing Ryan, 1991).

Hand (2006), in an article entitled ‘Against autonomy as an educational aim,’ in fact suggests that such a concept of autonomy is far more rational than one that stresses independence of action, pointing out that “if autonomy is scepticism about information supplied by others, it must be rejected as an educational aim” (p. 545), and that the goal should rather be to produce “rational, well-balanced people willing and able to exercise

independent judgment, rely on expert advice or submit to legitimate authority as the occasion demands” (p. 539).

Whether autonomy is to be seen as a universally accepted value, then, might depend on whether we embrace the fierce independence of Gibbs’ (1979) definition, or recognise other forms that it might take, especially those from different academic traditions. Holliday (2003) suggests that this is unlikely: “Students are considered autonomous when they behave in ways which conform to an image of the ‘native speaker’ and his/her culture” (p. 115). Within an investigation such as this one, however, a more nuanced understanding of autonomy than that provided by Gibbs promises recognition of subtle achievements.

2.3.2.2. *Critical thinking*

Smith (1990) claims that concern with critical thinking in education “has reached almost obsessive proportions” (p. 82), and Curzon-Hobson (2003), that it is signalled in university charters worldwide (p. 201). He describes the notion thus:

The critical stance is characterised by a willingness to challenge, recreate and reimagine in a manner that is searching, persistent and resolute. (p. 202)

His further discussion of the concept draws a clear link with relativism, another value that emerges in the literature about epistemology in the university and in students’ understanding:

The critical stance is underpinned by a perception of reality which considers our relationships within the world incomplete, becoming, and ultimately, beyond human reason’s ability to objectify. (p. 202)

Smith (1990) sees three conditions which allow for critical thinking to occur: adequate knowledge of the subject in question, a disposition to question the propositions made and the authority allowed to express this questioning. The essential requirement of adequate knowledge, he suggests, prevents it from being a universally transferable quality or “a unique psychological process” which can be taught (p. 100).

There is evidence in the literature that the criteria for adequacy of knowledge for critiquing are set much higher in eastern educational traditions, in which, therefore, the disposition to question is not encouraged and the authority to express such questions not experienced until a far more advanced achievement than undergraduate study (see

3.1.4.1). Even within the western academy, the notion is complicated by implicit limitations on the practice. Laurillard (2002) points out that

Although we often argue that in university education students should develop their own point of view within a subject, not accept spoon-feeding, and be critical, we nonetheless expect right answers. (p.2)

Like autonomy, Atkinson (1997) suggests, the concept of critical thinking as generally conceived in writing about higher education sits more readily with a culture that values the individual highly, as it “presupposes that individual conflict and dissensus are a social reality, if not a tool for achieving socially desirable ends” (p. 80), than one which places higher value on the maintenance of collective harmony. If this value, too, is not quite so universal as Nightingale and O’Neill (1994) imply, yet strongly characteristic of the western academy, the understandings and attainments of study participants in relation to it form a valuable focus for study.

2.3.2.3. *Articulateness*

Haggis (2006) asserts that in many disciplines there is a belief in the value of challenging students in order to develop their critical awareness, and that major ways of providing that challenge are through verbal engagement in seminars and “the creation of an academic essay” (p. 524). Advances in verbal competence are an important measure of university influence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 65).

Once again, the question at issue here is whether this is a neutral truth or a cultural construct. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) support the latter, suggesting that a lack of verbal participation in classroom discussion should not be taken as a sign of mental passivity. Nor is it just those whose early acculturation was geographically distant who may dispute verbal participation in class as an undisputed good. Pavlenko (2004) attributes to feminist poststructuralist theorists a questioning of “the privilege given to talk versus silence and to the public use of language versus private reflection” (p. 55). In spite of such protests, though, the students in this study would be subject to a regime in which this privilege does prevail, and their success would often depend on their ability to articulate their learning in a particularly heightened form of their second language, academic English. This would inevitably be another important focus.

2.3.2.4. Intertwined ideas

Of course, the separation effected here is artificial. These three notions are firmly intertwined. For example, Smith (1990) associates critical thinking and articulateness: “an unheard (or unread) critical thinker is practically a contradiction in terms” (p. 106).

Curzon-Hobson shows its links with autonomy:

This [critical] stance towards our experiences is underpinned by a recognition of one’s freedom to choose, the responsibility that comes with this projection, a rejection of unreflective acceptance of value and meaning, and a celebration of self-will and the will of others. (2003, p. 202)

The three notions come together in the concept of “voice” in academic discourse which will be discussed further.

I will also return later to the consequences of the unfounded assumptions of universality which have been unfolded here. At this point, I would like to foreshadow that discussion by establishing that the issue is not the appropriateness of such qualities as ultimate goals of higher education, but the expectation that they should be immediately available as tools of learning. As Haggis (2006) suggests, reframing induction into the ways of the university to take account of this

does not necessarily imply the need to abandon, or even necessarily to adjust, conventional expectations about independent thought and autonomous study. It may, however, imply a need to work differently with students, at least in the early stages of their study ... in order for them to learn what these expectations entail. (pp. 530-531)

2.4. The student experience in higher education

Although in the next chapter I will take a more emic view of the student experience, I would like here to refer to work which has sought to identify general patterns, which provides a useful background to the experiences of the participants in the study.

2.4.1. The First Year Experience

A point of particular interest in the study of students in higher education is their early experiences, in response to concerns about retention (e.g. McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000; Tinto, 1993). The initial encounter has been seen in terms of culture shock, or as “a combination of *desocialization* – pressures to unlearn certain attitudes, values,

beliefs, and behaviors, and *socialization* – pressures to learn new attitudes, values, and beliefs and participate in a new culture and social order” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p.62, citing Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Much of the research has been designed to investigate what can help students emerge from that process with their resolve to study intact and progressing. Tinto finds a strong correlation between student contact with teachers on learning matters, both in and out of class, and their persistence and enhanced learning. Rewarding social connections beyond that are also important:

In addition to the increasing range of support that individuals may experience while in college, membership in multiple communities allows individuals to play out a multiplicity of roles and satisfy a range of needs that no one community may be able to fulfil. (Tinto, p. 122)

Too high a focus on social relationships can, of course, be detrimental, as McInnis et al. (2000) indicate. However, almost 25% of the Australian students in their investigation had not made close personal friends during their first year (p. 36). Not unrelated to this factor is the evidence gathered by Pascarella and Terenzini that class-based interpersonal contact through teaching which involves students in cooperation, collaboration and small group interaction can increase cognitive skills and enhance learning.

Alongside these findings, which highlight the value of interaction, with staff, with other students and with social networks during the early period of study, is the disturbing finding that first year teaching is often structured “so as to discourage contact” (Tinto, 1993, p. 167). Gilbert, Chapman, Dietsche, Grayson, and Gardner (1997) found that first-year instruction was characterised by (among other things) lectures, large classes with inexperienced teachers, little personal feedback, infrequent writing, little opportunity for oral skill development, inadequate attention to development of critical thinking, and superficial introductory survey courses focusing on memorisation of rote facts (p. 6). Lea and Street (1998) point out that many courses nowadays move students through a number of different disciplines, thus delaying the chance for them to familiarise themselves with one discipline, its requirements or its teaching staff.

As a result of studies such as these, attention has been paid to enhancing the first year experience, and two of the works quoted in this section were commissioned precisely with that intention (Gilbert et al., 1997, in Canada and McInnis et al., 2000, in Australia). However, McInnis (1997) argues that such efforts should not dilute the

“serious learning challenges” that “most students need, enjoy, and indeed expect the university to provide them with,” and that “they expect and should not be shielded from, a reasonable level of anxiety and uncertainty.”

2.4.2. Theories and models of learning in higher education

Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) comprehensive survey of research into the impact of higher education on its students contains a range of research-based theories and models far beyond the scope of this review. Of interest, though, is the fact that they tend to indicate a developing alignment over the period of university study with the “idea” of the university as expressed in 2.3.1.

For example, Chickering's influential Seven Vectors of Student Development (Chickering & Reissner, 1993, cited in Pascarella and Terenzini, p. 20 ff) describes a spiralling process by which students gain more expertise in *achieving competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose* and *developing integrity*. Manifest in the accounts of a number of these vectors (for example, developing mature interpersonal relationships and developing integrity) is a growing independence of thought and acceptance of relativistic viewpoints. Perry's Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development (1970, cited in Pascarella and Terenzini, p. 34 ff) contains nine “positions” which can be placed in four clusters, *Dualism, Multiplicity, Relativism* and *Commitments in Relativism*. These models indicate, then, that for persisting students within the university in general there can be an expectation of at least some movement towards what Tinto (1993) calls *integration*, “the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in subgroups of it” (Pascarella & Terenzini, p. 54).

On the other hand, factors leading to a lack of persistence include a sense of “incongruence,” “a lack of institutional fit ... where individuals perceive themselves as being substantially at odds with the institution,” and also isolation (Tinto, p. 50). In some cases, a general sense of incongruence can be countered by pockets of social and intellectual fit: “Thus the notion of finding one's niche within the institution is a

requisite part of persistence in college” (p. 59). The parallels with Lave and Wenger’s notion of participation are clear.

One point to be made in seeking similar experiences among the participants in this study, though, is that these models emerge from studies of traditional-age undergraduates. By far the majority of participants in my study were over the age of 21 by the time they enrolled, and had lived away from home for at least a year. Other aspects of their difference from the bulk of the student body will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Non-traditional students in western universities

3.1. A focus on non-traditional learners

Having looked at general patterns of engagement with higher education derived from large scale, often quantitative, studies, I will now move into a closer focus on the lived experience of non-traditional students entering these new communities and learning new Discourses. I do not confine discussion to the experience of Chinese students, because there are other authentic beginners within the diversifying student body (for example, the ethnic minority L1 English-speaking mature women in Lillis, 2001), and their experiences share many commonalities. This section looks at salient issues identified by a range of researchers, supported by longitudinal studies which reveal L2 students in the process of grappling with them.

3.1.1. An institutional practice of mystery

Lillis (2001) describes the induction of students into the university as “an ideologically inscribed institutional practice of mystery” (p. 14), and as a process emanating from an elite system predicated on the expectation of “inducting small numbers of privileged students into the ways of the academy” (p. 54). Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999b) use the term “hidden pedagogy,” citing a number of authors who relate it to “the implicit, apparently non-directive nature of educational ways of acting and being that are covertly based on middle-class, mainstream social practices” (p. 64). That it is an “ideological” stand is backed by Ridley’s (2004) conclusion that, for some teachers in her study, “assignment titles are intended to pose a challenge and therefore may be deliberately opaque” (p.98). Lähteenoja and Pirttilä-Backman (2005) found that some teachers in their research believed strategies to ease students’ integration into first year study would interfere with the natural and appropriate attrition of the unsuitable.

Others attribute the implicit nature of induction not to ideology but to the fact that university teachers, educated themselves in just such an academic culture, take it for granted and do not think of making its elements explicit (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1997;

Littlewood, 1999). Haggis (2006) gives an example of what may thus be masked in relation to the demands of reading to write university assignments:

The valuing of independence, for example, may translate, for university teachers, into an assumption that students (who know that they are expected to read widely?) will make it their business to learn how to use the university library effectively; will succeed in selecting appropriate texts from the range on offer; will know that academic reading is strategic, and will be confident enough to skim over large chunks of irrelevant material; will succeed in making sense of the dense genres of much academic prose; and will feel confident enough in their interpretation of the assessment task to be able to work ideas gleaned from text into their own written answer to a question. (pp. 524-525)

Whether the lack of explicit induction arises from ideology, or from assumptions of shared understanding, entry into the university can be problematical. The next section will examine the specific nature of some of those difficulties in relation to the academic discourse students are expected to appropriate.

3.1.2. Entering academic discourse(s)

3.1.2.1. *Writing*

Writing is a key skill in the university, being the medium through which most evaluation of students is made. For L2 students, linguistic proficiency is an obvious issue. Weigle (2005), writing about expertise in L2 writing, suggests that there is a threshold level of proficiency below which existing L1 skills will not be available for transfer to facilitate “attempts to deal simultaneously with the multiple considerations of writing such as overall goals, audience, and genres” (p. 140). She suggests that a full understanding of the process needs to take into account “social perspectives” such as finding out what the requirements of a discourse are by such means as reading and writing its texts, and seeing what it considers important and what methods of enquiry stand. These aspects of writing have received wide attention in the literature on non-traditional students in the university because of the challenges they present, some of which will be enumerated below.

3.1.2.1.1. Academic literacies

Lea and Street (1998), in an article arising from an investigation of perceptions of writing held by staff and students in university courses across disciplines, suggest earlier perspectives on teaching writing, such as the skills approach, focusing on surface

features like grammar and spelling, and assuming a homogeneous style of writing which would serve in all academic situations, are inadequate. They found that requirements vary across disciplines, and even between teachers within a discipline. More appropriate is an *academic literacies* approach which recognises “literacies as social practices,” student writing at the level of “epistemology and identity,” institutions as “constituted in, and sites of, discourses and power,” and “student writing as being concerned with the process of meaning-making and contestation around meaning” (p. 159). The diversity they discovered “was at a more complex level than genre, such as the ‘essay’ or ‘report,’ but lay more deeply at the level of writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting” (p. 163).

Such an approach puts some responsibility for literacy education on teachers within the disciplines. Lea and Street (1998) found, however, that they rarely recognise these differences themselves, see their own writing practices as “commonsense,” and are categorical in insisting on their adoption. An example cited is the different views of the place of personal pronouns in academic writing. This situation is exacerbated for students by multi-discipline courses (such as the BBS, which has nine core courses).

Other studies echoing the diversity of requirements include Harwood and Hadley (2004), Kutz (2004), Lea and Stierer (2000) and Moore and Morton (2005).

3.1.2.1.2. Core values as applied to writing

Writing is a key site of the “mystery” discussed above. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) identify the failure to make explicit the notions of voice, critical thinking, peer review and ownership of texts, pointing out that they are “culturally specific norms of thought and expression which non-mainstream writers of English may have little social training in and thus real difficulty accessing” (p. 46). Making matters more complex are areas of apparent permissiveness which turn out to have significant limitations, bounded as they must be by what constitutes “knowing” within the discipline, (Lea & Street, 1998). One example is the invitation to creativity or originality which co-exists confusingly with instructions to adopt a specified style. Allison (2004) suggests that this can be an “illusory freedom” to those who “lack access to ... how to innovate acceptably in writing” (p. 195).

An aspect of writing that has been given wide attention in recent years, and in which international students have often been implicated, is that of plagiarism (e.g., Holmes, 2004; Le Ha, 2006; Liu, 2005; Sowden, 2005; Walker, 1998). It is a notion which seems

straightforward to western academics. However, a little investigation reveals not only that other cultures have different relationships with these factors (e.g., Handa & Power, 2005; Sowden; Le Ha), but that the western concept of ownership and plagiarism is fraught with inconsistencies and that textual borrowing is a widespread norm. One of the ways that academic writers demonstrate their central participation within a discourse is by drawing on “the repertoire of voices they have encountered in their experience of participating in genres and discourses” and by uniquely recombining “a selection of the resources at their disposal for the purposes of the writing task at hand” (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 6). Pennycook (1996) discusses lucidly the resultant confusions: undergraduate students,

while constantly being told to be original and critical, and to write things in their ‘own words,’ are nevertheless only too aware that they are at the same time required to acquire a fixed canon of knowledge and a fixed canon of terminology to go with it. (p. 213)

Under such circumstances, the “moral outrage” (p. 204) shown by many academics at apparent plagiarism seems often to have dubious justification, and Pennycook suggests a more defensible stance would be distinguishing between instances of good and bad plagiarism, “between those who reused parts of texts very well and those who seemed to randomly borrow” (p. 226), thus adopting a flexible response to the question he poses, “on what grounds do we see certain acts of textual borrowing as acceptable and others as unacceptable?” (p. 202). A cause of the difficulty is the dependence that students new to a discipline inevitably have on authoritative sources, as Lea and Street (1998) found. The UK students they spoke to felt “that they as students had little useful to say” from their own understanding (p. 167).

Lea and Street note that although plagiarism is one of the few aspects of academic writing overtly addressed in course instructions, it is generally addressed in very legalistic terms, rather than by trying to unpack the underpinning philosophy. This is often, too, the focus of writing teachers, rather than questions of how to assess knowledge and decide what to incorporate (Wingate, 2006, p. 463).

3.1.2.1.3. Voice in academic writing

While we might see the question of plagiarism as one of voices in one’s writing, an important issue in discussion of writing is that of “voice” in the singular, the sense of some kind of personal presence in a text.

Ivanič and Camps (2001) look at two potential meanings encompassed by the term “voice.” The first of these is voice as *self-representation*, which they see as inevitable in any text, as it is created by the choices that writers make at the level of elements of syntax, lexis, and so on, which result in writing that represents them as adopting some sort of stance. As Bakhtin (1986, p. 124) says, “there are no voiceless words that belong to no one.” There are social constraints in the choices open to students: “the version of self that will be rewarded may be determined by the tutor who will be assessing the work” (Ivanič & Camps, p. 6). However, most writers in the critical academic literacies tradition advocate introducing students to an awareness of the choices that they have in constructing this voice and of the voice they construct through their choices (e.g., Baynham, 2000; Benesch, 1999). Many, though, share Gee’s (2004) view that there is a greater possibility of transforming discourses from a position of central participation. For example, Harwood and Hadley (2004) advocate Critical Pragmatic EAP, acknowledging the importance of exposure to dominant norms, but stressing “that students have choices and should be free to adopt or subvert the dominant practices as they wish” (p. 357).

The other meaning of voice Ivanič and Camps (2001) discuss is *voice as having something to say*. This is a more specific presence, that of “the writer’s own views, authoritativeness, and authorial presence” (p. 7) within the text. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) claim that a common expression of this meaning aligns it with a “neo-romantic” movement in education” associated with teaching which seeks to “allow for the full expression and further development of ... individuality” (p. 49). This movement, Atkinson (2001) suggests, is driven by a cultural view of individualism to which students educated thus far in a culture which values interdependence have limited access. On the other hand, a milder version of the same sense is the requirement for developing a position, and this one Lea and Street (1998) found to be a requirement across disciplines.

One way in which students might seek to develop a position is by calling on their own experience and that proves to be another area of confusingly curtailed permission and difficulty within writing. Students need to learn to move beyond personal opinion and autobiographical experience to “redefine everyday experience by creating a frame drawn from the concepts and ideas they have learnt in the course” (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000, p. 168). Once again, this is rarely made explicit (Creme, 2000).

The two senses of voice examined here have clear links to the notions of agency and autonomy. That agency is, of course, constrained by what one's role allows one to say or do (Johns, 2005).

3.1.2.1.4. Inventing the university

Bartholomae's (1985) cogent phrase reminds us that voice always assumes an addressee:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion -- invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (p. 134)

The choice of verb is significant. The university is not a fixed entity waiting to be *discovered*. An inventor is a person with imagination who builds on existing knowledge to find new ways of doing things in the world, which will inevitably alter existing situations in some way. This is the mutually constitutive process that Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to. Of course, inventions can fail if they are based on false premises. Bartholomae points out that being able to accommodate readers' expectations involves "a writer who can both imagine and write from a position of privilege ... She must be either equal to or more powerful than those she would address" (p. 139). She must, in other words, have a sense of legitimacy. This proves a powerful image not just in terms of students in the act of writing, but in all their dealings with the university.

One reason for the need to 'invent' the university is the lack of overt induction to it, as we have seen. Many writers in this field advocate what Maybin (1994 cited in Lillis, 2001, p. 10), refers to as "long conversations," multiple opportunities for engagement in discourse (spoken or written) allowing teachers to develop awareness of the students' present state of understanding and to provide feedback helping to align them with the discourse of the discipline in question. Laurillard (2002) sees teachers' access and response to knowledge of how their students conceptualise their subject as an essential ingredient of university teaching. This does not need to be a one-to-one process. The reframing Haggis (2006) refers to in 2.3.6 is a "*collective inquiry into the nature of specific disciplines*" (p. 531, italics in the original), in-class sessions where the teacher's leading questions and guidance, eliciting student discussion, reveal how enquiry is done in the discipline. University teachers' accounts in Zamel and Spack (2004) of their

growing expertise as mediators of international students' learning in their courses (e.g., Alster, 2004; Fishman & McCarthy, 2004; Sieber, 2004; Srikanth, 2004) reveal how creating such opportunities allows both teacher and learner to respond appropriately to new dimensions of the learning situation for the benefit of all. It is unfortunate, then, that the first year experience is unlikely to provide such conversations (see 2.4.1).

3.1.2.1.5. Developing writing strategies

Nevertheless, longitudinal studies do reveal that highly motivated international students can find personal resources to compensate to some degree. In her study of five postgraduate and undergraduate students which focuses on writing, Leki (e.g., 1995) recounts their experience grappling with the challenges of writing over the period of their first semester. They encountered many of the difficulties signalled above (such as the challenge of critical analysis and finding an appropriate voice), but used a range of strategies to overcome them which Leki collected into ten categories. Some of these, such as clarifying and focusing strategies, were from repertoires they brought from previous educational experience, but others were developed in response to the current context, such as accommodating or resisting teachers' demands.

Evident, though not highlighted in the article, are issues of agency (choosing to resist teacher's demands in cases where they seemed to impose too great a burden on the writer, for example), identity, participation and membership. One of the students successfully used her identity as "other" by using Taiwanese examples as major elements in her writing, even when asked by a teacher not to, rendering her point of difference cultural capital. Another, having struggled unsuccessfully to imagine and accommodate her teacher's demands, lamented that she was clearly an "outsider" (p. 245). Although at times they struggled and were disappointed with results, Leki recognises their agency: "the students in this study nevertheless did successfully ferret out their own pathway toward completion of their work" (pp. 254-255).

3.1.2.2. Reading

Reading is a major source of input for students largely excluded, at least in early stages, from the dense but ephemeral oral language of lectures. Once again, the level of proficiency in English, and in particular, knowledge of vocabulary, is the starting point. Nation (2001, p. 147) calculates that at least 95% of lexical tokens within a text need to be understood to allow readers "a standard of minimally acceptable comprehension." In

academic texts, around 20% of the words in the text can be expected to be beyond the 2,000 most frequently used words in English (Coxhead, 2000, p. 224).

Macaro (2003) finds an interactive model of reading involving a balance between top-down and bottom-up processes, amounting to a co-construction of meaning between the writer's text and the reader's interpretation, as the most powerful explanation of how readers access meaning (p. 120). However, where there is serious disparity between the reader's vocabulary and that used in the text, the reader is likely to fall back on over-reliance on one of those processes. Thus, an over-concentration on decoding each word (bottom-up) leads to surface-level reading and perhaps a loss of coherence, while over-use of top-down processes leads to "wild guesses" at meaning (p. 131). He cites Kern (1994) in underlining the value of mental translation for reducing the cognitive load for difficult texts (p. 143).

A more sociocultural framework sees reading "contextually influenced, with the ability to make meaning from text linked to variables such as what we are reading (content), what kind of text (genre), in what context and with what purpose?" (Wallace, 2005, p. 94). Freebody and Luke (2003) identify four 'roles' which are needed to allow for a "broad and flexible repertoire of practices" constituting "effective literacy":

Breaking the code of texts

Participating in the meaning of texts

Using texts functionally

Critically analysing and transforming texts. (p. 56-7)

3.1.2.2.1. Becoming an effective university reader

Spack (1997) provides a longitudinal account of a Japanese undergraduate student, Yuko, struggling and finally succeeding with the demands of literacy over three years of university study. Although Spack makes the point that her growth as a reader and writer are intertwined, I will here summarise her development as a reader, relating it to the above four roles.

Yuko, had a very high Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score, and her difficulty was not primarily with the mechanics of reading (breaking the code), but the demanding vocabulary level of her university texts combined with her lack of prior knowledge of their topics (such as U.S. history) made it very difficult initially to participate in the meaning of texts. A bottom-up process including extensive dictionary

consultation failed to elucidate them sufficiently and their impenetrability was a major cause of Yuko failing to complete two courses in her first year.

She was also excluded from using texts functionally in a way that allowed her to feel competent and successful as a student. For example, she was dissatisfied with a test grade which she attributed to the fact that she had done her reading too far in advance and had not assumed that questions would refer to material from the readings not covered in the lectures. No guidance to clarify this had been provided by the teacher.

Yuko's expertise increased as she developed strategies that allowed for more fluent reading and an active participation in the meaning of texts, transferring strategies she had acquired from reading fiction. She read for gist first without using a dictionary and then re-read, if she had time, for greater detail. Where the level of the course texts did challenge her, she skipped passages she could not understand, but picked up her reading again beyond them rather than giving up. Her strategies were functional and flexible, responding to different purposes, and included choosing not to read some texts she deemed unnecessary. Reading for a later test saw her adapting her reading to allow for retention, reading slowly and carefully, "Not memorizing ... understanding (pause) so you won't forget" (p. 28). The final role, critically analysing, took her the longest to achieve, and involved re-configuring her interpretation of it from being an expression of personal opinion to analysing the writer's stance and being selective.

By the end of three years, then, Yuko found herself no longer afraid of reading and able to assume all four of Freebody and Luke's (2003) roles. This was due in no small degree to her own determination, but was facilitated by teachers who provided guidance, for example by making the readings accessible through their talk.

3.1.2.3. *Listening to lectures*

Lectures remain the "central ritual" (Benson, 1994, cited in Carkin, 2005) of the university, in spite of research cited in Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) which suggests they are

not a particularly effective approach for exploiting the potential efficacy of the learning that occurs when students are actively engaged in processing information in new and personally relevant ways and, in a very real sense, 'constructing' their own knowledge. (p. 101)

They are, of course, particularly problematic to L2 speakers, and limited levels of proficiency impose greater barriers on accessing meaning from oral language than from written (Macaro, 2003, p. 155). In particular, Macaro reports a strong correlation between apprehension and lower listening proficiency (p. 158), and between knowing the purpose for listening beforehand and increased success, as a result of awareness of context enabling the listeners to make predictions and to use their world knowledge to infer meaning. Prior knowledge, especially when it has been newly alerted, thus facilitates the process of learning from lectures. Gaps between the understanding international students share with their local counterparts and the pool of knowledge called on by lecturers leaves them lacking “sufficiently consonant cultural background to be able to make an informed guess” at meanings (Haggis, 2004, p. 43), a point also made by Walker (1995) in his study of international students in a New Zealand university, who told him they lacked “background knowledge of politics, law, finance and everyday New Zealand concepts” (p. 52). While the effects of this lack can be felt in various practices in the university, the real-time processing required in listening to lectures make it particularly cogent.

3.1.2.4. Speaking

This is an aspect of academic discourse that has attracted less attention:

Although there have been numerous studies of academic and professional genres, the ESP⁵ gaze has been focused more often on written than spoken genres and on products rather than processes. (Belcher, 2006, p. 149)

There have, however, been valuable recent studies focusing on the processes by which students engage with speaking in academic settings which suggest that situation might be changing.

An approach that looks beyond language proficiency is called for again. In fact, particularly so for speaking. In the absence of easy contact between local and international students (see 3.2), opportunities for speaking in the context of university roles become an important source of encounters that give access to the intercultural understanding and practice of oral skills which L2 speakers often value highly. Leki (2006) talks of *socioacademic relations*, “those relationships, often friendly, that students develop with people through their academic interactions in shared classes but that do

⁵ English for specific purposes

not turn into out-of-school friendships” (p. 139). These include relations with both peers and teachers, and it may be here that international students have the greatest sense of having studied abroad and that the university can gain the benefit of diversity. They are not, however, unproblematic.

This section will examine a range of opportunities for such encounters, recognising them as sites of what Miller (2003) calls the struggle to make oneself “audible,” both literally and metaphorically.

3.1.2.4.1. Verbal participation in class

The area which has attracted most attention has been international students’ typical reticence in asking questions in class or participating in discussion. In their investigation of students at a New Zealand university, Lewis and Gravatt (1999) found that the reasons identified most often fell into the categories of language (limitations in understanding and speaking), and social and contextual factors (including perceived racism and different norms of group communication). They identified affective factors (such as shyness) as a third category. Holmes (2006) looked at these relations in a New Zealand university business school from an intercultural communication competence viewpoint, examining the meanings that Chinese students accorded to encounters that were often not easy. She found that values she attributed to Confucian heritage, such as a desire to save face and maintain harmony, influenced participants’ decisions to retreat from some situations, choosing not to expose their limited English or not to challenge incidents where their contributions were ignored or they were treated without respect. On the other hand, at least one student renegotiated his ideas about relational harmony and “engage[d] in boundary crossing” (p. 29), entering and enjoying the exchange of different viewpoints.

Morita (2004) carried out a year-long ethnographic investigation of six female postgraduate Japanese students in their first year in a Canadian university, and gave particular attention to the personal meanings they attributed to both their talk and their silence in classes, pointing out that it was not simply a matter of language skills, “but involve[d] a complex process of negotiating identities, cultures, or power relations” (pp. 574-5). The degree of participation was strongly influenced by the context created within each class. Where a sense of competence was available, some of the students took active steps to overcome their own silence, self-managing their participation by various means including rehearsing contributions in advance or choosing to speak in

less daunting forums such as small groups. In one case, an instructor's acceptance of quietness as a legitimate expression of cultural norms allowed the student to revise her sense of marginalisation and weakness within the class. In other cases, students felt disempowered by the difficulties that they had in overcoming silence and the unwillingness of instructors to support them in doing so. Positions of resistance were still available to them, though, including assuming an internal identity as someone with the potential to improve, or choosing to withdraw from further attempts to speak.

These attempts at resistance, whether overt or covert, did not seem to change the ways that the students were treated in the classroom; nevertheless, they reflected the students' ongoing struggles to negotiate their multiple identities and to take control of their academic life. (p. 591)

What Morita's study demonstrates is that assuming reticence to represent merely a cultural norm covers a multitude of individualities responding to a range of different contexts, and the fact that silence should not be assumed to represent inaction: the students "were in fact engaged with many cognitive, affective, and social activities" (p. 596).

3.1.2.4.2. Group projects

One forum in which there has been special interest is in the group projects which are required in many higher education classes, in particular in business studies. The groups operate autonomously in a goal-oriented fashion and potentially provide opportunities for international and local students to enrich each other's understanding. The literature highlights areas of difficulty.

One of these is the reluctance of both local and international students to form mixed groups, which could arise from issues of perceived power differential (Holmes, 2000), a mutual distrust of the other group's ability to contribute equally to the process (Leki, 2001; Salili, 1996) and/or issues of cultural comfort (Volet & Ang, 1998). Another is approaches to working in groups that have evolved through different academic cultures. Volet and Ang, and Holmes suggest that Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) students see groups as an interdependent network consulting on decisions, whereas Australian and New Zealand students operate on a division-of-labour principle with each student working alone on a component of the task.

Studies looking at the results of mixed group work do not support the assumptions that the benefits of internationalisation will occur by osmosis. Wright and Lander (2003) found that no attempt was made to negotiate an agreed process of group work,

and that there was a reduction in verbal interaction for both Australian and South East Asian students when they worked together. Volet and Ang (1998) found that the experience resulted in participants overcoming their fear of working together, but nevertheless maintaining their preference for mono-ethnic groups.

Leki (2001) looks closely at the experiences of two non-native English-speaking students in terms of relationships with other members of their groups. She uncovered evidence of an assumption on the part of the local students that international students could not make a significant contribution to the project, which manifested itself by discounting or ignoring their efforts to offer ideas, and assigning them tasks which were not concomitant with the two students' circumstances, in one case, a task entirely outside her limited experience of U.S. society, and in the other, tasks that were utterly menial in spite of this student's reserves of knowledge. Even where relations were friendly, they were not equal, with local students positioning the others as "novices, incompetents or apprentices" (p. 60). The course teachers' belief in the value of group projects for fostering autonomy left them unaware of the processes involved, including one case where the task had been completed with absolutely no discussion, nor even with the individual members reading each other's contributions. Both focal students considered the future possibility of group projects with dread.

3.1.2.4.3. Socioacademic relations with staff

Tinto (1993) attests to the importance of contact with academic staff, as we have already seen (2.4.1). Leki (2006) looks at this contact in relation to four L2 undergraduate students. She found that response from staff was varied, some being willing to accommodate to L2 students' situation and others not. She found that the students sought various active means

to re-structure the contexts in which they interacted with faculty, to manage the socioacademic relationships they participated in, and to develop subject positions for themselves that they felt comfortable occupying given the constraints of their various communities of practice. (p. 147)

The means used included trying to understand and respond to the teachers' personalities and the purposes of the assignments they required, adding personal notes to the assignments handed in, and making out-of-class visits to teachers, purportedly to ask study-related questions, but possibly with another, even more important, purpose, that of "being seen as a particular type of person, perhaps even simply of being seen at all" (p. 138). One of the students specified the importance to him of being personally

memorable to his teachers “because he felt, almost certainly correctly, that more attention typically got him more sympathy” (p. 145). In achieving this, none of the four focal students passively accommodated themselves to the interaction offered by staff but sought to structure it to achieve their own ends, for example, reflecting on an unsatisfactory visit, and returning with an adjusted request. Leki feels that,

given their potential importance to understanding the academic lives of L2 undergraduates, the more specific, and more human, reactions of L2 students and faculty to each other have been notably understudied. (p. 137)

3.1.3. The English language

The four previous sections have looked at various issues concerned with English as a medium for learning in specific contexts and as a mediator of identity as competent (or incompetent) university student. In this section, I will examine some general aspects of the influence of English on the experience.

3.1.3.1. *Issues around English proficiency*

3.1.3.1.1. Entry level

Various studies have looked at the predictive value of English at enrolment (e.g. Bellingham, 1995, IELTS; Loewen & Ellis, 2004, vocabulary; Woodrow, 2006, IELTS). A theme of their findings is that there appears to be a threshold level below which language proficiency can be a very limiting factor, but over which other factors come into play. Their evidence would suggest that this threshold level might be around IELTS 6 (e.g. Blue, 1993, cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 87). Beyond this level, as Hirsh (2005) says, many international students “are accessing and benefiting from academic and language support and are performing well academically.”

3.1.3.1.2. Language choice

A specific area where a threshold level appears to operate is in the extent to which L2 can be used for complex cognitive operations such as tertiary study implies. Guerrero’s (2005) book-length treatment of thinking in L2 builds up a picture of limited cognitive processing resources which can dictate the availability of L2 as a medium for thinking. Of significance here are the findings that:

- use of L1 can be “a critical mediating cognitive tool” to support complex L2 tasks (p. 85)
- code choice might be dictated by the language in which the domain of the task was learned (p. 62 citing Cohen, 1996)
- even at high levels of achievement, there “remains a dynamic relationship between the use of the two languages at inner speech level” (p. 174).

Thus it can be expected that, although L2 students are studying “in English,” there will be a continuing reliance on L1 to support that process.

3.1.3.1.3. Sociocultural effects

The English limitations of international students have been seen to affect relations with local students. For example, resentment on the part of locals about pressure on teaching resources has been signalled in 1.2.4 and is reiterated in Ward (2001). Effects on interpersonal contact with locals will be discussed in 3.2. In terms of relations with teachers, Harklau’s (2000) finding that some teachers

cast these students’ ability to communicate in two languages not as a special talent or strength but rather as a disability, emphasizing what ... students could not do relative to monolingual, standard English speakers (p. 50)

would not appear to be confined to the high school teachers of her study. The focus is generally on students’ difficulties rather than on abilities.

3.1.3.1.4. Contextualised communicative competence

Miller (2003), in her investigation of L2 students entering Australian high schools, found “a complex combination of both linguistic and social factors,” and that linguistic factors were germane to “access to interactions with English speakers and what I have termed audibility” (p. 172). She enumerates some of the linguistic features of speech that mark out the more proficient speakers in her study, and that are both indicative and predictive of greater contact:

- a) use of extended or elaborated discourse;
- b) use of generalisations in English;
- c) point-making, using examples;
- d) use of markers of casual discourse, including the adolescent ‘like’;
- e) reflection on metalinguistic issues and language learning processes;
- f) use of expressions found in the talk of others;
- g) use of humour. (p. 56 ff.)

3.1.3.1.5. Operating above the threshold

It is important to remember that the experience of international L2-speaking students in university is coloured by a multitude of elements, and the English language is just one of these. At IELTS 6, students may still sometimes feel, as Cammish (1997) puts it, “as though one is ‘seeing through a glass darkly,’” (p. 143) but, she suggests, this can be taken as either a daunting, or an exciting and challenging, experience. It is at the division of these two responses that the other factors enter.

3.2. Chinese learners

The discussion above has provided a survey of significant aspects of the experiences of non-traditional students in higher education, without confining that to studies of Chinese or CHC students, although they have been present in many of the studies. There is, though, a body of research which focuses particularly on this group and I will look at some of its features at this point.

3.2.1. A different academic culture

Much has been written on the philosophical underpinnings of Confucian-heritage education and how they differ from those of the west. For example, contrasts seen to emanate from the collectivist/individualistic continuum posited by Hofstede (1983) are widely found (e.g. Ward, 2001).

The Chinese system is said to value mastery and the understanding of existing authorities in a field as the first step towards creativity, rather than expecting to call on creativity at a stage when students feel they do not “know enough to say or do something original” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 86). To achieve this, perseverance and hard work are highly valued, including a high degree of memorisation, and there is a tendency to attribute success to effort rather than high ability (e.g., Biggs, 1999; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Salili, 1996). Relationships with teachers reflect this underlying respect for authority: a teacher, say Jin and Cortazzi, is seen as an “authoritative parent to whom respect and obedience are due,” but this carries with it a reciprocal duty of care and concern “which also characterises it in Chinese tradition” (p. 12).

These values are manifest in classrooms where typically teachers teach from the front of large classes and students are not invited to take an interrogating role in the process. One of the university students who contributed to Cortazzi and Jin's (1996) account of Chinese education says that children in school:

are strictly taught to be obedient and obey orders and rules. They are not taught to develop their own unique personalities and bring out strange questions. They only answer teachers' questions or are silent. Such virtues will be praised by both teachers and parents. (p. 196)

Nevertheless, it is not to be assumed that the absence of articulated personal response and critique means that critique itself does not occur. Other students in the same study described an active mental role as one of the characteristics of good learners:

He not only listens to the teacher but also thinks about it himself.

He masters what the teacher has taught and knows other things by himself.

[They] like to think about the lesson in their own minds and draw their own conclusions. (p. 191)

It is also common practice to seek teachers out after class to raise the questions that are disapproved of as a waste of time in class (Cortazzi & Jin).

In a highly competitive system, great value is put on success in norm-referenced exams, and this is likely to affect the focus of the classroom: "For most learners in China, what is to be learnt is largely defined by what is to be examined" (Gao, 2003, p. 54).

3.2.1.1. *Student writing*

An academic culture valuing initial mastery sees student writing not as a way of finding a personal voice, "but for the purpose of becoming integrated into a scholarly community. ... One is writing to pass on what one has received" (Scollon, 1991, in Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 53). This carries implications for the use of the words of others within one's writing, and the attitude to textual borrowing is certainly less strident (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Biggs, 1999; Sowden, 2005), though there is some dispute in the literature about whether unattributed use is permitted (see the response to Sowden in Liu, 2005).

The actual structure of the discourse is said to differ, too. In contrast to British academics' preference for initial statement of the main idea followed by background

information and supporting arguments, Cortazzi and Jin (1997) tell us that Chinese writers tend to begin with background information to establish common ground, followed by brief mention of the conclusion, since it is assumed by now to be obvious. They give an example of student writing that was assessed much more highly after a simple cut-and-paste transferred topic sentences from the end to the beginning of paragraphs (p. 82).

3.2.2. The paradox of the Chinese learner

3.2.2.1. *Western disrespect for other education systems*

These learning practices seem so opposed to those suggested by the core values that hold sway in the west that a widespread disrespect among western teachers for the Chinese education system and the practices of the students whom it has educated has developed (Biggs, 1996). As Cadman (2000) puts it, “There is a great temptation in the western academic world to characterise other academic traditions as being, in St Paul's terms “without signification”” (p. 487). Alongside “reified notions of the Asian learner” sit “idealised versions of the Western student” (Singh & Doherty, 2004, p. 19), as if they were all autonomous, critical thinkers eager to ask searching questions in class. In more inward-looking discourse on western education, a very different view of our students is often promoted, as Kubota (2004) reminds us, recognising that they, too, might be deficient in some of these qualities (see, too, Nichols, 2003).

3.2.2.2. *Academic success*

Such disrespect, however, is hard to sustain, since Chinese students often out-perform western students, at least in science and maths, and achieve high levels of understanding (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Hence, the paradox of the Chinese learner, a term coined by Biggs.

Marton, Dall'Alba and Kun (1996) posit in the title of their chapter in Watkins and Biggs (1996) that “memorising and understanding” is “the key to the paradox.” Western educationalists often refer to Chinese as rote learners. *The Oxford English dictionary* (OED Online, 2007) gives as the first meaning of “by rote”: “in a mechanical manner, by routine, *esp.* by the mere exercise of memory without proper understanding of, or reflection upon, the matter in question” (italics in the original), clearly denoting it as a

shallow approach to learning. However, Marton et al. found that memorisation as it is used by Chinese learners is strongly associated with understanding. They found two different types of association, the first, understanding something and then memorising it, recognising that understanding facilitates memorisation, and the second, memorisation *in order* to understand, through a process of intertwining memorising phases with focus on attempting to understand.

Other research, too (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Gieve & Clark, 2005), suggests that attribution of surface learning approaches to Chinese learners arises from misunderstanding, and that they, like many other learners, adjust their approach to their perception of the task in hand.

3.2.2.3. A small culture approach

Reference to “the Chinese learner” (e.g. Watkins & Biggs, 1996) is, of course, delusory; Chinese learners are by no means uniform. The process of casting people of different origins as representatives of a reduced, monolithic, and often misunderstood and outdated, version of the national culture they grew up in is often referred to as essentialising (e.g. Holliday, 2003, 2005). From this perspective, “a Chinese learner is always and only a Chinese learner” (Clark & Gieve, 2006, p. 57). Holliday (1999), referring to this as a “large culture” approach, urges acknowledgement of the inevitability of a range of influences such as past experience, fellow members and present context coming to bear in each group that they enter and creating a range of potentialities and emergent communal practices. A “small cultures” discourse recognises that each context is co-constructed by its participants and “refers to the composite of cohesive behaviour within any social grouping, and not to the differentiating features of prescribed ethnic, national and international entities” (p. 248). This viewpoint allows for the exercise of personal agency in the encounter between the student and the university, and even the question of “whether individuals necessarily feel themselves to ‘be Chinese’ wholly, irrevocably and consistently” (Gieve & Clark, 2005, p. 264). It also allows for recognition of the cultural hybridity arising from intercultural contact, from which emerges a “third space” of encounter and transformation producing “new cultural forms and identities,” undermining teachers’ ability to “to know or predict their ‘Other’ students with any certainty through

reproduced categories” (Singh & Doherty, 2004, p. 18). It suggests that the university might to some extent be “invented” (Bartholomae, 1985).

3.2.3. Changes in millennial China

Gao (2003, p. 41) notes that an earlier western view of Chinese students as diligent workers with high academic achievement has in recent years been overshadowed by the plight of large numbers of students struggling to adapt to a new academic environment. One cause of the diversity within Chinese culture now being rendered visible in the west is the dual system of education (1.2.2).

Zhang (2003), in a report written in 1999 about students leaving the Beijing area for study abroad, is here clearly describing the typical students of former times:

The great majority of them have manifested such characteristics as good academic foundations, strong abilities, and hardworking diligence, and thus commanded admiration in the countries to which they have gone. (p. 54)

These, it is clear, are the scholarship-winning products of “China’s key universities” (p. 50). Towards the end of his report, he notes that there is another cohort leaving China under their own funding towards those developed countries which “regard education as an industry” and are “casting their eyes towards the Chinese mainland” (p. 62). Just as China’s education operates as a dual system, it would seem so does study abroad, and that the self-funded students who became such a feature of higher education in recent years are often students who have not been winners in the educational competition thus far. As Jin and Cortazzi (2006) point out, there are plenty of excellent educational opportunities in China for the gifted. Gao (2006) warns against relying too heavily for understanding this new cohort on research carried out in the early 1990s in elite institutions (such as that reported in Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). His investigation of his own students in a “low-profile tertiary vocational college” (p. 61) demonstrated different traits and motivations, in particular, teacher dependence, which he attributes to strategies developed in similarly low-profile high schools to optimise the chance of passing exams. He notes, though, that his students had “a critical evaluation of their dependence on teachers” (p. 64), and a sense of age-related readiness to move on from it. It may be in his students that we see reflections of many of those who have chosen New Zealand, somewhat more low-profile than choices such as the USA or UK, as their

destination. This is a group whose experience in western universities has not been extensively researched.

3.3. Prior educational experiences in the west

Chinese international students do not necessarily simply fly in, freshly emerged from the education system described above, and enrol for university, particularly those who were not high achievers at home. Most of them enrol in another educational institution within the western education system for further learning that will enable them to meet the entrance criteria for university, such as a high school or an English language centre. It may seem counterintuitive to *end* this account of students' engagement with university study by considering preparation for it, but it will be easier to consider the process of transition having established a picture of the task ahead. The accounts reported here have in any case travelled in the same direction: they all arise from reflection on the preparatory process as a result of study of first year university experiences. English language centres are most salient in the literature and also among my informants, so the discussion will focus on them.

Above all, language centres are seen as benign, predicated on a sociocultural model of the willing expert scaffolding the novice's entry into new understandings of learning practices (such as in-class discussion) as well as increased English proficiency (Singh & Doherty, 2004). In fact, they are perhaps too benign. Turner (2004) warns:

we should not confuse caring for students' well-being with leniency over their language use. At the risk of sounding a bit ruthless, I would argue that we should be less caring and more critical. (p. 100)

Others, too, argue for a more intellectually challenging experience. Leki (1995) proposes more demanding writing tasks, for example, to give students "writing experiences they can later refer back to in attempting to address tasks across the curriculum" (p. 22). Gee (2004) suggests that teachers who use a "moral response to neediness" model for their relationship with students perhaps set them up with inappropriate expectations "that will help those students to fail" (p. 27) in the university discourse.

Teachers are certainly not held entirely to blame for this. Turner (2004) refers to an "intellectual short-cut mentality" among international students (see also Read & Hirsh,

2004): time is money (and rather a lot of it), so routes towards earning eligibility for enrolment bypass the intellectual investment required for fuller understanding of the discourses they are entering. Eligibility has been neatly allied with international exams and “students’ scores therefore slot comfortably into a checklist of easily ticked off registration requirements” (Turner, p. 97). However, these exams have questionable value as sole preparatory routes for university study (Moore & Morton, 2005). Spack (1997) notes that her informant had entered university without ever having written more than a two-page essay, and Le Ha (2006) points out that neither IELTS writing task requires candidates to incorporate information from other sources, leaving them with that conundrum to grapple with during their first semester at university.

A further difficulty for teachers here and in in-sessional EAP classes is the plurality of discourses students must enter, in most of which EAP teachers “do not participate as conversation partners” (Leki, 1995, p. 2).

Within the benign and supportive environment of the language centre, after perhaps an initial period of confusion, students are constructed by teachers and peers (and therefore themselves) as competent language users who are audible. The transfer to mainstream education where there is less willingness to invest effort in understanding and encouraging L2 speakers can be traumatic (Miller, 2003; Harklau, 2000).

3.4. Social contacts

Becoming a full-time student involves assuming a whole life-style that will accommodate and, ideally, optimise the decision. Essential to this is the development of social networks:

The academic and social communities within an institution are seen as nested inside an external environment of family, friends, and other commitments that places demands on students in ways largely beyond the students’ institutional worlds. (Pascarella & Terenzini, p.54)

Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005), in their study of native speaker students, found that one of the roles played by these contexts was as “buffering support in stressful situations” (p. 709). This role may assume even greater importance for CHC students, as the literature suggests they have a tendency to look for help among their

immediate social contacts rather than using counselling and other services provided by the university (Cameron & Meade, 2002; Ward, 2001).

Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) discuss Bochner's functional model of friendship networks for international students which describes three networks, the primary one with compatriots which allows them to "rehearse, express and affirm culture-of-origin values," a second one with host nationals which tends to further academic aims and to be formal rather than personal, and a third with other internationals which is recreational and offers mutual support arising out of "shared foreignness" (p. 148). Of these, the second is typically the least salient. The importance of the first is one reason why many Chinese students choose to flat with co-nationals, finding that the psychological gain outweighs the loss of opportunities for English interaction (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 37).

Ward (2001) indicates that contact with domestic students is "generally associated with psychological, social and academic benefits for the international student" (p.3). Unfortunately, a theme of the literature is the limited opportunities that exist, a source of considerable disappointment to the students. Reasons for this that have been posited are:

- language proficiency (Miller, 2003; Mills, 1997)
- contacts based on classes rather than social centres pertinent to local students, such as sports clubs and pubs (Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Eisenclas & Trevaskes, 2003)
- difficulty experienced in early encounters which discourage further attempts (Gao, 2003)
- perceiving investment in social interactions with local students as threatening diligence towards study (Gao, 2003; Holmes, 2005)
- the comfort of resorting to the more familiar group (Butcher & McGrath, 2003; Gao, 2003, 2004; Mills, 1997)
- the resulting "formation and maintenance of cohesive Asian student groups within classes" further reducing interaction with locals (Mills, 1997, p. 65)
- international students' perception of discrimination on the part of locals (Butcher & McGrath, 2003; Holmes, 2006)
- a lack of motivation on the part of local students to initiate contact (Ward, 2001; Mills, 1997)

- impatience of local students with others' struggle to express themselves in English (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006)
- a lack of spheres of common interest to talk about (Holmes, 2004; Mills, 1997; Spencer Oatey & Xiong, 2006)
- “the relatively high level of cultural distance between New Zealand and many Asian countries” (Ward, 2001, p. 7)
- a lack of institutional support to foster such contacts (Butcher & McGrath, 2003).

Ward reports that both groups of students believed that the university should take a role in rectifying the situation (p.4), and that responsibility for contact lay with the other group (p.11). Another arena for social contact is the community beyond the university and Butcher and McGrath (2003, p. 9) indicate that for some students this is the most important source of social support. A 2007 New Zealand-based report prepared by Ho indicates that the situation has not changed over the period of the study (Education New Zealand).

One further network in which students may operate is that of the family. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) describe Astin's Input-Environment-Output model of university impact, which recognises family as an important influence on the 'input' that students bring (p. 53), but only one of the models included in their survey, Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Socialization, counted it as potentially significant as an on-going influence (p. 58). This may reflect a western bias, and the strength of that element post-enrolment is worthy of attention in relation to Asian students.

3.5. Conclusion

The literature paints the university as a complex institution relatively unaccommodating to those who have not taken the prescribed route to arrive there. However, international students have a high degree of investment, in both Norton's and the monetary sense of the word. Although university teachers often see them as passive learners, the longitudinal studies cited here show us students ferreting out their own ways to operate (Leki, 1995), often below the awareness level of those teachers. New

Zealand statistics reveal that Asian students have the highest qualification completion rate of any group (Strategy and System Performance, 2006).

There are however, gaps in the literature. Much of the research done in the past has focused on the experience of postgraduate students, they having been in the majority. Recent increases in the presence of undergraduate students in the west call for much more investigation of their experience (Leki, 2006).

New Zealand forms a specific site of study with its own characteristics, in terms of how western academic culture has evolved here, and also in the cohort of students it has enrolled, in particular, students who have not been particularly successful in China. The increased presence of international students from Asian sources in our university, though now somewhat tempered, calls for a closer understanding of their experiences.

There have been a range of New Zealand-based studies, though many of these are based on cross-sectional perspectives. Some have been cited already in this chapter (e.g. Cameron & Meade, 2002; Hirsh, 2005; Lewis & Gravatt, 1999). There are few examples of longitudinal studies at university level. However, Holmes (2004) reports on an 18-month study of the socioacademic intercultural communication of thirteen ethnic Chinese students in a New Zealand university business school, noting difficulties in interaction with both teachers and domestic students which were attributed to their lack of preparation for the dialogic nature of western learning, as well as other challenges such as different expectations of writing and difficulties with reading. Failure to see what was required of them in their new setting meant that initially “participants worked hard but found that their efforts did not necessarily bring them good grades.” (p. 298). However, “Confucian values of diligence and competition ... [and] family pressures and expectations” ensured that eventually they were largely successful in terms both of completing courses and deriving a sense of personal growth through “learning to question knowledge and society” (p. 303). Holmes (2005) reports on the same study, showing that whereas postgraduate students did, in spite of initial reluctance, find strategies for entering into the discourse norms of class interaction (such as using their cultural outsider viewpoint as a means of critiquing), undergraduates were less able to do so. The author does not report extensively on aspects of developing alignment with learning practices other than oral interaction, or on questions of identity and membership.

Other non-New Zealand longitudinal studies cited here, however, provide a deep understanding of the complex and unfolding experience of students that a single-point

study could never provide. Ward (2001) and Butcher (2004) both call for an increase in research into the situation of international students in New Zealand, and in particular for longitudinal studies and studies that give voice to the students themselves:

There is room for further research, but not necessarily the 'gravy-train', research-on-demand, research-for-the-market, out-put oriented kind. Rather, research should place international students' experiences in context; it should critically engage policy; it should interrogate discourses; and -- above all -- it should allow space for the voices of international students. (Butcher, 2004, p. 6)

This project was set up, then, with such intentions in mind, seeking to deepen understanding of the experiences of this cohort of students relatively little known to the teachers they were now encountering. To understand what they experienced at the university, it seemed necessary first of all to have some awareness of what had preceded that and what their mindset might be at the point of departure. In spite of indications in the scholarly literature as well as more vernacular discourses that encounters on campus were challenging as all parties came to terms with new realities, there was much evidence to suggest that many students found ways to meet the struggle. That process was central to the enquiry, the adjustments they needed to make and what prompted them to recognise the need for the adjustments. Finally, in view of the all-encompassing nature of full-time study, it seemed important to consider the possibility that changes were not simply about study practices, that potentially they would occur in other levels of the participants' experience, such as in aspects of their belief systems. From these considerations the following research questions developed:

1. What are the expectations, motivations and preparations of international students before they come to New Zealand?
2. What do they learn in order to succeed in their studies at the university?
3. What are the processes and critical events that cause them to learn it?
4. What is the nature of the changes they undergo?

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1. Selection of research paradigm

The nature of this investigation lent itself from the outset to a qualitative approach. Entry into an institution of higher education implies restructuring of behaviour, viewpoints, understandings and identities which is not confined to behaviour in classrooms or in relationship with classmates and teachers. Being a full-time student extends to decisions about where and with whom to live, taking part-time work, participating in leisure activities, relating to family and friends, timetabling one's activities, potentially into every aspect of one's life and one's sense of who one is. Very much more so for those undertaking it in a community with which they are unfamiliar, a long way from family support or existing social networks, and where a high proportion of their interactions are carried out in their second language: it was clear that the effects of these students' decision to come were potentially infinitely diverse responses to complex variables, such as personality, prior experience and institutional structure and culture. The qualitative paradigm, which "looks for patterns of interrelationship between many categories rather than a sharply delineated relationship between a limited set of them" (McCracken, 1988, p. 16) offered the best hope of capturing that.

The contributing factors to each person's experience would be different in themselves, but also subject to very personal interpretations which could be supposed to give weight to different aspects. Ultimately, it was in these interpretations that the lived experience lay, rather than in some separate underlying truth. In this, the study is in the phenomenological tradition, seeking "the individual's perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon or experience" placing the subjective experience at the centre of the investigation (Mertens, 1998, p. 169). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest, interpretive researchers "begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them" (p. 22).

It seemed unlikely that the significance of the students' experience would come from quantifiable responses to specific events, the range of which could be predicted and measured through some kind of survey. Any attempt to produce a set of tick-box responses would be reductionist in the extreme and prove frustrating to those asked to express the complexities of their experience in such pre-determined ways. While it was

inevitable, given the path by which I came to the study, that I would bring my own expectations about what at least some of the positions on this journey of adjustment might be, it was my intention to remain open to what the investigation revealed rather than allowing pre-conceived notions to shape either the process of investigation or the later analysis of the data. Therefore a “grounded” approach was called for, allowing theory to emerge from what the research revealed (Charmaz, 2003; Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, like Charmaz, I found grounded theory methods more useful “as flexible heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures” (p. 251).

4.1.1. The research perspective

The research questions focused on processes of change implying a chronological view, and two perspectives suggested themselves in this regard, the longitudinal and the retrospective.

For many reasons the extenuated view permitted by a longitudinal study was important. The dimensions of the experience of entering the university could be tracked as they unfolded. The widely researched notion of culture shock (e.g., Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) has led us to understand that entry into a new cultural environment is likely to bring successive reactions. While it was not assumed that participants would be absolutely new to New Zealand at the point of enrolment in the university, they were certainly entering a new academic culture, with pervasive influence on their daily experience. The cyclical nature of life in an educational institution also meant that aspects of the new life would continue to roll themselves out at least over the period of the first semester, and so a research design that provided different points of inquiry over that cycle was called for.

Cohen et al. (2007) posit various strengths for the longitudinal approach, including the fact that its contemporaneous gathering of data can avoid “the problem of selective or false memory,” that it allows for “in-depth and comprehensive coverage of a wide range of variables, both initial and emergent,” that it “enables change to be analysed at the *individual/micro* level” (italics in the original) and that it “enables the dynamics of change to be caught, the flows into and out of particular states and the transitions between states.” They suggest weaknesses as well, including the potential “mortality” of the sample, the “measurement effect” by which the fact of being under repeated scrutiny

can affect the behaviour of the participants “sensitizing them to matters that have hitherto passed unnoticed, or stimulating them to communication with others on unwanted topics,” and the fact that the very richness of the data from individuals makes them complex to analyse and report on (pp. 216-219).

A retrospective view gleaned from students nearing degree completion suggested itself as a valuable form of triangulation. The journey these students had already undergone, obviously with some degree of success, from their arrival as novices to the point where they were engaged in their final cycles of study in the university, could be supposed to have produced an awareness of processes passed through and recognised as significant which may not be apparent to newcomers. Their insights would suggest areas of interest to monitor that might not arise naturally from the new arrivals’ self-authored accounts. Their data would be potentially the source of the first emerging theory, and provide concepts for comparison with participants in the longitudinal study.

Cohen et al. (2007, p.215) suggest that the weaknesses of a retrospective view include potentially faulty and selective memory. The use of the two perspectives allowed for the strengths of each to dilute the weaknesses of the other.

4.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

The main instrument for the inquiry was the semi-structured interview. Kvale (1996, p. 105) says “interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world.” In short, it is “one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). It is an event in which both interviewer and interviewee work together to construct meaning.

A grounded theory approach, beginning inquiry without a pre-existing theory, sees value in encouraging interviewees to speak without too many restrictions, and the semi-structured interview is a useful instrument for facilitating this, because it gives scope for the informants to express their ideas in their own ways. It is certainly not an uncomplicated encounter, though, and careful reflection on various aspects was called for before beginning.

4.1.2.1. *The interview guide*

In considering the degree of guidance to be provided by questions planned in advance, I espoused a view of qualitative inquiry that its measures of validity do not reside in replicating as far as possible the same interview for each participant. To attempt to do so belies a belief in the situated construction of the encounter in any case, as different participants produce a different context. I decided it was more important to follow the lead of those learners who were ready to tell their story in their own ways, probe their accounts in a naturalistic manner remaining “responsive to nuance and opportunity” (Richards, 2003, p. 65), keep mental track of the areas that had been covered and return to my guide to fill in gaps, but not to seek to have every participant answer the same “schedule” of questions. Gomm (2004) suggests that this produces the disadvantage of different interviews taking different paths,

so that it may be impossible to find examples of variants on the same theme in all interviews. This leads to puzzles as to whether what was missing from an interview was unimportant to the interviewee, or important but just didn't come up in the interview. (p.194.)

This risk is acknowledged, but the iterative nature of the longitudinal study allowed some incidences to be checked in later interviews and more importance was attached to allowing people to reveal their own sense of the significance of the experience as much as possible.

Accordingly, Richards’ (2003, p. 69) term “interview guide” rather than “interview schedule,” to encapsulate the notion of an instrument that does not exert undue pressure on the evolution of the discourse, has been used. The guide can be used flexibly. Fairly open early invitations to talk might be sufficient to encourage some informants to provide a very full picture of their experience with attentive listening and just occasional prompting from the interviewer. Kvale (1996) suggests “the shorter the interviewer’s questions and the longer the subject’s answers, the better” (p. 145). However, other participants might need more prompting, particularly considering the extra inhibitions associated with speaking in a second language. Jones (1985) suggests that the absence of guidance can be more disconcerting than too much direction:

If the respondents have no clear idea of what the researchers’ interests and intentions are, they are less likely to feel unconstrained than constrained by the need to put energy into guessing what these are. (p. 51)

This seemed particularly likely in this case, where it was highly probable that the extended one-to-one research interview represented a very new discourse genre for the participants, and one which McCracken (1988, p. 12) points out bears little resemblance to more familiar interactions. The guide, then, was intended not as an attempt to direct the flow of talk, but as a reminder of the areas which reflection (and later on, previous interviews) suggested would be significant and valuable to explore, and a potential support for more reticent informants.

4.1.2.2. *Relationship with the interviewer*

In a qualitative interview the researcher cannot be seen simply as the unproblematic receiver of the informant's interpretation of the experience: in inviting interpretation and taking part in its expression she inevitably becomes co-constructor of that expression. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) put it, "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 3). The meaning revealed being of necessity dialogically constructed, the data cannot be seen to represent an objective and static reality. Another interviewer, another location, or the same interviewer on a different day, might uncover different data. Cohen et al. (2007) state:

Researchers are in the world and of the world. They bring their own biographies to the research situation and participants behave in particular ways in their presence. Reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research. (p. 171)

My responsibility for disclosure seemed to me to be both to participants and to the audience for reports of the study.

Taking reflexivity seriously also requires careful attention to the conscious role the researcher plans to take (accepting that there may be other unconscious roles as well). This was particularly important in a process mediated by an interviewer who was initially unknown to the informants and representative of the community with which they were in an unresolved process of coming to terms, and who, on the planes of age, language, culture, profession, and institutional relationship, could be seen to be at considerably greater ease in the setting than they were. It was important to adopt an appropriate tone to mitigate the potential power imbalance, to provide conditions that would not push participants to interpretations of their experience that were too far from

those that represented their normal vacillations, for example, under an assumption that the interviewer would approve a certain stance. It was important that they felt in some degree of control of the situation and the choices of self-expression they could make, and also that they found the process engaging, particularly for the longitudinal study: “Unless respondents feel the interviewing process offers them some personal involvement and satisfaction, the possibility of repeated, in-depth interviews is unlikely” (Cotterill, 1992, p. 595).

The traditional concept of researcher assuming an objective and distanced manner does not necessarily fit into this paradigm, because it may not be the relationship that best facilitates the process of self-revelation that is hoped for. For example, some of the experiences that participants in this research might have, and which therefore I hoped they would feel able to discuss with me, might be painful or humiliating, and it seemed likely that those sorts of emotions would be easier to reveal to an interviewer who had conveyed a degree of human empathy. Kvale (1996) advises that “the interviewer must establish an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings” (p. 125). However, a concern that was too overtly present or an apparent alignment with the student viewpoint could themselves suggest that certain kinds of responses were expected. Cotterill (1992), recognising the complexity of the relationship, distinguishes between friendship and friendliness, favouring a “friendly stranger” stance and suggesting that a degree of distance might encourage informants to disclose more than they would to someone they knew well. McCracken (1988) sees self-presentation as “a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest” (p. 38) as optimal. I attempted in my dealings with participants to maintain a relationship of interest and concern without intrusiveness.

4.1.2.3. *Resting the voice*

Although vocal data was to form the major part of the study, value was seen in varying that on several counts. First of all there was the question of triangulation. A paper-based response format became a mediating tool, in the Vygotskian sense, leading the attention to focus in new ways on the experience and potentially tease out different perspectives. Another perceived value arose from my awareness of the language and communication demands involved, which suggested that a change in dynamic from the

intense gaze of the one-to-one dialogue would be beneficial in maintaining interest and stamina. Accordingly, a range of artefacts such as forms on which to plot graphs, tick-box lists and sheets on which to respond as desired (pictorially, in words, diagrammatically or in fact not at all) were included within each interview format.

4.1.2.4. *Other methods of data collection*

In-depth interviewing is central to qualitative research (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Richards, 2003). It is not, however, the only tool available. One tool commonly used in educational research is observation and consideration was given to using this. However, it seemed that much of what was happening for the students would not be subject to external observation in any specifiable arena at any particular moment. This method also brought up the question of the “Hawthorne effect,” where the fact of being researched actually changes the nature of the experience for the participants: my presence as observer in tutorials, for example, would be very likely to make the students very conscious of their own behaviour, and potentially to single them out in a way that may be detrimental to desires they might have to become relatively unmarked members of the university student community. Rather than a programme of systematic observation of particular individuals, I made general observations of the situation they were entering, noting developments within the university, taking part in events, forums and discussions with particular relevance to international students and attending several lectures from their programmes.

4.2. Ethical considerations

Cohen et al. (2007, p. 52) suggest that an initial step in the process of planning research should be an assessment of the costs/benefit ratio. It did not seem that this project had great risk of harm, if the normal requirements of strict confidentiality were upheld. Although it was certainly possible for the interview process to create discomfort or misunderstanding, careful handling by a researcher with cultural and sociolinguistic sensitivity could mitigate that. In fact, I was hopeful that participants might see benefits in having ongoing contact with someone who had an interest in them and was willing to talk and listen. My reading had suggested that opportunities for personal contact with

locals were difficult to come by and greatly desired by international students. Nevertheless, my research made considerable demands of the students, particularly those involved in the longitudinal study, in terms of time and personal revelation, and the question of reciprocity arose. Ethically, I needed to be prepared to offer something in return. Part of this return was small gifts offered in thanks, but it was also conceivable that students might ask for advice or help with the experiences they were going through. Would a response to such requests bring about the Hawthorne effect, thus endangering the validity of my findings?

Reflection suggested that this was an unavoidable possibility. It was untenable not to offer participants the opportunity to ask something of me, to allow for the potential, therefore, that involvement in the study would in itself be to some extent empowering. I found precedents for this view in other studies. Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (1992) discuss this issue and come to the conclusion that

- (a) Persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects ...
- (b) Subjects have their own agendas and research should try to address them ... asking questions and introducing topics is not the sole prerogative of the researcher ...
- (c) If knowledge is worth having it is worth sharing. (pp. 23-24)

This was an understanding adopted by Norton (2000) in her longitudinal study of migrant women in Canada. Kiley (2003), in her study of postgraduate international students in an Australian university also found that “it is not possible to remain the dispassionate observer” in the kind of interaction this type of interviewing involves (p. 348), and found it necessary to respond to requests for assistance.

The study was subject to scrutiny by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Their approval documents can be found in Appendix 2.

4.3. Implementation of the project

The choice of a longitudinal inquiry into the experience of students in their first semester of study in the university as central to my investigation imposed a tight timeframe on the project. At the time I enrolled for doctoral research, in April 2003, the numbers of Chinese students in New Zealand universities had burgeoned. Lengthy

experience of international education in New Zealand had made me aware of the vagaries of the market, however, and I knew that there was no guarantee that this situation would continue unabated. In terms of the university year, largest enrolments occur in Semester One, which would therefore give the best scope for recruitment of informants. It was desirable that the longitudinal study should begin in early 2004.

During the latter part of 2003, the preparatory steps for the project were completed. First of all, I needed to establish the criteria for participation. Discussions of the changing situation in New Zealand universities suggested that greatest numbers of students were enrolling in business degrees which created particular conditions of stress (1.2.1, 1.2.4). Information Sciences was another popular area of study for Chinese students. I decided to restrict my investigation to students in these two sites, assuming that aspects of their experience would be markedly different from those in classes where Chinese students were a small minority. The structure of the business degree provided another serendipitous advantage, as its nine core papers would produce individual perspectives on a shared pathway, unlike the more disparate ways through other New Zealand degrees. Formal requests were consequently made to both colleges at Rutherford University for permission to carry out the study with their students and this was granted.

With the same aim of restricting the parameters of the study to people who shared important aspects of it, and in recognition that it was this group whose unheralded arrival was the focus of greatest interest and concern, I decided to define Chinese in this case as being from the People's Republic of China.

My decision to begin with retrospective interviews provided an initial exploration of the field which would help alert me to a range of issues so that there would be less possibility of bypassing areas of interest. For the same reason, I spent time during this period discussing issues with support and academic staff to increase my understanding of how they encountered Chinese international students.

4.3.1. The retrospective study

4.3.1.1. *Locating potential participants*

The first task was to seek recruits. I decided that enrolment in a 300-level class would provide some degree of valuable retrospection, as it generally implied at least three semesters in the university and often more, and in Business Studies was the

highest stage of study before graduation with a bachelor degree. Access to the university's system of recording statistics was requested and allowed me to locate classes with relatively large proportions of international students in the two chosen fields.

4.3.1.2. *The interview guide*

An interview guide was developed. It began with simple biodata questions. While Glaser (1998) suggests that such information is often irrelevant to inquiry, in this case there was certainly potential for factors such as previous qualifications or length of time in New Zealand prior to university study to have relevance, and it seemed prudent to decide on the relevance or otherwise at a later date. Such questions also had merit in being undemanding to respond to so they could oil the wheels of the encounter before more searching responses were called for. The following sections of the guide attempted to balance opportunities for the participants to respond to open and more directive questions. Open questions have the advantage of flexibility allowing further delving if desired, helping the interviewer “to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes” and enabling “important but unanticipated” issues to be raised (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 357). More directive prompts would allow for probing of events which might be productive of useful reflections, such as first assignments, making friends, or first exams. Examples of the first type of questions were “What were your best experiences, and what were your worst experiences?” and “What were some of the things that happened that were important and that you learned from in your early time here?” Among the more directive questions were “Tell me about the first exams you sat here. Were they similar to previous experiences? How did you study for them? Was that successful?” In this kind of funnel design, of course, the first question might be enough to elicit a full response, removing the necessity to continue the series.

Invitations to provide personal accounts of the experience were balanced with questions which altered the viewpoint, in the hope that distancing the response might give expression to aspects observed but not experienced, or that were difficult to acknowledge personally. Examples of these questions are: “Do you know some people who dropped out? What made them do that, do you think?” and “What advice would you give someone from your country who wanted to study abroad?”

Another area of interest was overall attitude and learning beliefs. There is extensive discussion in the literature (3.1.4), and in university corridors, about the difference between western educational values and those of Asian countries. It was of interest to see whether such differences were noticed by participants and what the effects of immersion in the new academic culture might be on their own beliefs. Examples designed to investigate attitudes were: “What do you think is the main purpose for university study?” and “Are there some ways of learning that you used in your country which you think Rutherford teachers should try to use?”

The final questions invited students to sum up their experience (for example, “What are the positives and negatives?”), followed by a chance for them to make further comments or ask any questions.

I prepared an overview of the areas intended to be covered to give the participants on arrival at the interview. Although there was certainly a danger that this could pre-empt the students’ own nomination of important areas, this was in response to concerns mentioned earlier of the unfamiliarity of the genre and the view that a degree of written support would be valuable.

As well as the spoken questions, paper-based instruments were developed, including two checklists of sources of support (those that formed part of the university structure and informal support networks), a diagrammatic representation of the first period of study with an invitation to use it to demonstrate the main foci of attention, and a set of contrasting statements about tertiary experience drawn from other studies of international students for students to respond to.

4.3.1.3. Pilot interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted with three students and modifications made to the original design. The contrasting statements, for example, were discarded because in fact the students seemed very capable of producing their own accounts, and the prepared ones did not lead to extra insights. The paper-based instrument used in the retrospective interviews can be found in Appendix 3. The overview is reproduced in reduced form in Figure 4.1.

One technical point that arose was the question of transcripts. The initial pilot interview was with a student who had a higher level of English than I expected to be the norm, and an accent which I found very clear. I had access to secretarial services and

requested a transcript of the tape to be made. However, the transcriber found the task very challenging and was unable to decipher a number of passages. I decided to undertake further transcripts myself, and this proved to be an excellent way to attend very closely both to the ideas discussed and to the language in which they were expressed including, of course, the nuances of its prosody and pausing.

Figure 4.1 Overview of retrospective interview

The [Rutherford] experience

Framework for the interview

- The information you give will be confidential
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Please tell what you think.
- Remember, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to

Information about you	Age, previous study, etc
Preparation for coming	Why study abroad? Why New Zealand? Why [Rutherford]?
The first year experience	How did [Rutherford] differ from your expectations? Where did you put your energy? How did you feel about it all?
Classes, teachers and learning	Classes Assignments Teachers and teaching Courses English Study skills Library
Summing up	General opinions Advice to other students Changing attitudes
Any questions?	

Information sheets and consent forms for participants to sign were prepared. As the intended volunteers were obviously not native speakers of English, the question of the language to be used arose, but the subjects of this part of the project would all be at an advanced level of their tertiary study in English language medium. I therefore decided that it would be appropriate for all documents and interviews to be conducted in English. The information sheet needed to give students a clear idea of the commitment required of them, and so it was necessary to estimate the duration of the interview. The pilot interviews had taken about an hour, by which time there was a depletion of energy on the part of both participants. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that “tailoring the instruments to the concentration span of the respondents” enhances validity (p. 145), and Richards (2003, p. 67) that after an hour, the quality of the data may be compromised. The attention demanded of both parties to negotiate nuances of communication where one is using his/her second language imposes even greater demands than interviews conducted in the native language of both, so I decided to try to restrict them to one hour.

Application to MUHEC for this phase was duly made in August 2003. Minor changes were needed to the original application, which meant that approval for the retrospective study was not gained until the second last week of classes in October 2003.

4.3.1.4. *Recruitment of volunteers*

This late date meant recruitment of volunteers had to be attempted during the final classes before the study break that preceded examinations. This was not an ideal moment to ask students to give up an hour of their time, but nevertheless permission to speak briefly to the identified classes during a lecture was sought from and granted by the lecturers involved.

The psychological distance produced by standing at the front of a large lecture hall and asking for volunteers for the research was a cause for concern and I reflected on how it might be possible to break that down and present myself as someone worth talking to. Having opted for a monolingual approach to the associated documents, I felt I should make an attempt to equalise the power imbalance a little and also present myself as somebody with an existing interest in China and Chinese people by presenting the first part of my self-introduction in my very halting Mandarin. I hoped that this

would present me as someone willing to take steps towards the students (even when those steps did not come easily) rather than expecting them to meet entirely on my ground.

Information about the project (see Appendix 4) was distributed in class and students were asked to fill it in and contact me, thus meeting the criterion of a time lag between provision of the information and the actual data collection which Cohen et al. recommend for informed consent (2007, p. 53).

Predictably, the numbers recruited for the study at that time were not large, but the first four interviews were conducted.

4.3.1.5. *Conducting the interviews*

The first interviews were held in a small discussion room available in the university library and later ones in office space in another college of the university. The office, adorned with a range of Chinese artefacts, proved less impersonal and more conducive to a relaxed atmosphere. The interviews were recorded, with permission, on minidisks and were then transcribed. Minidisks and consent forms were kept in locked drawers in my office, and transcripts were on my password-protected computer. This was the method of secure storage for all stages of the study. Analysis began and was used to inform the development of the interview guide for the longitudinal study. The process of analysis will be described in more detail later.

As a result of the small number of interviews conducted in the first period of this part of the study, a process of opportunistic sampling (Mertens, 1998, p. 263) continued over the following year, as a result of meetings with students during my own movements around the university or referrals from other staff members. In some cases, snowball sampling also occurred as informants suggested others for further interviews. In the course of this process, I found that the students who had been referred did not all meet the initial criterion of enrolment in 300-level papers. Holliday (2002) reminds us that “qualitative research settings are difficult to control; and we have to capitalize on those which are available to us” (p. 24). In this spirit, I interviewed them, and found, in fact, that each had valuable perspectives to add. In total ten interviews were held in the retrospective study. Biodata of the participants can be seen in Table 4.1. All initials are pseudonyms.

Table 4.1 Participants in the retrospective study

Name	Sex	Age	English level	Highest study in China	Prior study in NZ	Time in NZ before interview	Sem-ester	Degree
CN	M	23	6	2 years of university		18 mths	4	BBS
DX	F	28	5.5	3-year DB	6 months ELC	2 years	3	BBS
FW	F	22	5.5	2-year DB	6 months' ELC	1 year, 7 months	3	BBS
GZ	M	24	5.5	3-year DB	1 yr	1 yr	2	BBS
JN	F	22	6	ELC	1 yr: ELC + NZDB	3 years	3	BBS
KT	F	21	5.5 ^a	Incomplete high school	1 year: ELC + NZDB	3 yrs	4	BBS
LH	F	21	TOEFL 563	Incomplete degree		2 years	4	BBS
MB	M	22	7.5	Incomplete high school	2 yrs' high school	5 years	6	BIS
TY	F	22	7	Incomplete Dip Teaching	2.5 yrs	3.5 yrs	2	BBS
YQ 1	F	25	6	Diploma of Tourism	1 yr	1 yr, 8	2	BBS
YQ 2						3 yrs	5	

Note. DB = Diploma of Business; ELC = English language centre; BBS = Bachelor of Business Studies; NZDB = New Zealand Diploma of Business; BIS = Bachelor of Information Sciences.

^a This result allowed her entry into (NZDB) study, and success there gave her an alternative route to enrolment in the university.

4.3.1.6. The teacher interview

It had been clear from media reports during the course of 2003 that staff facing high numbers of international students in their classes were finding that some kind of adjustment of their own practice was necessary, and that consideration of how this might best happen was going on within the university. Presentations and workshops focused on responses to the presence of international students in classes which I attended during this period were well attended and engendered engaged discussion.

Initially I had hoped to be able to carry out a wider interview-based investigation of teacher responses, and to this end, I piloted an interview with a teacher with experience of the situation. However, when I sought to recruit teachers to the study through a group likely to be teaching the cohort I was investigating, the convenor asked me to defer it as teachers were feeling pressured by the situation and were not ready to discuss it further at that point. Initially I planned to return to the teachers at a later date, but in the event that was superseded by later decisions about the longitudinal study (see 4.3.3), design changes being part of the “continually changing actual research process” (Kvale, 1996,

p. 83). Nevertheless I derived useful insights from this pilot interview and they have been incorporated into the study with permission from the interviewee. They covered matters such as the teacher's understanding of the students' situation and the ways in which the presence of these students had affected classes, teaching and out-of-class demands on teachers' time. This data was very useful in the development of the first semester student interview guide and its later analysis.

4.3.2. Investigating the first semester experience: the longitudinal study

4.3.2.1. *Preparation: The schedule of interviews*

With the next stage of the project due to begin in February, 2004, a new MUHEC application needed to be made to cover it. At this stage, my plan was to include both focus groups and individual interviews. Potentially, the communally constructed response of a focus group would provide a different viewpoint from the one-to-one interview, but the main reason for the focus groups was to offer participants a choice of method of participation, the option of being part of a small group perhaps providing some sort of support for shyer students.

Three interviews for each subject or group over the course of the semester were planned. In deciding on this number, I took various aspects into consideration. First of all, the measurement effect mentioned earlier: while it was inevitable that asking students to reflect in depth on their experience would raise their metacognitive awareness and perhaps lead to an adjustment of their practices as a result, by leaving a considerable interval between the interviews, this effect could perhaps be mitigated. Another consideration was the time commitment for the students. The retrospective interviews had indicated that the time demands imposed by study were sometimes gruelling, and so it was important to restrict the commitment that involvement in the project demanded. Finally, a three-interview plan would reflect the structure of the semester. The initial interview needed to take place near to the beginning. Six weeks later, there was a two-week study break soon after the first assessments for most courses had taken place, which suggested itself as a time for collection of useful data during which students might feel freer to commit time to the interview. After a further six and a half weeks of study, classes finished and there was a further study break before the

examination period. Once more, this was likely to be a time of intense learning, and a period when students might be ready to commit time, either before or after exams.

4.3.2.2. *Preparation: the interview guide*

Once again an interview guide was developed, informed by the results of the retrospective and the teacher interviews.

One challenge in the interview guide was to elicit an expression of the expectations students had of the university without allowing the question itself to channel them towards new expectations. I decided to ground this part of the study in their existing experience by asking them to describe study and teachers in China and to comment on whether they thought the situation would be similar in the New Zealand university. This made the object of comparison their own insights rather than some view provided by the researcher. As Tuckman (1999) suggests “non-specific questions may lead circuitously to the desired information while provoking less alarm by the respondent” (p.238).

This interview guide (and all subsequent ones) once again finished with an invitation to the participants to ask questions of the researcher or to make any comments they wished to. A copy of the overviews provided to participants can be found in Appendix 5.

4.3.2.3. *Recruitment of subjects*

From the outset it was apparent that finding volunteers would not be straightforward, so my intention was to accept any students who met the criteria of the study (Chinese, international student, studying business or information sciences, in their first semester of study) until adequate numbers were arrived at, rather than to try to control the group for any particular characteristics.

On this occasion, given that the English of the target group could not be assumed to be advanced, all information was presented bilingually in accessible English and Chinese translated by an experienced translator (see Appendix 6). Volunteers were also offered the opportunity of giving any responses they wanted to in Chinese, which would later be translated.

In an ideal world, it would have been desirable to have contacted a group of students well before their arrival at the university in time for enrolment procedures in the second half of February 2004, so that first meetings and interviews could take place before classes began. The International Students' Office had agreed to send information to them. The reality, however, was different. MUHEC approval was delayed because of trying to get extra information over a period when many staff members were on holiday. It was granted on 4 February, 2004 (see Appendix 2), so that by the time the notices could be sent out to students who had received an offer, it was very close to the time of their arrival. No responses were received by this means.

The next strategy was to present myself in places where international students were likely to be gathered. The week before classes began for the semester, an orientation programme was run for new students, including a day-long event for international students at which attendance was compulsory. I was given permission to speak briefly of my project and distribute information sheets. Another place where I could assume the presence of first semester international students was in two undergraduate courses teaching English for academic purposes for speakers of other languages. Once again, I presented myself and my information with permission at classes for each of the courses during Week One. By these means I recruited thirteen students, which seemed an adequate number to allow for potential attrition over the semester.

I conducted the first interviews in the first three weeks of the semester (for the schedule of interviews see Appendix 7). Two students asked to be interviewed together, but otherwise only one student ticked the Focus Group option. He was invited to have an individual interview, at the end of which he indicated that he was very happy with the opportunity it had given him to talk at length in a one-to-one situation and felt it was preferable to a group format. In fact, it was clear that the opportunity for extensive speaking in English, something that students were already aware was not going to be readily available in the university, was a significant reason for taking part in the study, and consequently I decided to shelve the focus groups. Although this potentially removed another way of "thickening" the description, to expand Geertz's (1973) metaphor, the value of conducting an investigation that presented itself as mutually beneficial to the parties involved overruled that. None of the students took up the option of using Chinese in their answers, except as a while-thinking step in searching for an appropriate word in English, which was immediately offered as a translation.

Although the information sheet had clearly stated the criteria, it became evident after one of the interviews had begun that the student (YQ) was in her second semester of study rather than her first. In the interest of courtesy, and because the first semester experience was not the sole perspective I was seeking, I completed the interview taking a retrospective perspective on her previous semester's experience. Richards (2003) suggests we should "*seize opportunities*" because "sometimes there's no second bite of the cherry in the field" (p. 236, italics in the original). I did not recall her during that semester. She did, however, return in her final semester of study, as can be seen from Table 4.1, and made a valuable longitudinal contribution.

After the 12 initial first semester interviews had been conducted, it was apparent that only one of the participants was studying information sciences. The data I had already collected was very rich, but I felt it would be valuable to seek further informants in this field to investigate the possibility that the experience was very differently constructed in the two subjects. I therefore visited some computer laboratory classes to request more volunteers to redress the balance. Two students joined the study from this course.

Biodata for the resulting sample can be seen in Table 4.2. All names are pseudonyms.

Experience suggests that international students tend to trickle into the university at the start of semester, often arriving after classes have begun, and it was probably inevitable that the first plan of a group established and interviewed before classes began was unrealistic. However, in the event the initial interviews, although a little later than anticipated, were still very much imbued with a sense of the newness of the experience.

4.3.2.4. Conducting the interviews

Various measures were taken to encourage the desired relationship between the two parties discussed in section 4.1.2.2. Verbal and written assurances were made and repeated about confidentiality and freedom to speak (see Appendix 6). The actual interview began with mutual introductions using a large map of China to chat about the experiences of both parties. I had long experience in communicating with Chinese learners of English, making communication accessible and providing a supportive atmosphere. I was also able to use this experience to good effect in presenting my understanding of their existing achievement as language learners who had attained entry to the university, and of the degree of difficulty that studying at university level in L2

represented. This contrasted with the deficit view of their “poor” English and inappropriate learning skills that some were already aware of in some quarters within the university. The interface of the two cultures was for the researcher an area of careful negotiation, with necessary attention to avoid any sense of disrespect for the original culture and its ability to provide worthwhile educational experiences and outcomes, which I had observed at first hand. This disclosure of self seemed to achieve the desired end of enabling informants to see me as a person with a genuine interest in their experience and views who would work to understand them, rather than as a distant researcher or an ally of the university to whom a certain view should be presented, and seemed to engender a willingness to talk openly. One student even responded to my PhD candidature by positioning me as fellow-student when drawing an analogy.

Table 4.2 Participants in the longitudinal study

Name	Sex	Age	IELTS	Highest study in China	Prior study in NZ	Time in NZ	Degree
Ben ^a	M	19	?	Incomplete high school	2 years' high school	2 years	BIS
Andy ^a	M	20		Incomplete high school	1 year high school, ELC	18 months	BIS
Connor ^b	M	23	5.5	3-year DB	ELC	1 year	BBS
Gao	M	23	6	3-year Diploma Computing	ELC	8 months	BIS
Gemma ^c	F	24	6.5	High school	ELC; Polytechnic BBS courses.	18 months	BBS
Li Ming ^b	M	20	6	High school	Foundation course	1 year	BBS
Linda ^b	F	22	6	Incomplete Teaching Diploma	ELC; PTE business studies	1 year	BBS
Louise ^b	F	25	5.5	College DB	ELC	1 year	BBS
May	F	22	5.5	College DB	ELC (2); distance art course	1 year	BBS
Mike	M	24	5.5	College DB	ELC	1 year	BBS
Saul	M	24	6	College DB	ELC; Polytechnic incomplete NZDB	2½ years	BBS
Scott	M	25	5.5	College DB	ELC	1 year	BBS
Sky ^b	F	24	5.5	College DB	ELC; distance BBS course	18 months	BBS
Thomas ^b	M	25	5.5	College DB	ELC	1 year	BBS

Note. BIS = Bachelor of Information Sciences; ELC = English language centre; BBS = Bachelor of Business Studies; PTE = Private Tertiary Education Provider

^aDid not return after first interview. ^b Did not return after Semester One interviews. ^c Did not return after Semester Two interview

My role was defined not simply by how I spoke of myself but how I listened to the participants, and I tried to be, as Kvale (1996, p. 148) proposes, knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and

interpreting. I allowed the talk to flow in a logical way in response to what interviewees offered “building on the motivations of the respondents” in order to avoid invalidity in the data that emerges (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 145). Interviews were very individual, responsive to various factors, not least of which was degree of extroversion.

The questionnaire developed as a result of early answers. As ideas emerged, I pursued some lines of enquiry a little more and re-worded questions. As Creswell (c.1998) says, “our questions change during the process of the research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem” (p. 19).

As a number of these students had come under the special arrangements with the Wideweb agency, several of them had a lower level of English language than was the norm for university enrolment, but in fact in the face-to-face situation with an experienced interlocutor, there was only occasional indication of comprehension difficulty. One of the students appeared to misunderstand some questions, which was soon revealed by the answers he gave, so the original question was re-formulated. One of the students who chose to be interviewed as a pair relied on his partner, whose English was much stronger, for translation now and then. Occasionally, students seemed to be using an incorrect vocabulary item, but the context generally indicated the intended meaning. The possibility, however, must be acknowledged that language difficulties may have prevented them from presenting some thoughts which would have been forthcoming had they been speaking L1.

Transcribing, summarising and beginning preliminary analysis as I went along was also enormously helpful in giving me the opportunity to refine my questioning and interviewing manner. Transcripts were sent to those interview subjects who requested them after each round of interviews.

4.3.2.5. Data analysis

Writers on qualitative analysis have often advocated early analysis (Cohen et al., 2007; Glaser, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Richards, 2003). Richards (p. 236) asserts that not only will this provide useful insights, but it also adds to the enjoyment of the process. Tesch (1990) identifies principles and practices of interpretational analysis of qualitative inquiry, derived from an analysis of texts on the subject, which describe a recursive process. The original reading of (or listening to) the whole interview, or other research encounter, is then followed by a process of dividing it into more meaningful and

manageable units used for comparison (with previous data, with data from later subjects) to uncover patterns, similarities and differences, and, if necessary to modify earlier analysis. From this, concepts and themes emerge which are eventually brought back together again in “a higher-level synthesis” of a “larger, consolidated picture,” or description of patterns, or new substantive theory (pp. 95-97). This process provided a helpful approach to the task, setting up a cyclical process of using new insights both to go back and re-visit earlier interpretations and to look ahead towards issues to investigate further in following interviews.

During the first half of the semester I initially made a brief summary of each student noting the aspects that seemed to be most salient and began the process of categorising and coding data from their interviews. This was done by setting up a series of broad category headings which emerged inductively from initial reflection on the interviews, and which quickly divided further into slightly narrower subheadings. Transcripts were read closely and units of meaning discerned within them which were cut and pasted into these codes. Data was amalgamated from all the interviews in the round, allowing comparison across the subjects. At this point, it seemed helpful to draw these together into a written narrative that allowed me to investigate the concepts that seemed to link them and the patterns that were revealed, to make sense of the data and create a larger picture. During this process, the original “folk categories” (Morita, 2004, p. 581) were further analysed and coded into more nuanced and theoretical constructs.

While the interpretations that the participants gave to their experiences thus formed the raw material of the study, it is important to stress that my analysis created an interpretation of these interpretations, bringing to bear the wider perspective that my investigation of the issues brought me, though I vigilantly attempted to avoid distortion of their meanings. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 196) remind us that while participants are “well-placed informants on their own actions, they are no more than that; and their accounts must be analysed in the same way as any other data” (p. 196), and Geertz (1976, cited in Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a, p. 48) aims for an interpretation of subjects’ experience “which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons ... nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence.”

The first round of analysis provided a deepening awareness of the students’ accounts which informed the preparation of the second round of questions. A basic set of guiding questions was drawn up, and for each participant additional questions were added

following up particular issues they had raised in their previous interview. This process continued for each set of interviews.

4.3.2.6. *Later interview rounds*

Around the time of the mid-semester break students were invited back and the original twelve all returned. The attrition of the two late recruits meant that the continuing sample had only one student of information sciences, and no students who had attained eligibility to enrol via study in a New Zealand high school. These restrictions may affect transferability of results, but not the validity of the process of enquiry into the richness and complexity of the individuals' experience, which was the focus of the investigation.


An aspect of this study of a lived experience that was very much being lived, and in which all of the students were experiencing extreme pressure of time as the first round of assignments were due in, was that I needed to present myself as very flexible to their availability to enable them to choose an optimum time to come. For one of the students this was immediately before the break, for others during the two weeks without classes and for others it was during the first two weeks into the second half of the semester. In the event, this provided a richer perspective on the developing experience as some participants were speaking before they had begun to get assessment results back, and others were speaking with hindsight on what the results had taught them.


The iterative process of the longitudinal approach allowed for a degree of participant validation of interpretations I had put on the earlier data provided by each participant, and this was used to verify that interpretation and if necessary modify it (for example, in cases where the subjects' more recent experience had altered their own perception of earlier events).


Paper-based instruments were successful in relieving the focus and providing a prop – the marker held in the hand and used to underline points even where it was not used to mark the paper, as was sometimes the case. A graph showing emotional progress over the intervening weeks, reproduced in reduced form in Figure 4.1, proved particularly useful in stimulating a close analysis of the period and bringing about recall of significant events and this was repeated in the third interview. Other paper-based instruments are to be found in Appendix 8.

At the end of the semester flexibility was again required, and the third round of interviews were spread out from the last day of classes, through the pre-exam study week, into the first weeks after the examinations, and the last of this round of interviews were held after the participants had returned from their break in the first weeks of their second semester of study.

Figure 4.1 Interview 2 graph









Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four	Week Five	Week Six

Can you draw a line on the graph to show your feelings over the first 6 weeks?

Name: _____

In most cases, a back-up recording device was used, but on one of the few occasions when this did not happen, the main minidisk recorder incurred a technical fault and recorded the interview inaudibly. Data from this interview was therefore restricted to my written notes.

4.3.3. Extending the project

The initial project had been intended to investigate the experience of a single semester. However, the richness of the data collected and the assumption that the students had by no means reached the end of their period of significant adjustment, or even made full sense of the first part of the experience, led to an interest in following their experience further. During the next semester, the project was re-designed and further interviews were sought from any of the students who were willing to continue

their participation at the completion of their first year, then at the end of each year thereafter until graduation. Six (50% of those who had completed the first semester study) agreed to be interviewed once between the end of classes in their first year of study and the early weeks of their second. Five returned at the end of the following year and continued until completion of their degrees.

The extension of the project thus brought about the mortality of the sample that Cohen et al. (2007) identified as a danger of longitudinal studies (4.1.1). This third phase of the study, then, although it built directly on the data collected about the initial experiences of the larger group, maintaining the unfolding quality of the longitudinal trajectory, took on something of the nature of what Stake (1994) refers to as a collective case study, in which a researcher studies

a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, proposition, or general condition. ... They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (p. 237)

Ideally, they will share similarities and also manifest differences: “A new case without commonality cannot be understood. Yet a new case without distinction will not be noticed” (p. 241). Figure 4.2 shows the collection of data over the project’s history.

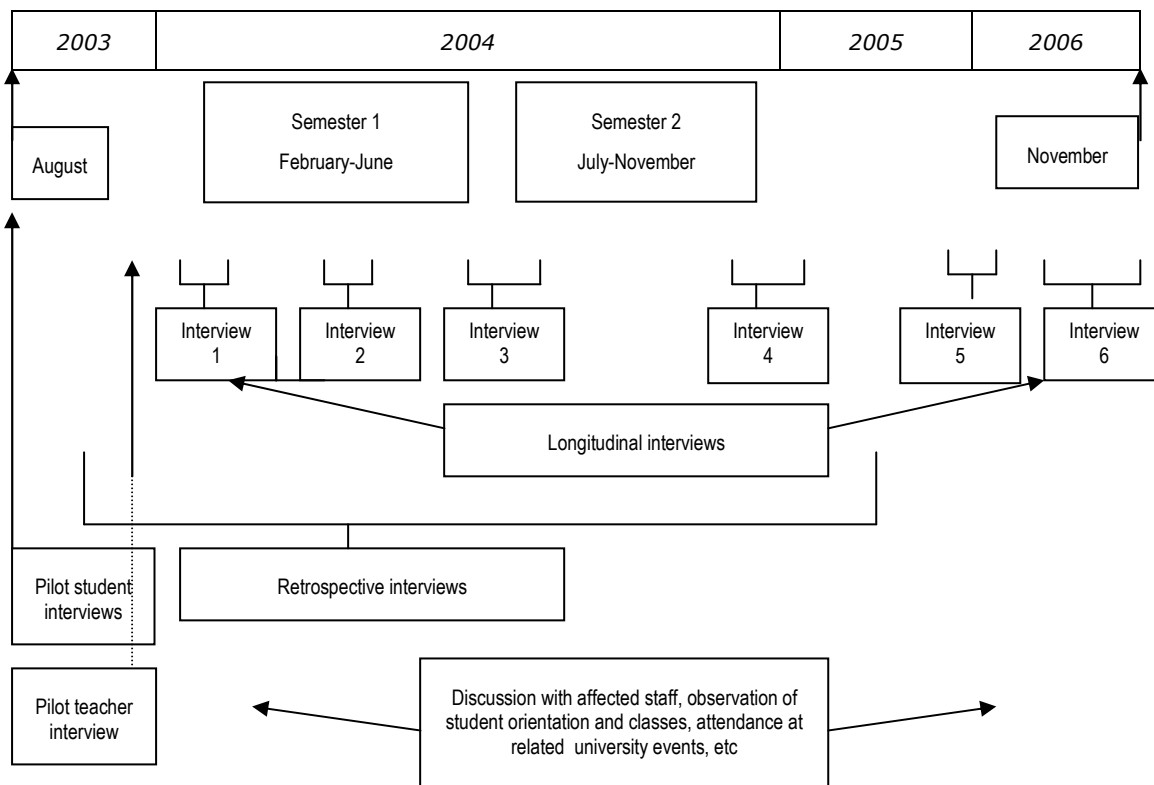
4.3.3.1. *Shifting perspectives on the data*

The end-of-year interview followed a similar pattern to those held in the first semester. By this point I had accumulated a great deal of data and there were two dimensions of comparison available, the cross-sectional, which had been the approach for the first process of analysis, and the longitudinal. The constant comparative method continued to prove useful for dealing with accumulating data. Whereas the initial analysis had involved “comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts and experiences),” my emphasis now shifted towards “comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time,” in order to develop a fuller awareness of their personal sense-making journeys, and there was a continual process of “comparing incident with incident, ... comparing data with category, and ... comparing a category with another category” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259).

In my early analysis my starting point had been the students’ units of meaning-making, utterances that were bound together as meaning entities. This had helped me

begin to shape my understanding of major themes derived from a large pool of data. As I returned to a close scrutiny of the longitudinal perspective in the second year of the study, I subjected the transcriptions of the continuing students to the line-by-line scrutiny advocated by Glaser (1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) to ensure that I was prepared for their next interview with a deep understanding of what they had already told me. This process facilitated the recognition of subtle positioning, nuances and echoing phrases which clarified a growing awareness of patterned individual difference within their responses and experiences.

Figure 4.2 Time line of data collection



From this close scrutiny, I wrote up a narrative of each of these informants' journeys. Cohen et al. (2007) indicate that there is a tension in data analysis "between maintaining a sense of the holism of the interview and the tendency for analysis to atomize and fragment the data – to separate them into constituent elements, thereby losing the synergy of the whole" (p. 368). The move between a fragmented perspective and a holistic narrative ensured that the examination of the detail informed but did not mask

the full experience, and assisted the process of getting under the subjects' interpretations while not losing sight of them.

These individual longitudinal narratives allowed for "concrete and complex illustrations" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 364) or thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the individual cases, while also inevitably identifying general trends and significant patterns among them.

4.3.3.2. Interview 5: Seeing the big picture

As I prepared for the fifth interview at the end of the second year of study, I found that I was beginning to perceive each student's journey in diagrammatic form. I had been looking for a way to mark this interview out from the previous four, so it did not seem like simply another re-run. I also needed a method to optimise the opportunity for checking my interpretations and getting students to re-visit their own reflections on the first period of study. I decided to develop these mental pictures into actual graphic representations on A2 sheets and use them in the interviews as a means of validation of my interpretations. One of these is reproduced in Figure 4.3 and the others can be found in Appendix 9, in each case including a central representation of adjustment pattern, learning style and chronological narrative, with important influences, aspirations and representations of identity depicted in relation to those. Portions of them are also reproduced among the findings recorded in the next three chapters. I have labelled them "big pictures," since both literal and idiomatic meanings of that phrase fit.

The fifth interview, which was for two of the students, because of papers cross-credited from their Chinese qualifications, also the interview which marked the completion of their undergraduate studies, began with a general account of significant events in and response to the second year experience. The big pictures were then introduced and proved very effective in allowing a re-tracing and new reflection upon the journey they had followed, prompting more detail about earlier items or indications that earlier stances had been elaborated or altered. For example, Saul was able to discuss his re-evaluation of a teacher who had been a strong influence on his early experience, and to reflect that his puzzling struggle had helped him arrive at greater awareness about himself in his role as university student.

The students were all interested in my pictorial representations and some of them were obviously flattered that their accounts had been subject to such close attention. One in particular, when I produced the photocopy of the big picture reduced to A4,

which I was giving as a record to each participant, asked whether he could take the original and I would keep the small copy. I agreed to this.

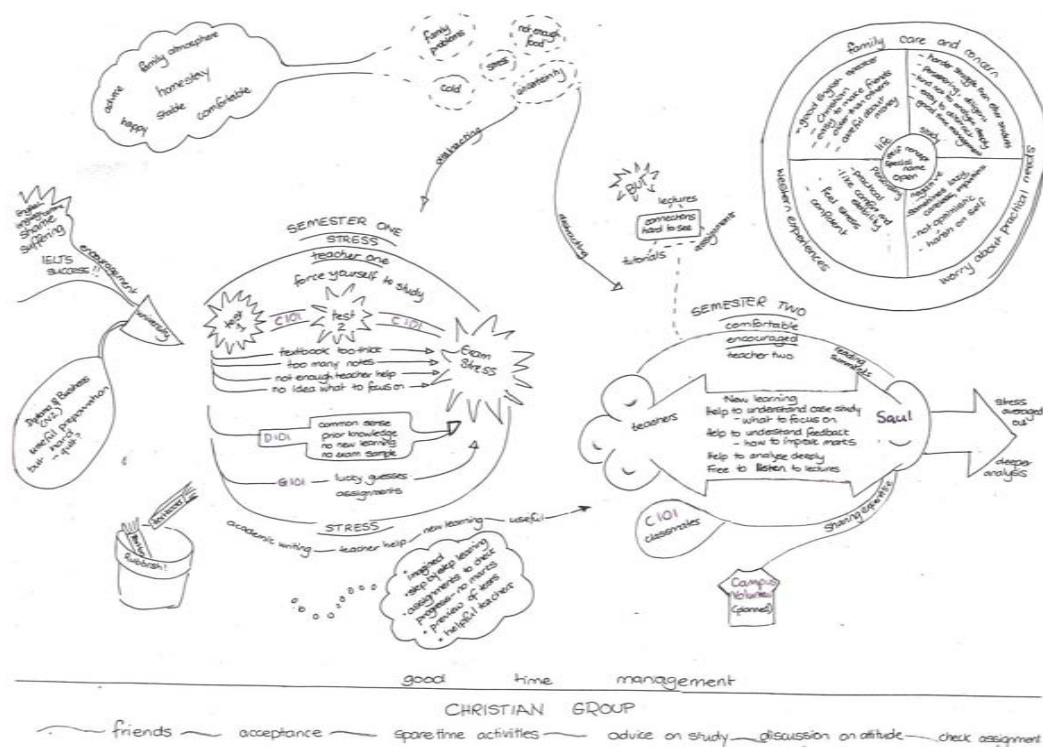
My pictorial interpretations were not contested by the students, although in some cases they were closely interrogated. For example:

Saul: 'Free to listen,' what that mean, 'free to listen to lectures'?

Researcher: Free to listen to lectures. In here [first semester] you had to write all the time so you couldn't listen, but when you came back again you had the notes and you could listen and I think you learnt a lot from listening.

Saul: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you are right. Yeah.

Figure 4.3 Saul's big picture



4.3.3.3. Interview 6: Photographic representations

The success of using my pictorial representations of their experience as the centre point for the fifth interview round suggested inviting the three remaining students to do something similar for their final interview. Some weeks beforehand, I tentatively asked them whether they would be prepared to bring along photographs of “times, events, people, places that have been important for you in your time at Rutherford” offering to provide them with the means of taking the photographs. Once again, I did not want their

involvement in my research to make unwelcome demands on them. However, all three agreed, and assured me that they would choose from existing photographs or use their own digital equipment.

This proved highly successful as a way of framing the final interview, since it provided the students with the opportunity to control how they presented their summation of the experience. Their manners of doing so were very different and very reflective of their approaches to learning which had been revealed during the study. For example, Gao produced a series of pictures presenting himself outside the university in a range of diverse situations and drew analogies from them about his personal development, while Saul found himself unable to make his own selection and showed me several albums so that I could tell him what kind of photos I wanted. The significance of this contrast will be revealed in the following chapters.

4.3.3.4. *Changing relationships*

It was inevitable that the relationship between researcher and subjects would alter during the longitudinal study. The students obviously revealed much of themselves to me. As well, each interview was followed by an invitation to the participants to ask questions, and there was often long discussion after the recorder had been turned off when they asked about a range of matters, such as the reasons for the research, but sometimes more personal, such as, from a converted Christian, my own spiritual beliefs.

Over the years the participants and I sometimes saw each other by chance, and I realised, as I met one or two of them together, that some of them were known to each other and had entered the process through a covert “snowballing” effect. The fifth interviews for three of the participants were held during the “summer semester” when life for students (even those enrolled in papers) seems to take on a slower pace, and after these interviews we had lunch together, in one case, gathering up a group of friends en route. Another of the participants offered to come and talk to me “any time,” rather than simply at the set points I had established, and requested that his final interview take place in his flat rather than on campus. Although this did introduce new facets into the relationships, I took heart from Holliday’s (2002) assertion that it is important for researchers not simply to adopt a stance that represents their “technologized discourses” but to adapt to the appropriate relationship within the

research setting (p. 161), and I saw these changes as enriching the perspective if particularising it in specific ways.

Over the course of the study, I sent out three summaries of the interviews to participants who had requested them, in July, 2005, May, 2006 and March, 2007. The final one went, of course, just to the three students whose graduation occurred in the third year of their study. Their response to it was indicative of how our relationship had developed over that time, and assured me that my hope that the process would be mutually beneficial had come to fruition. One of the students immediately e-mailed me to thank me for it effusively, saying:

I spent about 40 mins just reading through it without a stop. You know, not many articles from academic perspective I could enjoy reading through but this is definitely one of them

and thanking me for sharing “our special journey” with other educators and policy makers. Another needed a second copy since his mother had seen his and wanted to keep it, and the third immediately invited me to his graduation ceremony and dinner, during the course of which he told me that I was one of only two New Zealanders to whom he had ever talked about his own feelings and problems during the four years of his stay. Even one of the retrospective students, at the end of her single interview, indicated the value she had derived from it:

I’m glad that you asked me these little questions, because if you don’t ask I might not have thought about before. As I said, you know, when you do it you never realise it, but when I get there and really answer what you asked me, then I could have summarised a lot of things that I’ve learned and I could see the changes in my thought and my studies and skills and, you know, all things.
(KT⁶)

Holliday (2002, p. 161) suggests that the term “participant” may be a misnomer as the life which the subjects of research “participate” in may be largely removed from brief encounters with researchers and the interpretation which those researchers put on the encounters. However, such responses suggested to me that these informants had truly felt they were participating in a collaborative process of understanding the experience.

⁶ Keys to the attribution and presentation of data can be found in Appendix 1, 1 and 2

4.4. Issues of validity, generalisation and reliability

Clearly an issue in this kind of research is what Cohen et al. (2007) call “cultural validity,” defined by Joy (2003 in a personal communication with Cohen et al.) as “the degree to which a study is appropriate to the cultural setting where research is to be varied out” (p. 139). Previous discussion in this chapter has indicated efforts made to achieve this which match up with the criteria established by Joy and Morgan (2005, again a personal communication with Cohen et al.). These include attention to the comprehensibility of language and terms used, consideration of the appropriateness of the researcher to the task, inclusion of the opinions and views of members of the target culture in interpretation of results and making results available to the target culture for comment and review. The extremely positive response of participants to my interpretations through the iterative process of the study and in the summaries circulated to them indicate that they felt I had achieved that. The final criterion established by Joy is accurate and fair communication of results “in their cultural contexts to people who are not members of the target culture.” Those efforts are ongoing.

It has often been stated that the point of qualitative research is not to achieve a numerical measure of evidence that can support generalising the findings to other cases (e.g., Cohen et al., 2007; Glaser, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Stake, 1994; Yin, 2003). Such a concern can work against the value of qualitative research: “If the number of subjects is too large, then it is not possible to make penetrating interpretations of the interviews” (Kvale, 1996, p. 102). McCracken (1988) suggests it is “more important to work longer with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them,” and further, that access to “the internal categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world” is more important than “how many, and what kinds of people share a certain characteristic” (p. 17), which is not to be found out by qualitative methods.

Stake (1994) describes a way of knowing and learning about the world which he calls *naturalistic generalization*, which accounts better for what a qualitative inquiry such as this one aims for. In life, and in the reading of research reports, “we come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal of their experience,” which consolidates and enriches our understandings. “Knowledge is socially constructed ... and thus case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge” (p. 240).

In order for such a result to occur, Mertens (1998) suggests that reliability should be replaced by a notion of dependability established by means of varied sources of evidence, a visible track to interpretations, an ethic of disciplined collaborative study that encourages challenge and revision to initial interpretations (p. 291). The supervision process of the doctoral research project, opportunities taken to present findings to peers (e.g., Skyrme, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), and the inclusion of quoted data to support interpretations offer ideal opportunities to achieve those qualities.

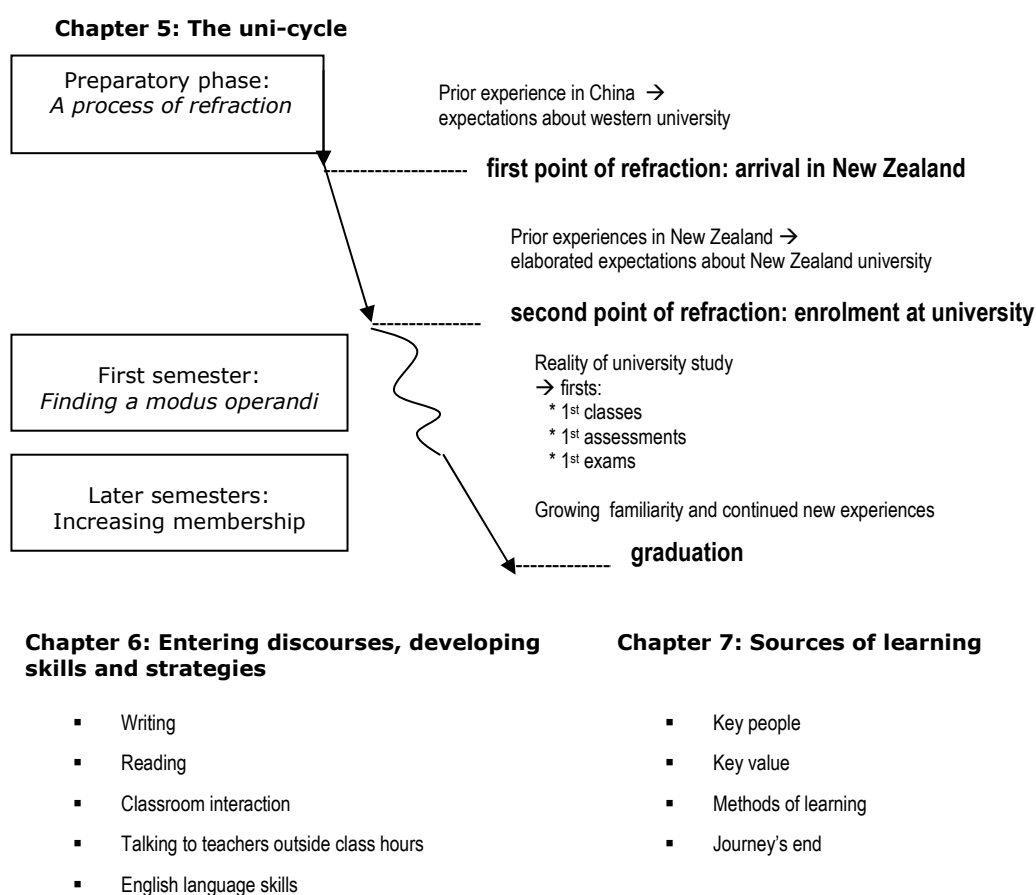
4.5. Writing up

The final step was, of course, finding a way to bring order to the hundreds of pages of fragmented data and written memos and narratives to produce this account. Through multiple re-drafts and re-organisations, I continually scrutinised the data as I transferred it into text alternating descriptive accounts with direct quotations, to attempt to avoid falsifying what the students had expressed. Inevitably this necessitated loss of detail and resisting temptations to follow more tangential leads. I hope I have managed to achieve what Stake (2005, p. 450) sees as the task for the case study researcher: “to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but to describe the case[s] in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions.”

The next three chapters will report the results of my inquiry. Chapter 5 provides a chronological narrative of the experience, beginning with the expectations, aspirations and preparatory experiences that preceded enrolment, looking next at the first semester experience, and then continuing towards completion of the degree for those participants who remained in the study. Its main focus is on the first two research questions, concerning the participants’ expectations, motivations and preparations, and what they learned in order to succeed, though along the way of necessity beginning to provide answers to the other two questions as well. Chapter 6, focusing mainly on the second research question, tracks the development of key features of the experience not necessarily responsive to patterns imposed by university cycles of activity. Chapter 7 seeks more in-depth responses to the third and fourth research questions about the processes and critical events that caused learning, and the nature of the changes

undergone. The pursuit of themes is inevitably analytic in the sense of separating the experience into component parts. The final task of Chapter 7 will therefore be an attempt at synthesis, contemplating the question of the degree to which complex and multi-faceted goals were achieved. In looking at these I will consider both the goals of the participants and the assumed goals of the university. Qualitative research reveals that events are “multiply sequenced, multiply contextual” (Stake, 2005, p. 449), and inevitably there are overlaps in these accounts which are cross-referenced (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Organisation of findings chapters



The process of tracing themes that have arisen across a number of interviews from different participants leads to a fragmenting of their individual data. Threaded among these compiled accounts there are also sections where the data from one or two students which is of particular significance to a theme is reported in a more extensive, holistic fashion. I have labelled these sections “vignettes.” It is hoped that these will work to provide a rich picture of the lived experience of being a Chinese international student at

the university and at the way the intersection between events, learning styles and previous experience contours each student's experience along different lines.

Chapter Five: The Uni Cycle

This chapter follows the trajectory of the participants from the time of their decision to undertake study abroad to the end of their undergraduate university career. It is responsive to the cyclical nature of university life, as a result of which new students tend to experience their first assessments, their first chance to take a breath and evaluate the events so far, their first exams and entry into ensuing cycles at approximately the same time. It describes aspects of the affective experience and issues of negotiating identity and achieving a sense of competence as university students, as well as the more pragmatic elements of the journey. It recounts their responses to the events in this cycle as they arose and demanded action, and as such will give a series of cross-sectional perspectives on the data.

5.1. Reasons for coming

The journey to this point had begun well over a year earlier in China with the initial decision to study abroad, and for some this had been a dream of many years' standing. Their reasons were multilayered and warrant examination as they underlie the experience and provide insight into the perspectives by which the informants might measure it. Although all students mentioned work skills and greater employability as valued outcomes, several indicated that their idea of the main purpose of university education was far from utilitarian.

5.1.1. The value of a university education

It offered the chance

- to develop intellectual openness:

the ability to accept new things and to use new things. If I have to stay at home I can don't think. (Linda 1)

- to prepare for citizenship:

University just like a laboratory, you can do what you want before you go to society. Because, just like the photography and the camera taking.

Maybe if you do wrong in this part you can take another shot, but in society if you do something wrong you cannot take another part. So maybe just practise before I go out into society. (Li Ming 1)

- and to develop new skills, especially independence:

I think university is different with high school is one of important thing is independent. You should research the information by yourself. (Connor 1)

To improve my ability to solve the problems. (Gao 1)

5.1.2. The value of western education

Some qualities were particularly associated with a degree from a western university:

If you just graduate from university you won't get a very high job, high paid job, but if you graduate from an overseas university, you might well get some higher than others that they studied in Chinese university. (Ben)

There were specific expectations of gain in terms of:

- business management skills:

People used to say, especially in business management, some management knowledge here would be better than learn in China, is different, so I would like to learn more, and then go back China find out what different. (Sky 2)

- a more practical focus for the study:

[in China] we don't have enough case study. I think the case study also important. ... Because you need practice in the life, practice in the fact. And I think you can learn some experience, not just from paper. (Connor 1)

- and more current content:

What I learned is some people have learnt. That's old book. Not like here, up-date. (Linda 1)

None of these students had been winners in the competitive Chinese education system, and some of them felt short-changed by 'college-level' education which had left them undereducated:

When I working and then I meet some foreigner, especially Japanese, and always they talk about some economy or something, but I study computing, I don't know any. (Mike 1)

I want to upgrade myself, because I saw a department manager, is export department, is very good at English and very good at negotiation and communication. I quite [admire] her. She's a girl. I can't believe, oh, I can't

believable. I quite [admire] her so I choose go to New Zealand to upgrade myself. (Scott 1)

Study abroad, then, offered imagined future identities as educated people, ready to use their skills in higher status jobs than had thus far been available to them.

5.1.3. Seeing the world

Underlying these reasons was the spirit of adventure, the desire to see the world, under conditions of independence that were not available in China where most of them were still living in the family home:

In Beijing I just school, home, home, school, school, school. (DX)

And then I want to choose, how do you say, more independent, and just want to know what does another country look like, and just want to taste a different culture. (Li Ming 1)

A significant aspect would be the opportunity to meet people from other cultures:

I'd like to see lots of Kiwis, and you know people from other countries ... yeah, I think it's the primary purpose why I want to go overseas. (KT)

This purpose was firmly entwined, of course, with the question of developing English language proficiency.

5.1.4. English skills

Although few of the students suggested existing aptitude at English as a motivation for study abroad, its acquisition was a major reason for choosing New Zealand:

So the first mission for me is improve my English; the second is do my best in university. (Li Ming 1)

Why I choose New Zealand first, even if I'm not good at something, at least I good at maybe general English. ... So that means even if I got the opportunity meet the foreigners clients I never afraid or hesitate again, or something else, I can just have good communication with them. (Scott 2)

For all of them English hovered in the background as a given of the experience, as an issue of concern and constant monitoring, as both facilitator and outcome of success in their undertaking.

In sum, then, while these students were certainly instrumentally motivated to gain the cultural capital in the job market that their current educational history denied them, their motivations were as complex and multilayered as one would expect of a group of young people whose future combined not simply a major educational undertaking but also an overseas adventure in a second language community (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Reasons for coming

Study related purposes	Life experience related purposes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualification ▪ Introduction to western business practices ▪ Intellectual openness ▪ Becoming an educated person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiencing another country ▪ Preparing for adulthood ▪ Developing independence ▪ Gaining English language skills

5.2. Preparation in China

In spite of the expectation of difference, the nature of it does not seem to have been a matter of much investigation or apprehension before arrival. Saul indicated where his interests lay:

The agency to organise some, like, introduction or meeting, but I think it is quite boring and that is not what I want. So I just pick up what I want, and they said New Zealand is agricultural country so the IT is not very popular, so if possible you'd better to take up your laptop. And it is quite windy in autumn or winter, so you'd better prepare some coat, and such like this. (1)

His and his parents' assumption was that the university would "provide the very good lecture or something, is no problem." Their concerns were firmly focused on more mundane matters.

Those students who had received information from the university had not read it (it was in English). The obvious dimension of difference was the language, and most of the students had simply enrolled in language classes with no overt attention to cultural difference, in particular differences in academic culture, as they awaited departure.

5.3. Prior experience in NZ

Eligibility to enrol in an undergraduate degree depended on an English criterion, generally a Band 6 pass in the academic module of IELTS, but for the ten participants who were with the Wideweb agency, just 5.5. There was also an educational criterion. Two of the 24 students in the study had met both criteria in China and could enrol directly in the university. Only those who had not completed a year of tertiary education in China needed to do a specific university preparation course in New Zealand. Of the others, most needed only to add the IELTS criterion and took the “intellectual short-cut” (Turner, 2004) of general English courses at language centres in New Zealand, seeking as direct a route as possible. A few later transferred to polytechnic business courses as another way to improve their English (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Coming to New Zealand for English had seemed an obvious route to take in view of a widespread folk discourse that suggests that immersion in a second language community provides rapid access to fluency. The reality, however, had proved different, providing the first point of refraction of their expectations:

before I come to New Zealand I take IELTS and 5 mark, and then I think, ‘Oh, New Zealand, they speak English and study in that is very good,’ and then I think I will easy to improve my English but when I come to here many things is different, I should consider many things and so many problems the first time you come here. (Mike 1)

The actual experience differed from expectations on the two dimensions of process and outcome: the participants encountered new ways of learning that could cause initial confusion, and the challenge of meeting English language goals was far greater than anticipated.

5.3.1. Experiencing new learning practices

Their language centres met with almost universal approval:

I think [the] English language centre is good, it’s really good. (Mike 4)

In the English Language Centre, always happy, do a lot of sports, meet a lot of people, Kiwis or international students. (Gao 2)

They were supportive, benign and responsive to a clientele unfamiliar with their learning practices:

Because every tutor is very good, you know, and always show their smile and they very hospitality and speak very, very slow, I mean speed is very slow and very, very clear. And if you any question they will answer you and help you. (Saul 2)

This early experience of learning to some degree seemed to define for the students what learning in New Zealand in general would be like. They mentioned a range of factors.

- accessible relationships with tutors with apparently unrestricted topics of conversation:

In New Zealand I think there's more relax and comfortable to talk with teacher and we just like friend and you have any problem such as my dog is not very good, such as my clothes is not very warm, and I can talk with you but in China it is quite strange. (Saul 1)

- motivation by encouragement and emphasis on the positive, rather than the Chinese practice of public shaming

I find the great different is the teacher encourage you to study, to understand, and make the class feel comfortable, easy to understand, and try to make good friend with you, and always praise you, I mean, always think, 'Oh, good, very good. Oh, it's good, very good,' you know. (Saul 1)

- available help from teachers

If you want, you can have heaps of way to get help from the lecturer. (Saul 1)

- a high degree of classroom interaction which had been greatly valued

Maybe in the university or the language centre here you can voice out your opinion during the class. That is very good thing for us because you know we always just listen and take the notes, so that is very boring and cannot create the imagination during the class, and also you can talk to the lecturer, that will be great, I think. (Li Ming 1)

5.3.2. Academic discourse

In terms of content rather than process, there had been some introduction to the requirements that university study would impose, such as exposure to academic vocabulary:

And I study language course and now I see the books and something I think the language course is very useful. They base on the university paper, and I see the words, vocabulary, and then, oh, I know! (Mike 1)

Scott had clearly had explicit instruction about participating in classroom discussion:

Firstly you have to show your topic sentence on what is the discussion topic and then you show your support sentence and keep going the structure, just like write assignment, and then show your opinion, and then maybe the other people will argue with you and then you go to show another more powerful opinion to this guy and make a discussion, yes. (1)

Li Ming, the only one who, having no tertiary level study in China, chose a university preparation course to meet the education criterion, had done a research essay which had given him a taste of hard work to come.

Significantly, though, and bearing out Turner's (2004) complaints of excessive leniency, in his fourth interview Mike reflected with hindsight that a lack of rigour in demanding timely completion of homework had proved unhelpful as preparation for university demands.

5.3.3. Personal change

Inevitably the new roles and demands had led to the emergence of new aspects of identity: "I was very introvert in China, but now I am becoming extrovert" (Gao 1); and new opportunities to exercise aspects hitherto suppressed: "When I was in China my parents told me 'Don't be very talkative,' but here they told me, 'Be talkative'" (Li Ming 1).

Gao's verdict on his language centre experience was, "I think the English study is only part of the life. More things I learned are not about English" (4).

5.3.4. Experiencing failure

If the process had proved different from expectations, so had the outcome. In spite of the comfortable atmosphere of the centres, the first step in their journey, which they had expected to be unproblematic, had introduced several to pain and humiliation. It took them between eight months and two years to achieve their IELTS scores, and most had made more than one attempt. Saul, who had highly developed oral skills, faced a very public shame when his struggling literacy kept him from attaining his goal:

actually this is quite suffering period, because when I was in China, my major is trade English so I quite confident about my English and I think my English is quite good, and when I was study in [the] Language Centre, and I every class, you know, that morning class and speaking class and writing class, all the class

in the advanced class. And everyone think, 'Oh, Saul is quite good and he must be study quite well and study Rutherford no problem at all,' but I don't know why, I take my IELTS test once, twice, second and third time it's quite suffering and I can't to get the 6 points. (Saul 1)

Another student used his peers as a benchmark and was devastated as they met enrolment criteria and he continued to fail:

I took three time to pass my IELTS, so that's horrible experience for me. The second time I failed I almost think going to suicide. It's really, really, really stressful. I was crying in my room. I didn't eat anything two day. My flatmates start worry about me because I locked the door, didn't let them come in. I start crying 'cause it's really, really stressful. (Scott 5)

Public humiliation was exacerbated by costly deferment of the central experience, degree study. Participants had already made a huge investment, on many levels:

I give up everything what I got in China and come to New Zealand which is very strange country for me, and also I spend lots of money from my parents, and especially during that time the relationship between me and my ex-girlfriend who is in China is not so good, so just like Cold War, during, so lots of thing combine together make me so stressful. (Scott 5)

The students' proper response to their privileged position, achieved by a high degree of family sacrifice, was diligence: "our family pay the money for me and if I don't go to school and just play all the time that will really hurt our family's emotions" (Li Ming 1). In the presence of the unquestioned belief that learning English in an English-speaking country was easy, the only reasonable response to failure seemed to be painful and unproductive self-recrimination:

I think, 'What are you doing here? You major in China is English and you study in New Zealand for two years but you can't pass the very simple IELTS test. What are you doing?' (Saul 1).

Scott's father suggested that he should give up and go back to China. This could not be contemplated: "I don't want to come back China, to use this road, every people know you are a loser, you didn't learn anything" (5). Little surprise, then, that another participant found herself unable even to tell her parents: "Actually my parents didn't know that I failed my IELTS test three times. ... I think I lie to them, 'cause I think I had to" (TY).

The corollary, to be understood in the light of the Chinese valuing of persistence and hard work, was that this experience could be valuable in itself:

So actually that is another point is how can you enjoy that kind of suffering, and how can you change the suffering to a kind of energy to give you to provide you to face your long journey. (Saul 1)

and that final success produced a sense of pride and achievement:

when I told my parents this news I can be a Rutherford student they also feel very exciting. They say, 'OK, you spend one year's time to learn the English, that is good, you can get came out, you can be a university student,' and also I think 'Yes, yes, I didn't waste one year's time to study English.' (Scott 1)

So this year when I come to Rutherford I feel I can taste little bit sweet of the successful, because I achieve a goal and I never give up, and keep trying, keep trying, keep trying. (Saul 1)

They were stepping out on their new journey with a sense of personal agency.

5.4. Elaborated expectations of university study

Their period of study in New Zealand had created a more detailed vision of its universities in a number of ways.

5.4.1. More of the same

The language centre experience had set up positive expectations and hopes. Li Ming's imagined community of learning was one of lively interaction in which his status as novice would be accorded full legitimacy by a highly available teacher gently scaffolding entry into new learning practices:

I hope my relationship with the teacher just like a friend, I don't want our relationship just like different [levels] ... I think the education is interactive. (1)

They will help the student even after the class and they will give us a guide to understand the textbook and also teach us the knowledge outside the textbook, use their experience to teach the students. ...When I am digressing they can give me a guide. That will be great I think. (1)

A similar picture was produced by the other participants; above all this would be an atmosphere in which their new-found enthusiasm for learning would be maintained without the extrinsic motivation that had sustained them in China:

In China I forced to study, but here I want to study, so my opinion has changed. (Gao 1)

For those who had had intervening work experience between their Chinese study and the New Zealand venture, this intrinsic motivation was enhanced by much clearer life goals:

And the most important thing for me is because I've got the working experience in China, so I know which kind of paper is useful, important for my future career ... after the university, I think I can change my life, I hope so. (Scott 1)

5.4.2. Expectations of difference from the language centres

They did, though, expect changes ahead, and there was an excited apprehension as they stood awaiting the 'real' experience of university study:

I think, 'OK, that's the truer life in NZ, not in the language school, that's what I'm doing now.' (YQ 1)

5.4.2.1. *Hard work*

Above all, they recognised the new experience would demand hard work. They knew that expenditure of time at university was not restricted to the sparse contact hours and plans were a-foot to support learning with preparation and review:

I need to read the textbook before the class and get in the WebCT⁷ and see the notes and after the class I also need to read the textbook and go to the library find something, material for the assignment or text. (Mike 1)

5.4.2.2. *Self study*

A significant cause of this hard work would be acquiring the new practice of "DIY" study (Gao 1). There was apprehension about this, a clear sense that it represented something of a hurdle, rather than a simple new step in their learning journey:

I have to work out a study method. That is very important, I mean, to find a good way to study. The study method, or maybe the ability to solve the problem. I don't feel I have enough ability at the moment. (Gao 1)

But I think the main problem for me is how to use the textbook and study guide correctly to study, especially study by yourselves, by myself, because most

⁷ Each course had a WebCT website where lecture notes and other course material could be posted and students could ask questions or participate in online discussion.

the time, you didn't got the lecture or the class, you have to study at home. And you have different media to study. (Scott 1)

A major challenge would be making sense of undifferentiated material:

In China the Chinese teacher can tell us some the point on the book, but in New Zealand listen the lecture or tutorial, we don't know what is the main point. (Thomas 1)

5.4.2.3. *The English language*

Learning *in* English rather than learning *English* involved challenges on many fronts and the students predictably had anxieties about them. For example:

Firstly the listening, because different people have different accents. I have to improve my listening and also written is very hard, especially the academic writing, I've never done it before so for me it's a big change. (Gao 1)

I think quite difficult, reading, listening. Also communication with the Kiwi class. (Sky 1)

My vocabulary is bad, lack of vocabulary. (Connor 1)

However, their recent success meant that anxieties were mixed with cautious optimism. Andy, who was studying information sciences, said:

My writing is so poor, but I got a high mark in my listening and speaking. My reading is not too bad. ... so I think my English is not very good but it's nearly enough for me.

An important way they envisaged improving their English was through socio-affective strategies offered by their new proximity to native English speakers:

Plan A is try find lots of Kiwi friends. I don't know if there is Plan B. (Ben)

I think this is need time and to study English language and talk, talk, talk. I think maybe in future I can speaking anything. (Thomas 1)

5.4.2.4. *A colourful life*

As an antidote to these challenges, several of the students looked forward to the affordances of a more varied timetable to explore different aspects of what it meant to be a university student:

Here you can choose study if you like you can choose Monday full of the lecture, and Tuesday is you get freedom. It's quite good, to me Wednesday is free for me so I can have different activity for me today. (Scott 1)

You can enjoy the all kinds of clubs, such as the sport and the music all kinds of things, and I like this kind of the study life. (Thomas 1)

5.4.2.5. The development of social networks

University is not just about study. It's something else as well. (KT)

5.4.2.5.1. Existing friends

The students who had been studying in the university city already had friends there, having found the interactive ambience of language centres conducive to developing social relationships. Three of the students in the longitudinal study (Li Ming, Gemma and Linda) were completely new to the city and their relationships were more tentative:

Actually I have got many friends here, but except [a longstanding friend] the another friend is not very familiar. (Li Ming 1)

5.4.2.5.2. A range of friends

An important part of the talk about friendship here and throughout the research was around the value of friends from different sources:

If too many Chinese student is here you make all the friends are Chinese, is not good for your study, you have to make the overseas student for your friend, and maybe you meet a local people for practice can improve your English and also improve your study. (Scott 1)

Friendships that reached beyond the ethnic group were also an important way of knowing they were seeing the world and meeting the adventure of study abroad.

5.4.2.5.3. Kiwi⁸ student friends

Greatest cultural capital seemed to be attributed to local student friends who were, for most of the participants, thus far merely imagined. There was generally a hesitant belief that friendships would now emerge, in spite of a well developed understanding of the difficulties involved. These involved a complex network of language barrier and cultural differences, often expressed in terms of the burden the Chinese student would place on the New Zealanders:

⁸ For a note on the use of this terminology, see Appendix 1, 3.2

if you don't understand what the people are talking about and you just don't know how to say, maybe you talk a sentence to me twice and I still don't understand, maybe you say, 'Oh, just forget it.' You won't say again. (Li Ming 1)

They clearly did not want relationships of such inequality and there were suggestions that local students might have been able to do more to facilitate friendship:

And also they talk very, very fast. They not consider you are Chinese or you are foreigner, they talk what they like. (Saul 1)

I think they are not very friendly to foreign people. They are very rude, I think. (Linda 1)

Nevertheless, the new proximity was promising and there was a faltering hope of a community where international and local students rubbed shoulders over study problems:

The past we spent almost the time on the IELTS exam so we didn't to find or make the Kiwi friends, and I think probably I can make some Kiwi friends, and my class has many the classmates is Kiwi friends. I can try to. (Thomas 1)

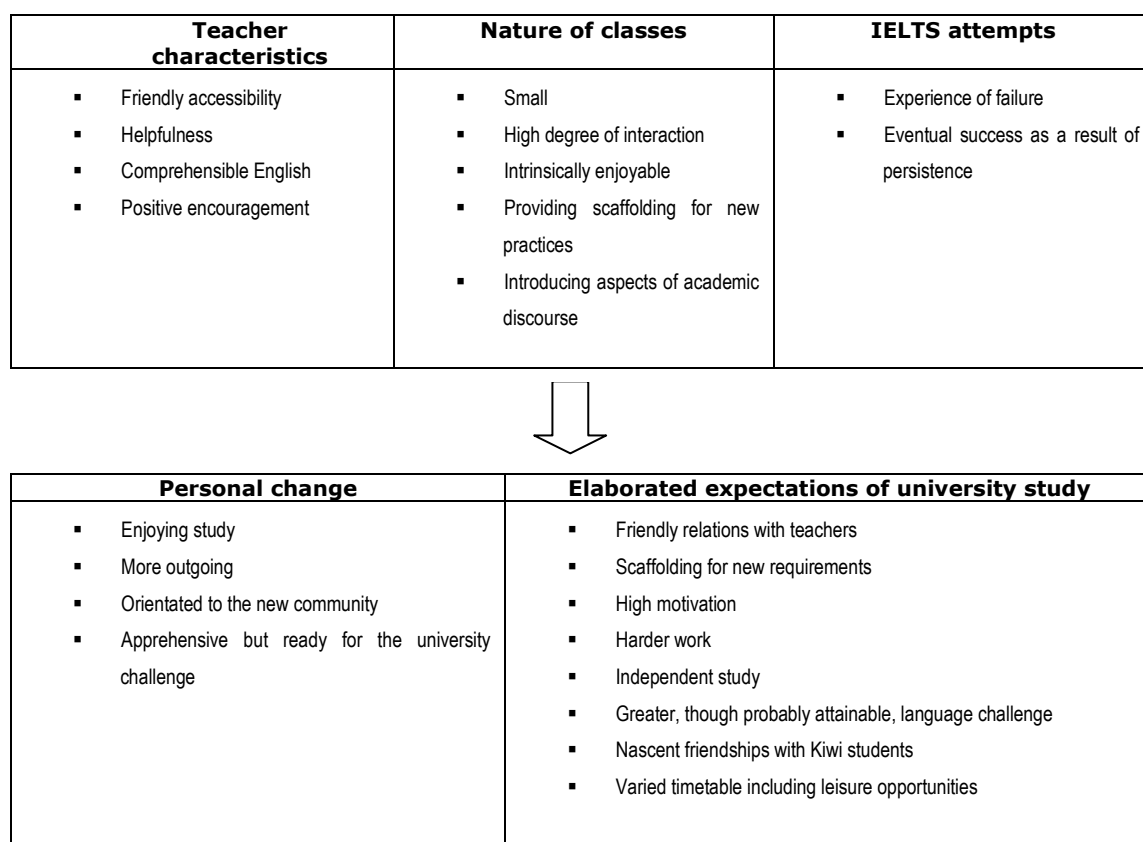
There had been some early encounters, including activities during Orientation Week designed to bring students together, but by the time of their first interview only Ben, who had spent two years in a New Zealand high school, had secured the prized trophy through classes, by dint of taking the initiative himself:

I think the best thing I got is I had a Kiwi friend. Before I came to uni I nearly didn't have any Kiwi friends. ... He's very shy, and just sitting in the classroom with a laptop on the desk and I was interested in his laptop, just asked him and I find he is easy to get on with so just invite him come to my house and have meals. We are interested in the similar things. (Ben 1)

5.4.2.5.4. Kiwi friends beyond the university

It is important to point out, however, that a few of the students had membership of other groups, such as Christian groups, which did provide them with access to Kiwi friends. These will be discussed further in Chapter 7. Figure 5.1 summarises the effects of their language centre experiences (see, too, Skyrme, 2004b).

Figure 5.1 English language centre experiences



5.5. Initial encounters

The first interviews with the students in the longitudinal study were still taking place in the third week of the semester. All but two of the students had been to their first class by the time of their interview. Early encounters were obviously continuing the process of framing their view of themselves in relation to the institution.

5.5.1. Orienting to institutional life

Inevitably as they sought to integrate with such a complex institution through interaction mediated in L2⁹ there were some confusions. These arose in particular over matters related to course choice. Cross-crediting papers from their studies in China, planning ahead to ensure that majoring requirements could be met within a course of study which was truncated by the cross-crediting, understanding lecture timetables for courses that were streamed because of high enrolments, and finding the offices where

⁹ For a note on the use of this terminology, see Appendix 1, 3.3

these measures could be effected required some guidance, often from more experienced friends (near peers, as Lave and Wenger, 1991, call them).

As Connor sought course information, he felt he was being given different treatment from other students and that his needs as a second language speaker in a strange environment were not being recognised:

Trouble, and some my classmates go to this room, OK, but I'll go to this room choose the same course, not OK. I should go another room. It's like the football, I think it's like the soccer, they kick the soccer, kick to that room, you should find go somewhere find some people ... Another people say you should go there. Because my English is not good, some words I can't understand, some programme because it's a foreign country. I don't know. I need someone help me. (1)

Looking back later, Scott explained that he had been entirely dependent on his Chinese friends at this time. He was unaware that a course consultation day was offered a few days before study began, but, in any case, apprehended risk in seeking advice from institutional sources:

After they get in the office they will feel, 'Oh, that's maybe a lecturer, and I will, maybe, if I say something wrong, or if I use very poor English, I will give very bad feeling or imagination from this lecturer. If later on I meet him, what do I think?' (4)

He was thus constructing a view of a university in which his status as L2 speaker was not seen as legitimate and could leave a dangerous lasting impression, which therefore discouraged him from seeking the guidance available when he most needed it.

In spite of this later disclosure, the predominant feeling expressed in the first interview was of available help and friendly service: "staff in Rutherford is very patient and warm-hearted" (Louise 1).

5.5.2. First classes

Severe language shock had been encountered in their first classes. In stark contrast to the carefully adjusted communication of the language centres, lectures were monologic and took no account of whether or not those being addressed actually comprehended:

At the first course I say, 'What she's talking about? She talks too quick, doesn't to think we are understand or not,' and go to C101¹⁰, that course, the tutors talk 'Lalalalalala,' like that. (May 1)

¹⁰ All courses have been given pseudonyms, the number indicating the level.

Difficulties contributing to this fog were the speed of delivery, the wide scope of content of the lectures, the use of technical vocabulary, the requirement for concentration over an extended time and the varied accents of teachers. The university's entry criterion proved not to be the reflection of its demands, which they had supposed:

I just like make by wood, and nothing, got nothing to do because I couldn't understand. That's totally different with the IELTS test, that's totally different. (YQ 1)

This initial blank might belie their concurrent relatively confident assessments of their English, but they seemed ready to give themselves permission to find the first lectures difficult, to strategise about how to cope with them, and to promise themselves improvement with time.

Strategies for trying to draw some kind of meaning from the onslaught of language included both top-down approaches: "Some key points, I just can guess some key points, but when start to discuss, that's really hard" (Sky 1); and bottom-up, as KT here sets aside attention to the framing concepts to try to deal with deciphering the words:

I couldn't follow them at all. I tried to catch up with the English, I mean the accents, and, well, forgot about the logics that they are talking about, the concepts they are talking about, panicked a little bit. (KT)

There was, too, an added complication: the need for a written record of the lecture. At this point, writing and listening at the same time was not a possibility. One strategy was to concentrate on the written notes provided on overhead transparencies (OHTs), as at least they represented some certainty. However this resulted in a serious reduction of the potential input:

I had to keep writing. Maybe I mean her word is very important but I had to -- I had no idea to focus on two things, I had to take notes. (Saul 1)

Others took the opposite path:

The next course I just to say, 'No, I stop. I don't want to take [notes], maybe a little later I can ask my friend to borrow the notes for me to copy it,' so I try to listen, and I can listen some but not all of them. (May 1)

The other strategy that a number of them mentioned as an intent, preview reading, seemed to be serving Mike well already:

before the lecture I read the books and see the WebCT and then the tutor say anything, I know. Because I read the books, textbooks. (1)

In general, there seemed to be a prevalent feeling of readiness for university study:

I try to solve the problem step by step, but if I have a problem I can solve it, I think. It's not such difficult problem. (Linda 1)

5.6. The first semester experience

Maybe first month will be the disaster, so just wait, just do, just wait. (Gao 4)

The accounts that the students gave over their next two interviews, one during the mid-semester break and one during or after the exam period, illustrate their attempts at 'being-and-doing' a university student (Gee, 2004). It was clear from the second interview that once again they had experienced a refraction of their expectations. The conditions that pertained in the university were very different from the language school and the process of acquiring competence was not going to be so smooth. In the graphs they filled in to show their feelings over the first six weeks, the only discernible pattern would seem to be an experience of great changes (see Appendix 11). All had experienced times of stress.

5.6.1. Causes of stress

The two most frequently stated causes, which might be seen as the framing conditions for this period, were the very large classes creating conditions of anonymity and distance, and a high degree of time pressure.

5.6.1.1. Anonymity

I just in the university I just be a number, just be my ID number and they cannot remember all the ID number. (Li Ming 2)

The first year courses had very high enrolment and met in large lecture rooms:

Just class is so crowded and full of people. Sometimes if you not really late, you just come in time, you probably won't get any seats, so that's a bit scary. (Gemma 2)

An inevitable consequence of this was the absence of the student/teacher interaction they had imagined. In an early lecture Saul had observed one brave Korean student attempt to contribute an answer which the teacher had not understood. In the ensuing

very public negotiation of comprehension he had empathised with the student's growing embarrassment and concluded that "maybe next time if he still have some very good idea, maybe he will keep quiet" (1).

Because everybody was always in a rush, there was no chance between lectures to talk to teachers: "at first I tended to ask lecturers at the time, you know, after they finish lecture, but they were rushing off to somewhere else" (KT); or to linger and commune with fellow students:

You go to one lecture and then you head off. You just came in before lecture start and you just run out after lecture, so there's no chance and everybody just concentrates on their study, and they all get different papers. (Gemma 2)

With individual study programmes, there were no opportunities to build on acquaintances established in one paper over the course of the week. Furthermore, incidental interaction between the different groups of students was prevented by spatial separation:

International will sit with international as a group, and Kiwis sit with their group, and even small classes you will find that there's no interaction between Kiwi student and international student. (TY)

In short, the imagined community of learning in which there was a non-hierarchical relationship with an available teacher and friendships developing with fellow students had not eventuated.

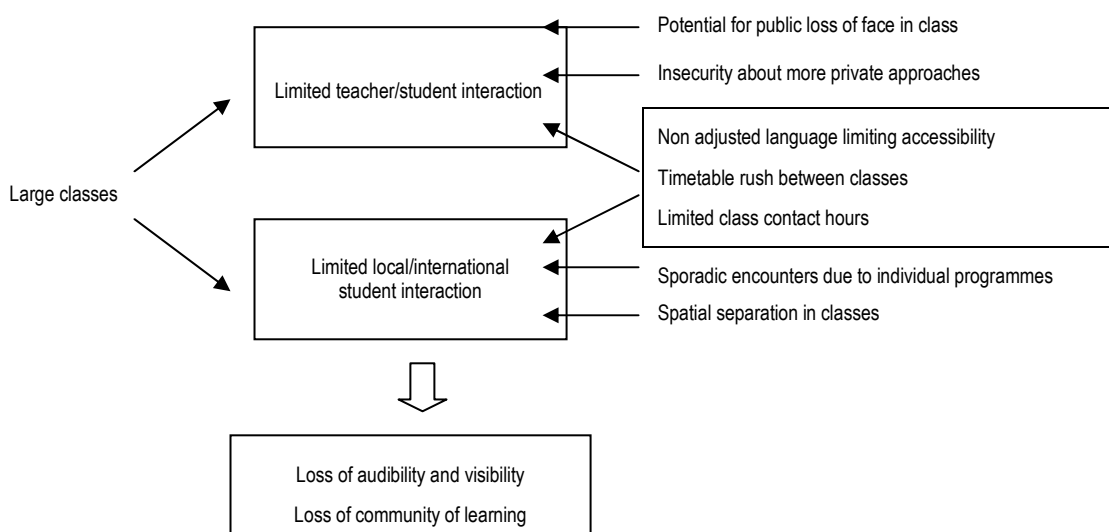
The result of this distance, then, was a triple loss of voice. They had lost access to the teacher's voice: it was no longer available to them either in linguistic terms (it was not adjusted to their level) or in personal terms (friendly conversations on wide-ranging topics were not part of the picture). Access to the voices of their New Zealand peers, which they had expected to be problematical but to some degree available, was denied them, and they had also lost the forum for their own voice (see Figure 5.2).

5.6.1.2. Time pressures

Time just like my enemy and I have to beat it down. (Li Ming 2)

Like all the students, Scott was finding that fewer scheduled classes did not translate to a life of leisure.

Figure 5.2 Experiencing anonymity



I think before I be a university student I was imagine the university life is quite free and quite relaxable, but right now I don't think so, totally disagree. It's quite, quite tough. (2)

Assignments had taken much longer than they had anticipated:

That's a hard, and I used for one week to finish that because I need to read the book first and then try to write and then go to ask the tutor how to going on that. (May 2)

We often got the assignment from 10 p.m. to the 6 a.m., yeah. All night.
(Thomas 2)

The issues of stress and time were inextricably interwoven in the students' talk. The high stakes involved in work that was going to contribute to the final grade increased the stress, removing any sense of exploratory learning as a first step:

That assignment they will get the marks in the final exam, that is a little pressures for us, if they didn't they just to say that the exercise, just practice I will do it and to correct it and I will say, 'Oh, is that problem? Oh, I will understand,' but now, no, they will get the mark, so I will thinking about that is a little difficult for me. I must need to try it very better to get the higher mark, and then I go to the final and I will be easier. (May 2)

Working in L2 was a vital contributor to time pressures, slowing down all language-based functions:

Maybe [if it was] Chinese it's OK, I don't need to take too many time, but for English, you know, my English is not good enough. So I have to read very slowly so that I can understand. (Gao 2)

On a more micro-level, it was a vital factor in the in-lecture competition they faced between attending to the spoken word and keeping a written record. Even when simply copying notes from OHTs, as they could not hold very much in short-term memory or summarise on the fly, their copying was very much slower than their local counterparts' and limited the value of the lecture as a source of deep learning:

And I can't catch the speed that the tutor change the OHP. (FW)

So we don't have enough time thinking and understanding. (Connor 2)

5.6.1.2.1. Study/life balance

Responding to this time pressure could create conflict with a prevailing belief in the value of balance. It appeared that insisting on health-giving balance might actually threaten study success. Gao was deeply dissatisfied with his mid-semester immersion in study:

It's a kind of my life but I don't think it is all my life, 100% I need to study hard, do the study all the time, not my life. Maybe 60% to study, other 40% time I need I can do sport or other things. (2)

Others felt they erred in the other direction, holding themselves to blame for failure to allot enough time to study or to begin work on tasks early enough. MB recalled that his attention to social needs in his first semester ("lots of parties and lots of time gonna spend to talk") had impinged with unfortunate consequences on his study time.

These pressures increased as assignments "bumped together" (Gemma 3) and exams approached towards the end of the semester:

In the end I was just totally stressed, like I was like staying up till the morning, like the next day it was the exam and then I was up for 6 o'clock, 5 o'clock. (Gemma 3)

In some cases, a limitation of potential activities was forced on the students, in that they had no sense of choice in giving them up. Ironically this category included measures designed to improve their study, such as the study skills workshops and assignment consultation offered by the student learning service. Other limitations were more strategic, resulting from their reflection on what they could eliminate with fewest ill effects, such as choosing which parts of the course materials to give close attention to and which to ignore, or deciding to defer taking a part-time job until they had scoped the study task. Appendix 11 gives a fuller account of these two categories.

Nevertheless, some students were managing to fit other activities in among the times of intense study activity, as Thomas indicates:

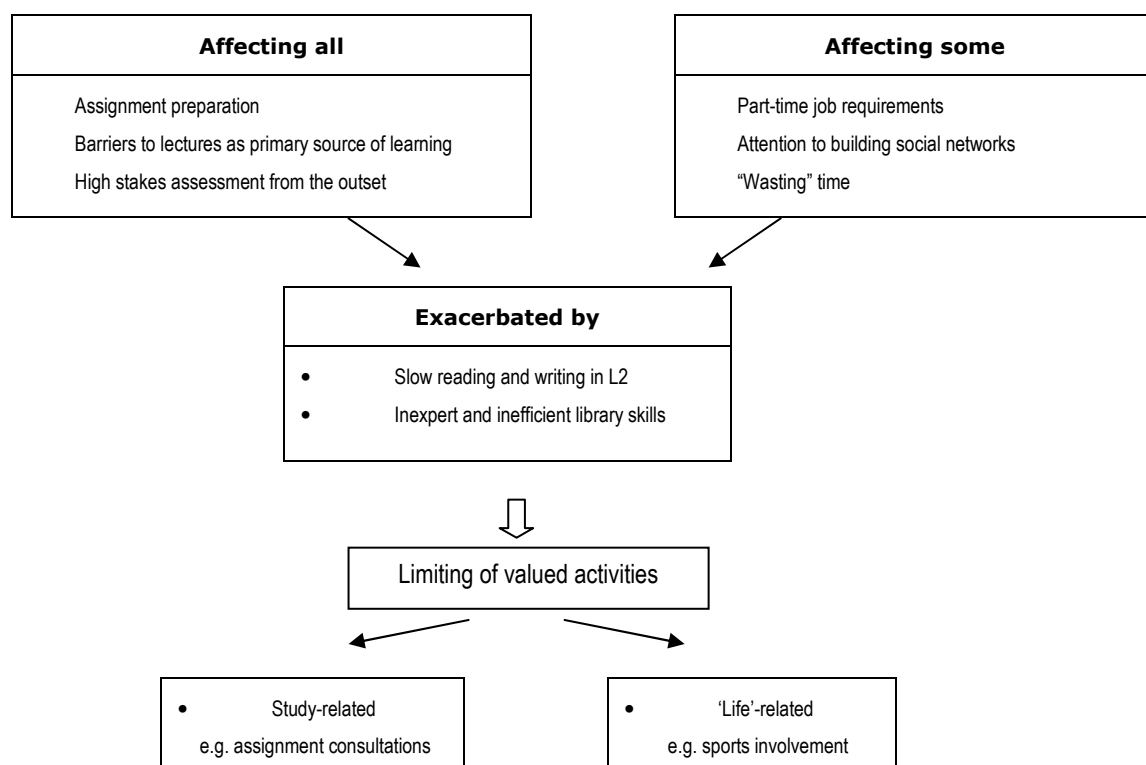
I think just the Monday and Tuesday is so busy because we have many the course, class, and located in the Rutherford any place. And other time, I think, we have the many the colourful life, such as the surf the internet, and you know I like to play the PC game. (Thomas 2)

There were signs of emerging strategies to deal with time-related issues. Mike and Scott had both implemented time management regimes learned from one of their courses of study:

I got a whole year timetable [indicating wall chart]. I mark down everything, important time, important day, what shop and anything, I write it up and wake up and go to have a look which one is today I have to do and which one is coming up, so if finish I cross it. (Scott 2)

Instituting these regimes was obviously a source of pride to them, a sign of growing expertise, and throughout the study, being in control of their time management held this meaning for the students. However, it is pertinent to note that after the final exams, both Thomas and Mike felt in retrospect that they had not put enough time into studying. Figure 5.3 summarises the time pressures they experienced.

Figure 5.3 Time pressures



5.6.2. In search of competence

The two framing conditions of anonymity and heavy time pressures were pernicious in that they removed the most obvious means of overcoming problems, taking time to consult with more expert others. With no obvious route to such expertise we might see the students' progress through the semester as the search for an understanding of how to construct a sense of competence and membership by navigating the demands and confusions of their new community of practice. From the second interview it was clear that there was a divergence of experience in this process that seemed to arise more from its affective components than from any clear difference in academic results.

5.6.2.1. *Affective responses*

The sense of excitement that had been evident in the first interview still persisted in some quarters when students returned halfway through the semester. Mike and Thomas were two who seemed to have encompassed stress as a normal reaction to the unknown and found, or foresaw, a way through it. When asked about the best things that had happened to him, Mike said:

I catch the study oversea, the oversea university study. (2)

And Thomas's response to a question about bad experiences was:

My the biggest wish is the enter the Rutherford University, so I think after the enter Rutherford University, anything is good. No bad. (2)

Others seemed to be more sombre and suffused by anomie. An important cause of confusion was the bewildering contrast with Chinese experiences. KT remembered a loss of her sense of trajectory and agency:

I didn't know what's going on. It seems like other people were very used to it, and other people, they were finding their ways around, and they had cars and they have good flats and such and I was like, what's going on to me, you know, I'm not on my way, you know, on the right track, so I feel a bit lonely, I feel a bit sad and homesick, and a little bit discouraged, but -- because before I was very, I'm not making compliment on myself, but it's just that I could control most of the things when I was in high school, I was the monitor¹¹. (KT)

Gao, looking back in a later interview, said at first he simply had not known what he should be doing to effect learning and meet course requirements in the absence of explicit instructions:

¹¹ A position of class leadership.

And the [Chinese] teachers they tell us, ‘OK, you got to hand in these tomorrow and you got to hand in that next week,’ so they all notice you and they sort of control -- not a good word but, you know, you know what to do. But when I was at Rutherford in the first week, second week, maybe first month, I didn’t know what to do [laughs], apart from going to the lecture I didn’t know what to do, when should I hand in assignments and when should I start? You know, I didn’t know when to start. (5)

Li Ming attempted to put a brave face on the situation starting his second interview with “I think everything is going well.” With the next breath and without any further prompting he listed eight problems he had encountered, namely, time management, large classes preventing access to the lecturer, not enough practically focused workshops, his own continuing laziness, the large quantity of things he needed to learn, the speed of delivery of lecturers, their failure to point out what aspect of the lectures and textbook was “important” and his lack of opportunity to speak English. In short, his hopes for gentle teacher mediation into the practices of the university which would see him as an independent but engaged learner (5.4.1) had not been met.

I will look first at some of the arenas where participants were confronted by the need to build new expertise before returning to the question of the diverging experience of the process.

5.6.3. Getting learning

It might seem a truism to say that their first task was to learn, but this certainly presented problems, not least of which arose out of the central ritual of the university, the lecture.

5.6.3.1. Lectures

Aside from their size and the competing requirements of listening and writing, at this point the students were disappointed with other aspects of lectures. In particular, the belief that western education had a strongly practical focus had not been borne out:

They don’t give you too much exercise, sometimes they just demand you to read through the book and just discuss in your tutorial, and I think the most easy thing is just give us more exercise. Then we can know the knowledge and practise our knowledge, but they did not. (Li Ming 2)

Planned strategies for dealing with lectures had not proved useful: May’s plan not to take notes floundered on her inability to follow the spoken word: “she didn’t stop, she

just talking, talking, talking, talking” (2). GZ had begun by relying on friends to overcome his complete incomprehension, but realised he needed more self-sufficiency: “they can’t always help me and what I can’t understand I can’t always ask them.”

A key to learning was the relationship between self-study and lecture, both to render the input comprehensible and to supplement it appropriately, but this was not always apparent. The obvious impediment was an inadequate investment in time, either because of what I have called forced limiting:

And then very important feeling is that you really need to pre-read the book...
But every day you got two paper, you got two lecture for one paper respective,
then that’s not easy to arrange time. (FW)

or because of a failure to realise the importance:

the lecturer go over stuff very quickly and he expect us to do a lot of work on
our own, and after the lectures, but I didn’t get that message, so halfway
through I just can’t follow him. I just gave up. (MB)

A third reason was in actually making the connections between textbooks and lecture material which will be explored below in Vignette 1.

It is important to note, though, that the participants were also readily able to locate instances of teachers who made lectures more accessible to them, and the measures they mentioned included using plenty of illustrative examples and detailed explanations, working examples on the whiteboard and using humour.

5.6.3.1.1. Attendance

Only Li Ming and Gemma admitted to missing lectures on a regular basis. Those who attended regularly were not necessarily motivated, though, by an expectation of content learning. In the imagined university, one might suppose that fully functioning attendance at lectures would be seen as a central experience, as an indicator of membership. It is the iconic place of imagined meeting between student, teacher and content. In the following extracts we can see reference to its role in helping students perceive new ways of thinking and in improving listening skills. However, I take the italicised phrases to indicate a claiming of right to this experience (Sky) and an intention to learn being-and-doing a university student (Scott) as part of the reason for going:

But I also heard a lot of student, they are stay at home ... they don’t like go to
lecture. I don’t know why. *I think you spend money.* I don’t quite feel the

lecturer can help you a lot in, I mean, the final test, ... but that's a good way to learn a lot, because some question, you can't think in that way (Sky 2)

Even if some friends tell me the lecture is boring, just review the study guide or maybe the some things just make a review, or you can get the material or lecture notes from the WebCT, you don't need go to school every day, but I don't think so. Because even if I go to lecture *I not only practise my study experience increasing*, also practise my listening and speaking, is quite general, so is very important. (Scott 2)

5.6.3.2. Tutorials and workshops

Some courses had tutorials which more readily matched both the size and the practices of language centres, and thus more closely approximated expectations than lectures. Their informality and size “let the student close their tutor, their lecturer” and they had a practical element (Scott 2); and Connor appreciated a more direct engagement with learning: “you don't need necessary to write down something, just try to thinking and remember and communicate with some other peoples” (2). Attendance was therefore generally more highly valued than for lectures: “entered the tutorial it's 100%” (Thomas 2). Workshops in courses with a calculation component, though still large, were appreciated for their practical focus. Unfortunately, not all courses had these more scaffolded opportunities for learning.

5.6.3.3. Other sources

Aside from these timetabled learning events, under their own resources students sought learning by reading and consulting others (teachers and more experienced students, among others). These practices will be discussed in the next two chapters.

5.6.4. Encountering assessment

5.6.4.1. Assignments

You need to use the computer and to think about it by yourself, so that is not easy for the people did it the first time. (Li Ming 2)

Assignments have been implicated already as contributors to the stress the students felt: they absorbed time, caused the stress of uncertainty and provided painful lessons

that the discourse was not yet understood, and satisfaction when good grades suggested that it had been.

Vignette 1: The first test for Mike and Saul

I take my first test in Rutherford, so what an important test for me! (Saul 2)

Several of the participants studied a particular course, C101, which had a test in the fourth week. Understandably, as the first test of their university career, with marks contributing to their final grade, this was a significant event as will be illustrated here by accounts of what it meant to Mike and Saul.

A major difficulty for this and other courses was knowing what to study: “I don’t know which part I should to focus on, should concentrate” (Saul 2). In China there had been explicit guidance and in previous study in New Zealand, sample questions had been given. Saul’s first step had been to approach the teacher suggesting sample questions in class, but his request was rejected, “and they say, ‘Oh no, no, no, you shouldn’t do this, it is not very useful, it is the kind of cheating.’” (Saul 2). This was very puzzling to Saul, so he sought help from a less mysterious source, borrowing a previous test paper from a Chinese friend. Mike took the same measure and their different responses to the process of working through this test paper and the course materials provide one key to the divergence indicated above (5.6.2).

Mike had entered the university with confident expectations sustained by the apparent success of preview reading (5.5.2): “and I think it’s not difficult” (1). In what proved to be a pattern of his experience, he soon discovered that the reality was often more complex. His good intentions about preview reading had lapsed because he had not known how to read the textbooks in a purposeful way and he had found himself without any apparent source of learning:

No idea about what I should do and even I do that I still no idea, ‘Oh, why I do that? and what I do?’ ... and waste time, and open the book and for few hours I just read little page. (2)

However, having in front of him the borrowed test paper, the textbook, his own notes and lecture notes, all this at a time when he was obviously attending deeply to their amassed meaning because of the impending test, he had what can be described as a metacognitive experience:

I borrow my friend’s last year’s test, I saw that and, ‘Oh, this question relates to the textbook and my notes and I should read my notes and text carefully with the lecture notes!’ (2)

In the presence of questions that indicated what kind of meaning to look for, aided by more focused other course material, suddenly he was able to locate meaning and see that with careful reading it could be used to support learning. He felt armed with a valuable new strategy for his studies, adjusting his practices accordingly after the test by planning time to read for assignments and tests. Evident, too, is a restoration of his

sense of competence as a university student: “The result [of the test] is good and I know I’m doing this is right and it’s useful.”

Saul did not have the same sort of epiphany. He failed the test in spite of hard work and could not understand why:

I think I try my best to have class with every lecture and every workshop, every tutorial, and I try to communicate with not only the lecturer but also the tutor, and before the test I spent two days to stay in library, maybe seven or eight hours to review, but actually I have no point about what is the lecturer want us to catch (2)

There was a significant difference between the two students, however. As Mike was honing his reading skills, Saul had completely rejected this highly sanctioned strategy for university learning which was serving other students very well indeed. He was therefore not able to make the connection Mike had seen and realise that the textbook could be a useful tool.

Nevertheless, Saul did feel he had learned something from the test; we can see him in the grip of a metacognitive experience as well:

After the test I thought, ‘Oh, the lecturer just ask us to focus on the New Zealand part’ ... I know that is teacher’s way to test us which part is important and which part is unimportant.

While Mike felt he had learned about *how* to study, Saul’s learning was about *what* to study.

5.6.4.2. Exams

Predictably the exam period was a time of great stress as students tried to catch up on the reading they had not thus far managed and to predict what exams in New Zealand would be like.

5.6.4.2.1. Preparation

Generally course materials, practice exercises and in-class reviews had given guidance, but for some courses these had not been provided, or not in a form that was fully available to these students. For example, they could experience course content as overwhelming and amorphous:

The tutor give some main point, but I remember is the J201, the main point including whole book. Nearly whole book, ooh! (Sky 3)

In-class revision could be at a speed which left the L2 speakers floundering, especially in the absence of previous exam papers:

She give maybe five example in the course, but that's just too quick. I just read the topic and the people's answer and she go to the other one, so I didn't know what happen. (May 3)

This teacher was the same one who had turned down Saul's request for preview samples of the first test. When he appealed for further guidance on the exam she advised that he should "just keep to copy, copy again, again, again, you know, just to let all the knowledge to stuck to your brain," which he was unconvinced by: "if you didn't understand the concept, maybe you can match the wrong example" in the multiple choice exam. He remained deeply puzzled by an apparent unwillingness to elucidate the mystery around this exam and support students towards success:

I don't understand. I think not only the student want to pass the test and the final. The lecturers also want to pass, and they didn't feel that is quite good if they fail two thirds. (3)

Inevitably, students developed their own strategies for making the task manageable including being selective in what they revised thoroughly, as all students might (see Appendix 11). The strategies that were most significant to their L2 speaker status were questions around which language to use, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and choices about memorising.

As Saul's doubt above exemplifies, the students rejected rote memorisation as a general strategy, and made a strong association between memorising and understanding, though only in the first sense that Marton et al (1996) describe, understanding as an aid to retention. May had said in her first interview, "if I understand what they talking about I will remember that. If I just try to remember that and don't try to understand, I will forgot it" (1). The prospect of writing L2 essays under exam conditions caused Connor, among others, to revise this stance a little, demonstrating the effect of task on choice of learning approach (Biggs, 1996):

I think the try to understand way is the best way, but sometimes I just memorise just for the exam ... For the overseas student maybe we should spend more time for write down some essay, essay for the exam, I mean write down some essay just like the real exam and read it again, write it again, and do a lot of times for remember it, and in the exam just write. (3)

Most of the students, though, restricted their use of memorising to theories and definitions, and otherwise sought to remember ideas rather than "sentences":

I'm not remember all the sentence what they talking about. I just try to understand the sentence and at the exam I just use my mind to make the sentence. (May 3)

Then some of the concept is just like terminologies that people use in business field I guess I have to remember it like, some of the things that you can say it in your own words, because it's just pretty much like commonsense, common knowledge, but some of the knowledge is not, you got to remember the concept, what exact, which person said this. (Gemma 3)

Mike erred in the other direction, relying, at the cost of a failed course, on reading with understanding as adequate trigger for his memory (see 6.2.2.5).

5.6.4.2.2. Sitting the exams

Exams are inherently stressful for all students, of course, but there were certainly added challenges posed by working in L2, especially for those like Connor whose English proficiency was well below the norm. It was hard to muster the ideas in L2 and write in a coherent fashion, which led one of the students to recommend what seemed like a wise strategy: "Just kept it simple. Don't use the long sentence. Sometimes confuse the marker and confuse yourself" (JN). However, others felt that not being able to add value to your answers in some way would also be disadvantageous. Being able to write in a way that met "the university standard" was one of the reasons that Gemma gave for memorising definitions. Connor was frustrated at being unable to call upon shared knowledge with his teachers to elaborate his answers, and once again clearly perceived reproduction as a less than optimum, if unavoidable, strategy:

Some Kiwi student can make the example in the New Zealand economic but we don't know too much about that so it's very hard for us so we just make the example in some case on the textbooks. But I think if I do that way the teacher, the mark is not very good. Your teacher likes you have your own idea, and you can make example in real life. That's the different. (3)

Throughout the study, written exams seemed to disadvantage these students seriously.

5.6.4.3. Interpreting assessment results

A vitally important self-measure of how well they were being-and-doing a university student was in terms of results. Responses though were not straightforward. Success could indicate they were on the right track, but could equally delude into a false sense of

security; failure could deplete their energy if they could see no other path, or on the contrary be a powerful spur to learning.

Early successes had in some cases been able to relieve some of the stress:

Quite worry about my first time assignment result, and don't know am I do the wrong thing or right thing? ... I'm confusing and nervous on B101 and G101. But after week four I got my G101 result. I got B so that's all right, I settled down. (Scott 2)

They could equally be a trap of their own. Mike identified his early good results as the reason that he did not put enough effort into his exams in spite of advice from more experienced friends.

In reacting to failure or disappointing meagre passes, participants tended to avoid a complete self identification with the negative event. It could, for example, be measured not against general norms, but against what they as international students could be expected to achieve: "for normally not good, I think I do this kind of thing I get this mark" (Connor 2), or by presenting the failure alongside other instances of success:

I feel very happy when I got my A101 draft plan back. I have got a very high mark, so that's very happy, the happy event. The very sad event, maybe I think I have to do a lot of work on E101. (Linda 2)

Another way was to focus clearly on the value of failure for moving one's learning along, and accounts of this will be examined in Chapter 7. Failures were most devastating where one could not find adequate explanation of them, no insight into how to operate differently the next time:

And the bad time is I failed two test in C101, and I have no idea, actually, because I don't think I am that kind of -- You know, I go to every workshop, and I go to every lecture, and I take marvellous notes, and before the tests I used one week to review (Saul 3)

In the absence of a good reason for it, a high mark was no greater reassurance for the bewildered Saul:

Before I take that G101 test I feel quite stressful, you know. After that I still feel quite stressful, but when I got the result it make me cheerful, but just maybe one second, or one minute. Really surprise. (Saul 3)

Seven of the 12 in the longitudinal study failed a course in the first semester. The ability to manage a convincing positive self-representation in the face of failure was one of the lines along which the student experience seemed to diverge.

5.6.4.4. Re-locating sources of motivation

Some of the participants found enthusiasm for learning was waning. Gao, mid-semester, was still self-driven, but “I want to study” has a very different meaning here from what it did in 5.3.1:

At the moment I want to study hard, nobody said me ‘You need to study’ or ‘You must study.’ Just because myself I study hard. But for me I can’t enjoy to study hard. (Gao 2)

They were finding that the absence of the overt monitoring of daily study they were habituated to in China did not make such a very big difference after all; due dates were constantly imminent, and they served as forcefully as extrinsic motivators:

You have to be really well organised, like everything by yourself, and there is no one to chase you up to tell you what to do next, but if you don’t do it you will be in trouble, but not like in China like the teachers always chase you up, and say, ‘Well, tomorrow you’ve got to hand in this. The next day, you should do this.’ But here, that’s your own business, if you don’t do it that’s your problem. (Gemma 2)

Some were, like Saul, finding it difficult “just to have some kind of energy or some motivate you can have more confident to continue” (2): “I just want to something can really push me and give me, ‘Mm, that’s great,’ and I can have enough confidence” (Saul 2). Louise used financial considerations to keep her going: “When I don’t want to study I will tell myself, if you didn’t pass this paper, you should spend more money” (3).

It is, however, important to acknowledge that success was not only to be measured in the classroom. These first few weeks had placed them in new relationships with a range of people, and we look now at some of these.

5.6.5. Developing social networks

‘Cause you’ve got to have mates at university. (MB)

As Tinto (1993) suggests, intricately intertwined with the academic journey were questions of personal and social support. At this point in their university careers participants were looking for opportunities to make new friends. This need was most acute for those whose prior New Zealand study had been elsewhere, and Gemma found she was quite lonely in spite of living in a student hall. MB had responded to a similar

situation by putting energy into developing a social network at the expense of study time:

Quite important for me, because the hostel where I stayed I'm the only international student in there, so if I don't make any friends, I'm pretty much isolated in that place.

A number of students pointed out that conditions for making close friendships were much better in Chinese dormitories, which reflected different values:

In China we maybe five or six maybe or sometimes ten students live in just one room but that make us generally very good friendship, but here maybe that's a different culture, people want their individual, their privacy, but in China we live together, we can get very strong friendship but here there is individual person first then friendship second. I think that, maybe that's the different style. (LH)

An important distinction was made between the nascent untried relationships developing and true friendship: "In the face we are friends, but you need to check this relationship during some thing, during some happens" (Connor 2). By the end of the semester these were strengthening.

The verdict on classes was that they did not facilitate friendship, though group tasks in tutorials created some contact. It was very clear that making friends with Chinese students was easiest, with other international students possible, but with local students much more difficult. By the end of the semester only three more of the longitudinal participants claimed to have acquired Kiwi friends, through a bible study group, sports and a neighbourhood contact (who proved to be transitory).

Of course, the university encompassed myriad small groupings. While meeting the entry criteria for enrolment provided a claim for membership of some of these, it did not necessarily spread to all, even those that were strongly university-affiliated such as clubs: "I don't know the -- how to say -- have the comfortable for meet club" (Thomas 2). Inhibition was an impediment, and the participants held a degree of self-blame that they could not overcome this to take up opportunities that they implied were somehow there: "I feel shy to talk to them, and I'm afraid my English is not good enough to communicate with them, and also it's probably the problem I have myself" (JN).

One student told of overcoming this inhibition by taking ten minutes to work up the courage to knock on the next-door room in her hostel to ask for some help in her first week. In fact, she found she was warmly received, although the local students spoke too fast for her to understand. However, her own finances dictated that within a week she

had moved into a flat with Chinese friends as a cheaper option. (Ironically then, that another participant suggested that prejudice against supposed Asian wealth was a reason for domestic students' resistance to making friends.)

Most unfortunate was Sky's belief at the end of the semester that "quite a lot of Kiwi student, they don't want to be a group with us" (3), since this was affecting her decision to enrol in a course with a compulsory group project.

5.6.5.1. *Isolation*

While most of the students were beginning to locate friendships within the university by the end of the semester, the gregarious and self-styled easy-going Gemma was finding that she had not been able to replace the social network she had had in her previous city. She had made one good friendship with another Chinese student, but that was all. She was thoughtful about this suggesting that friendship was impractical in a regime where she would always need to turn down invitations to go out:

Because I always believe that people they can be friends they have a lot of things in common, they do a lot of things together, and they talk about things they both interested in. But when it comes, you know, you do your own things and they do their own things it's kind of difficult to. (3)

Of course, there are other bases for friendship than outings, especially among a group of people all under a degree of time pressure, but she had found no affordances for such relationships to develop within the system.

5.6.6. *The way ahead*

Inevitably the first semester was a destabilised period as students sought to make sense of their new environment. Confusion and false steps occurred, and could be debilitating if the sense of overarching trajectory was lost, and so signs of successful adjustment to new demands and more ease in their role were heartening for them.

5.6.6.1. *New practices*

Such signs there were, and some of them have already been mentioned (time management and Mike's new ability to read the textbook effectively). A number of students claimed a more disciplined approach to study, often associated with more time

spent in the library. Other practices mentioned among the group were greater consultation with classmates, more efficient location and use of reference material, more selective note-taking skills based on closer listening, and better reading. Some of these will be explored further in the following chapters.

5.6.6.2. *Alignment with the new academic culture*

By mid-semester there were some indications of the students' attitudes centring more fully on the new culture, moving from resentment of some of its features (such as the lack of sources of personal academic guidance) to an acceptance and apparent adoption of its values. For example, in response to a question about whether they were learning useful new skills, a number of them highlighted deeper insight into self-study and an appreciation of it:

I just find maybe I'm more flexible than what I used to be. Not just follow the lecture. Actually it's to teach you the ability to find the information you need to what you want. (Linda 2)

Yeah, useful, because I'm already 24 and 24 I learn how to study on my own.
Yeah, I waste lots of time. (Sky 2)

On the other hand, Li Ming was finding a teaching method dependent on reading textbooks was "quite out of date," and would have preferred to "just listen the lecture and get the important thing" (2). Saul was puzzled by a process that threw students into the maelstrom of internal assessment from the outset: "but I don't know why they [don't] just give us very low start to let us feel more confident. That is the Chinese way" (2).

By the end of the semester, there was a firm assertion from most of the students in the longitudinal study that they were learning better than they had in China:

I think I learn much better [than] in China. ... Because now I know what I should do. Yes, in China ... actually I'm study and, how to say, no goals for me, I just study and even I got bad result and good result, no matter. When after my college I went on work and I think, 'Oh, I don't know nothing.' (Mike 3).

I think I understood most of the content. But in China, you know, we study just for the exam. After the exam we forgot all of the things, all given back to the tutor, but now I got the content because I read the book and I has been studying very hard. (Li Ming 3)

Gao and May had solved the persistent question of what was important: “And also I know why should I study this one, which part is really useful and which part is not really useful” (Gao 3).

There remained difficulties and confusions, though. Entering this complex community with a sense of expertise would take more than four months. The language barrier still filtered content from them. The mysteries remained: Connor had found the exams “just like gambling. Because we don’t know what lecturers or teachers think and some teacher didn’t told us how to give us the guide or way” (3).

5.6.6.3. *Legitimately peripheral or marginal?*

This exploratory period had often been about the process of inhabiting convincingly and confidently the new identity of university student. The students were on a continuum, at one end of which were those who seemed to have retained their sense of agency, not yet arrived at expertise, but still clearly seeing ways towards it, feeling they had learned valuable lessons about navigating their trajectory and adopted specific measures that they believed would help them do that. The other end was a much more sombre spot where the process was confusing and there was no clear vision as to how they should change their practices. There were, too, points in between, and students who changed their positions between interviews. I would like to end this section by looking at the participants in the first phase of the longitudinal study in terms of their placement on this continuum, establishing three groups according to my sense of how they felt about the experience.

5.6.6.3.1. Group A

The most confident group I have designated Group A, comprising Louise, May, Mike and Scott. These students were experiencing challenges and stress, but they maintained a positive outlook indicating specific measures they intended to take, or were already taking, which offered progress. The vignettes of Scott, Mike and May in Chapter 7 provide accounts of the learning approaches and attitudes of Group A students. See, too, Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Group A students

Name Interview	Indications of confusion, lack of clear plan, struggle with task	Indications of sense of progress	Overall tone of the interview
Louise 2 3	<i>Can you also listen to what the teacher is saying and take notes from that?</i> Not very often. No negatives expressed	Yes. B. First assignment is B. Actually I think anything is OK. For me I think the happy thing is I got the good result.	<i>Satisfied, on trajectory, normal difficulty</i> <i>Satisfied, on trajectory, normal difficulty.</i>
May 2 3	And at the course I try to catch the tutor's talk the course, I want to before she studying the course I read the book first, and I tried that but at the last week I can't, I can't catch it, because I have heaps assignments to do and tests, so I use all of the time to do the assignments and the test, so I didn't read the book. And I can say I failed, one terrible thing, I failed the D101 the second test.	I thinking about every people is at the same level. I didn't need to worry about anything. I will do it better, do it by myself is the better. Maybe I can catch them or at the same level. Yeah, I must can do that, any people can do that, I can do that, too. I know how to study which part is important, just a little bit more know how to study.	<i>Expectation of understanding and active role to achieve it; confusions temporary</i> <i>Erratic results, but an active role in pursuing clarification, learning.</i>
Mike 2 3	the first few weeks of study I have no idea. I haven't read the book and I just attend the lecture and then listen and no -- [indicates nothingness, no comprehension]. At home I have no read the books. I think, 'Oh, it's easy,' or something, and I [thought] I did it, but maybe later I feel wrong or I don't really realise what should I do and get a better result, so at final not good.	At first I have no idea about study but now I have little idea how to study at Rutherford. Yes. If my exam result is continue to up there, I think I can't learn more but I think ... if at that moment I just think I'm doing enough, but now I think I'm did not enough and I will change my some skills and listen to my friends and put more time on study.	<i>Continued enthusiasm in spite of temporary setbacks as course practices reveal new ways of working</i> <i>Pattern of entering with confidence, finding unforeseen complexities but drawing new insight and new confidence.</i>
Scott 2 3	It's quite, quite tough. Every day, especially for international students because they choosing the second language for their study, so is quite - - I don't think so hard for <u>anyone</u> , but quite hard for most of the international students. quite worry about final exams because that was first time for me so I don't know how the exam going.	I know my effort is not a zero, so that is good, even if I'm still make some mistake, I still make some silly mistake but next time, I can avoid them. But try to do my best, then better than the last one. I think more confident than the first time. I think, oh, exam like this, so I feel confident a little bit increased because I can handle well, and that is keep going, keep going, keep going.	<i>Sense of agency in spite of challenge; step-by-step learning</i> <i>Circumspection about the unknown but familiarity restores his sense of agency</i>

5.6.6.3.2. Group B

Group B encompasses those students at the other end of the continuum, Connor, Li Ming and Saul (see Table 5.3). Nobody was without both positive and negative experiences, but for these students the negative seemed to dominate and there was an anxiety about whether they really were going to be able to succeed and an absence of clear plans to change their current approach in spite of its apparent inadequacy. Li Ming, for example, was able to describe a well-structured plan in interviews 2 and 3 for improving his learning, involving preview and review reading and high attendance, but admitted that it would not be practicable as he did not have time to implement it.

Table 5.3 Group B students

Name Interview	Indications of confusion, lack of clear plan, struggle with task	Indications of sense of progress	Overall tone of the interview
Connor 2 3	Because my level is not good so I afraid fail the paper. not very good balance, because I think I also have problem with that, because I need to spend more time on study. I haven't enough time. I just read some principle but I haven't read the case for explain the principle. Maybe the meaning is not very clearly, so I think that's a problem for answer some question in the exam.	Maybe do next time better, [im]prove, step by step. Study at university, communicate with some Kiwi friend or Kiwi classmate has also open my idea, opened my mind.	<i>Sombre tone, but talking up his struggle: failure is asserted to be normal, and can see what to do next</i> <i>Confusion about content of courses, chastened by exam, self-ascribed bad study habits.</i>
Li Ming 2 3	I don't know. I am still struggling to do it better. Just try my best. I don't have the specific plan for my next the half semester. in that period I went to the restaurant, the takeaway, to do the job. After that I don't have time to look read the book, just like that ... I just worry about my study, I try to figure out all the things.	Independent living: because I can cook the food very well. Maybe I, how to say, more independent, and experience the life oversea, just like I tell you. ... At least I have to deal with all the things, pay the electric bill or something like that.	<i>Sombre tone, study challenges overwhelming</i> <i>Sombre tone, study aspects overwhelming. Learning better, better life skills.</i>
Saul 2 3	I feel quite pressure and frustrated ... before the test I spent two days to stay in library, maybe seven or eight hours to review, but actually I have no point about what is the lecturer want us to catch. it is quite stressful, you know. I think is -- some paper is quite strange, ... I don't know which one I should focus on, yeah, so that is why I feel so stressful. I think whole semester is quite bad.	<i>Managing regular attendance at 8 am workshop:</i> so I think for me I think if you have this kind of perseverance, can insist to do one things, it is make me real pleased. Good time is I got a really high mark at my G101 test. It is 20 out of 25, I think is A. It is quite surprising, though, because at the time I don't think I prepare very well, and I still have some problems, but that is multiple choice, so that is why, I think I just depend on luck, I think.	<i>Sombre tone, no sense of what he can do that is different but seeing that present strenuous effort is not working</i> <i>Still no idea of how to improve study. Small moments of feeling good, but mostly confusion and stress.</i>

Whereas in the first interview he had hoped for opportunities of “voicing out” his opinion in class, giving vent to his natural talkativeness and developing a friendly relationship with the teacher, in the second he sadly proclaimed a setback in his oral skills, was skipping classes and thus missing guidance on assignments, and was even considering whether attendance was necessary at all:

Just my friend told me last week she didn't attend to the D101 course for whole semester but she did the final exam and get a good mark, just like that. She didn't know about what does look like for the lecturer and just give the assignment and take the final exam. (Li Ming 2)

His loss of a sense of agency is perhaps manifest in his fatalistic pronunciation of the phrase “just like that” fourteen times in the second interview. However, as one of the youngest in the study, he was proud of advances he had made gaining independence in his personal life, citing his new earning power in a part-time job, his growing circle of

friends (including a Kiwi) and his management of such mundane matters as paying the bills and buying toilet paper: “I begin to suitable about the life here” (3).

Another example of this group was Saul. On the whole, apart from brief moments where some kind of competence could be claimed (as when he realised that he actually had more confidence about participating in discussion than some of his native-speaker classmates), the semester was characterised by confusion about what he should do and puzzlement that what he did, which had served him well in the past, appeared to be making no difference to his results. However, Saul believed that with effort it was possible to experience growth as a result of personal suffering, and that there is personal congratulation due to persistent effort, and this gave him some spirit to drive himself forward.

5.6.6.3.3. Group C

Between these two are Group C students, not quite so definable. Here I have included Sky and Linda, students who fluctuated between positive and negative feelings to such a degree that I had no sense of which predominated, and Gao, Gemma and Thomas, whose response changed considerably between interviews (see Table 5.4)

Sky clearly struggled with course work, feeling “so worried” about assignments handed in and anxious about how to begin the next ones with no obvious sources of enlightenment, eventually failing one course. Positive feelings for her, though, did not seem entirely dependent on a sense of competence or good results as they did for Saul. In her first interview she had talked of her experience of university in China saying it had not been “my dream”: “not much communication and they can’t connect, but here good, but I still can’t connection.” It was her inhibitions which barred her from “connecting,” but she was nevertheless excited at being in the presence of that possibility. “I love it!” she said (2 & 3). She also maintained an active extracurricular life, doing voluntary work, sport and a part-time job.

Of those who changed group between interviews, for Gemma and Thomas it was in a negative direction, chastened when semester-end demands undermined earlier confidence. Gemma’s previous experiences studying business in a New Zealand polytechnic had been positive: she had successfully engaged in interactive learning involving both teachers and local students; she had built a social network that included locals; she had had a range of “overseas experiences” (1) which in some sense validated the decision to come, such as homestay, flatting and part-time jobs. In all the spheres

which seemed seminal to these students' sense of identity as students in New Zealand, she had already proved herself. She arrived at the university as someone with a secure identity who assumed she would readily adjust to the nuances of difference that the university might present.

Table 5.4 Group C students

Name Interview Group	Indications of confusion, lack of clear plan, struggle with task	Indications of sense of progress	Overall tone of the interview
Gao 2 C	Learning centre, they told me some study method, but I suppose that is really helpful, but I can't try to do it or practise it because no have time.	Bible group: a new thinking method, and also new knowledge. ... I think it's quite important for my daily life. Advice from previous teacher: after that I felt better.	<i>Sombre tone, but perhaps light at the end of tunnel; good results, strategies to restore study/life balance</i>
3 A	But I still worry about exam, because first time to take exam at Rutherford. You know, nervous. Even though my tutors told me, 'Ah, you will be fine.'	100% it's good. I'm satisfied with my study in this semester.	<i>Very positive. Learning better, knowing what to study</i>
Gemma 2 A	just like two weeks before the break, and I got so many assignments to you know hand it in, so ... stress.	With my studies I think I did pretty good, and I got two As so far. But I will see. It's not as hard as I thought. I thought Rutherford would be quite hard, but it's similar standard from the school I was in before.	<i>Some frustrations but success as challenges are met</i>
3 C	I know the lecturers all have office hour but it's just like so many things and I didn't know what to ask. I knew that I need to go through it myself first and then, so yeah, that was just awful.	It wasn't too bad, because ... you mean my results? I got like three B+ and one B-. I mean, that wasn't so great, though. Because I was expecting I would get one A at least.	<i>Success, but huge stress and no fun.</i>
Linda 2 B	The very sad event, maybe I think I have to do a lot of work on E101. So I just, I think I give my too much pressure to myself, I want to study hard on that part.	I'm quite happy study at Rutherford, as long as I have here. The teacher was very good. I learn what I will used in the future, I think that is essential for my life, I am very happy study at Rutherford.	<i>Accepts role as active learner, but clear pathways not identified</i>
3 B	Inaudible recording	Inaudible recording	<i>Accepts role as active learner, but clear pathways not identified</i>
Sky 2 B	Because I faced a first assignment, my J201. I'm not that clear about what I'm going to write for the topic, but the teacher, the tutor, yeah, they just maybe spend just two or three minute to talk about the assignment, and also I'm afraid to ask.	I remember the day I can nearly totally understand what the tutor talk about. ... Because the tutor talk about I have learned that before in China. Maybe it's really good as I think before I came to Rutherford because I imagine a lot. Very good.	<i>Struggling but excited to be in the presence of learning practices which she aspired to but was excluded from by her timidity</i>
3 B	Yes. I also felt my English so poor and writing. I need to do more work. It's my fault.	I think I learn a lot in New Zealand than in China, because in here I learn how to learn, I learn how to thinking.	<i>Self-blaming for not working hard enough, enthusiastic about learning in new way.</i>
Thomas A	And, you know, in the lecture almost time I didn't know the lecturer's speaking, yeah, so I just write a notes.	my the biggest wish is the enter the Rutherford University, so I think after the enter Rutherford University, anything is good. No bad.	<i>Satisfied, on trajectory, normal difficulty</i>
3 B	I think most of time spent on the assignment, so last semester we prepared a final exam spent about one week, one week. I think not prepared enough.	[Long pause] Yeah. I think learn it well, yeah.	<i>Chastened by mediocre results. Way forward planned: translating materials</i>

Although she was shocked by the huge classes and time pressure she found, she maintained a high sense of personal agency through the first part of the semester, realising that “here you have to chasing the tutor, you can’t, you know, just sitting back” (1). She gave accounts of “chasing the tutor” in order to suggest changes in course practices (posting lecture notes on the WebCT), dispute what she felt was unfair marking and ask about course processes. This served her well as we shall see in 6.4.3.

In the third interview, she continued to present herself some of the time as a capable student, the exercise of whose capability was impeded by factors potentially subject to her own influence (like time management), and to applaud herself for what she did manage to achieve in spite of disappointments (at not getting an A, for example):

The final exam worth 75% and I did really well in that one because the exam was really hard, and also we got to read a whole book, it’s about that thick, and I just didn’t know what to focus on, like, it’s a lot of things to read and a lot of things to remember, so it’s hard.

By now, though, this agency was under threat as the task of assignment and exam preparation overwhelmed: “I didn’t know where to go to get help, like I know the lecturers all have office hour but it’s just like so many things and I didn’t know what to ask.” She was “struggling ... to get well organised for all my papers,” “just totally stressed” and finding the situation “just awful.” In the social sphere, too, progress had been slow (5.6.5.1), and she exuded an air of very much reduced confidence.

On the other hand, Gao’s dissatisfaction with the first few weeks had been so severe (5.6.1.2.1) that he had considered withdrawing. He had sought advice from one of his former English teachers who had suggested he see out the semester. Later, his feelings changed: “I enjoyed the second part of the semester. I changed my thinking” (3). He began to understand what was required of him, earn very high grades, and restore balance to his life with increased extracurricular activity. His move from a marginalised position is perhaps most manifest in his response to my question as to whether there was anything New Zealand teachers should do to assist international students. While in the previous interview he had suggested slowing down their speech, now he said, “I don’t think so, because we are equal like Kiwi students and international students are equal. Also the lecturer treat us equally, so I think it’s good” (3). See also Vignette 8.

5.6.6.3.4. A note on English levels

An interesting aspect of this allocation is that it does not correlate with level of English as evidenced either by IELTS results or language use within the interview itself.

Li Ming, Saul and Gao, all with IELTS Band 6, demonstrated good command of vocabulary and syntax as well as willingness to communicate, whereas Mike and Thomas, who both began in Group A, had Band 5.5 and were far less able to produce elaborated turns. On the other hand, Connor's extremely limited proficiency was so low that it perhaps fell below the threshold level above which other forces could come into play.

5.7. Beyond the first semester

Well, it's much better than the first semester, of course, you know. I've known what should I do and how can I achieve that. (Gao 4)

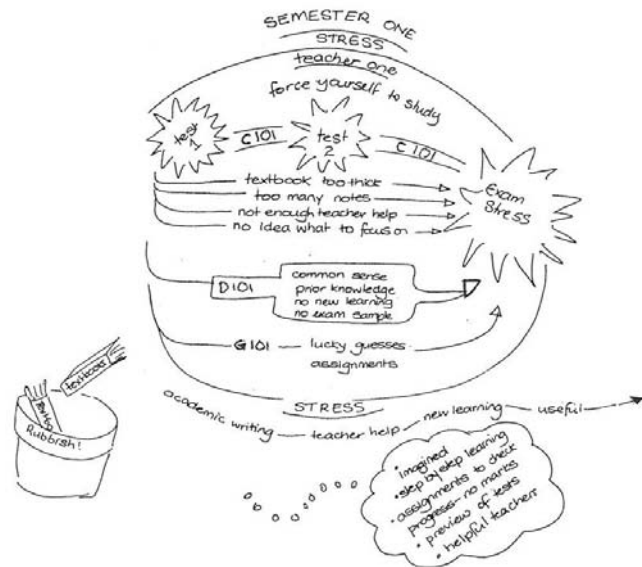
After the completion of the three first semester interviews six of the original participants agreed to return for further interviews for the duration of their undergraduate degrees, though one of these did not return after the first year. This number included students whom I had seen as belonging to each of the groups so provided a useful cross section. Students in the retrospective study also contribute to this section.

5.7.1. Increasing membership

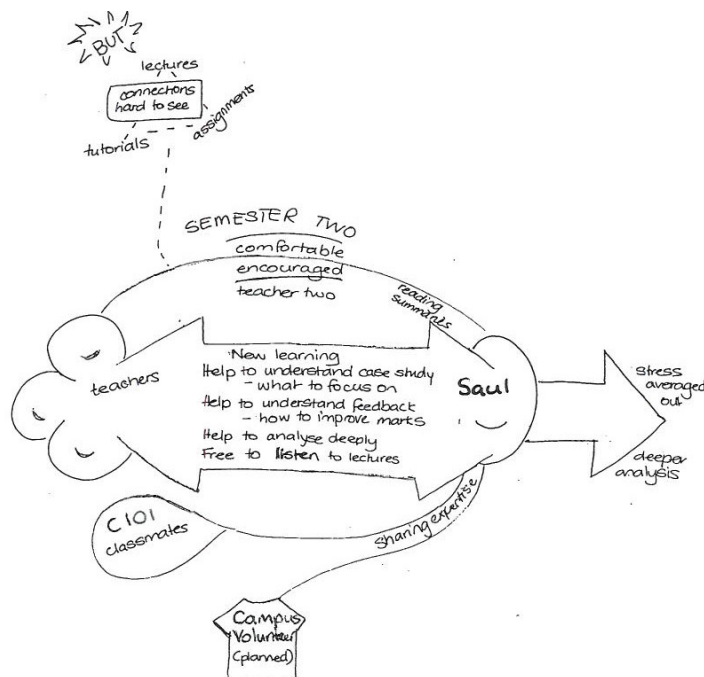
Most of the participants indicated an increasing sense of membership of the university learning community and a growing security that they had found ways to achieve their purposes there after the first semester, though there continued to be things to learn and hurdles to overcome. This contrast was particularly marked for Saul, as can be seen in Figure 5.4, extracted from his big picture.

Students continued to extend themselves over the ensuing semesters, responding to the increased familiarity with their task by trying slightly different approaches, such as increasing their engagement in leisure activities or taking on leadership roles in various arenas. By Year Two they were able to integrate their own learning styles to a much greater extent with the demands of the university, sometimes with its blessing, sometimes with a degree of resistance to certain of its intentions, and sometimes by a process of centring activity on particular places within it where such learning styles were accepted and responded to. An important contributor to this was the fact that they were now making more informed and personal choices about what they were studying.

Figure 5.4 Saul's big picture: Increasing membership Semester One



Semester Two



5.7.2. Persisting difficulties

5.7.2.1. Time pressures

The second semester continued the process of working out appropriate time allocation to deal with demands that showed no signs of reduction. For some, such as

MB, first semester disappointments had conveyed the message that more hours were required: “the next semester I start assignments as early as possible.” Others felt it was time to seek a better study/life balance. This proved difficult to achieve:

I studying four paper and then I found that I try to make more sporting, to play squash every day or something like that, but at the end, by the end I found my paper the results not very good. Also I pass, but it's not the high mark, or it's not what I want. (May 5)

By the second year, however, time management functioned as a measure of achieved expertise, even for those who had added a part-time job to the demands:

I can balance my study and part-time job. Even not a good result but I'm all pass paper ... this year I've got my part-time job so I think, 'Oh! Next week I got a house-cleaning, got a extra job so this week I will try to work out my assignment first.' (Mike 5)

Time, rather than incompetence, was now seen as the main cause of shortcomings in assignments: “Just no time to give me to find that how to make perfect” (May 5); “I don't think I do it very well, but I just hand it because I still have the two paper, final exam need to prepare” (Saul 5). May's attendance at lectures was a matter of balancing their predicted value against the demands of assignment preparation.

5.7.2.2. Stress

Some students continued to experience quite intense stress. Gemma's arose from the course work:

I never thought about giving up, 'cause, you know, what I'm after is a degree. I have to do it because my parents spent a lot of money on me. But sometimes I do get really stressed out, really like, you know, some assignment, this is really hard. (4)

There were also pressures related to the life stage they were at. TY, at 22, was just grappling with adult responsibilities:

we have lots of responsibility which, like, maybe we wasn't aware that we have lots of things have to do by yourself, we always, like, expect someone else to do it ... you find that heaps of problems comes at the same time, and you don't know which step to go, and you, especially for international students, you don't know who can help you. That's why I think heaps of international students, they find partners, they live together and they just want some company.

Though their origin and solution might lie elsewhere, such problems could impinge on study. The highly successful Gao attributed his completely unforeseen failure of one paper in Semester Two to unspecified personal problems.

5.7.2.3. *Other difficulties*

Saul was emerging from the fog of bewilderment which had characterised his first semester, but there were still areas of confusion for him and one of these was that the big picture often eluded him. He could see little connection between work done in tutorials and that of the lectures (“it’s like another project ... such as this lecture I told you how to do the muffin and this tutorial I told you how to do the pie,” 5), and needed guidance to see how assignments related to course material. This seems closely related to his first semester challenge of knowing what to focus on, and to a persisting difficulty in knowing how to structure his writing and link different ideas together (“It’s very very random. ... just write everything,” 6).

Understanding of vocabulary was not sufficiently precise for the fine distinctions required at this level:

I find that is quite tricky is in the exam and they always have this kind of question, such as, you just change one word and whole meaning is changed, you know, so, and A B C D, which one is right. You just remember the definition, and if you not understand very well, only change one word and whole the things are changed, so it is making me very, very confused. (4)

The language barrier remained throughout as these final semester comments indicate:

I can’t get all the meaning from the lecture, especially for speaking English, because if writing is I can read again but speaking is not. ... but just get the main point, it’s better, it’s better than before. (Mike 5)

If the teachers talk very interesting issues and stuff, and using a flexible way I feel comfortable with that, and I can understand 70% or 80%. But I couldn’t understand 100% of what teachers said. But for me I think it is enough to get understand. (YQ 2)

This meant that those parts of the course content that were presented through the spoken word remained only marginally available, and Mike attributed his failure of a course in his second semester to this. It also meant, of course, that the students were operating “through a glass darkly” to some extent right to the end of their degrees.

5.7.2.4. *Adopting disapproved methods of learning under duress*

Throughout their degree, the BBS students were still completing core papers, which took them into new and sometimes uncongenial disciplines. These could be sites that challenged their sense of membership and their embracing of the new learning practices that now presented themselves as the appropriate ways to be-and-do a university student. In these courses, they could still find that they did not know the discourse and that their questions were seen as ‘dumb’ (see 6.4).

For two of the students these late-entry courses had a mathematical component that presented an enormous barrier for them. Interestingly both resorted to measures that they felt were not sanctioned but in this case necessary to pass the papers. Saul pored over previous year’s papers and rote-learned all the examples:

I don’t know why this blah blah blah formula but I know how, you know, the whole process, so what I can do just remember the whole process, but I don’t worry about others. Otherwise I need to do a lot of reading and understanding, you know. No time to do that. (5)

His class mates found this method “quite dumb” but other approaches had led to disastrous failure in the first test in spite of “very, very good” preparation, so he needed an alternative.

Scott had found a Chinese version of the course that troubled him and, in spite of a clear choice made in the first semester to use L2 for his study, had learned it in Chinese rather than English:

It’s easy for me to memory in Chinese. And then I can translate into English. But for another paper generally I will do it memory in English, I won’t use the old method, which is, I think it’s a stupid method, to learn it in Chinese first. But for G101 I have to use this. Even if stupid, but it works for me, that’s OK. (5)

5.7.3. *New learning experiences*

Over this period, students continued to face new tasks. These were still capable of having a de-stabilising effect on participants’ sense of competence but increasingly they were able to approach new experiences with less disequilibrium.

5.7.3.1. Semester Two tasks

Contrasting examples can be drawn from Gemma's fourth interview. Her verdict on the second semester was less enthusiastic than the others' and it seemed to have been something of a rollercoaster ride. The stresses had arisen in particular in relation to two new kinds of tasks. For one of them she had been awarded a zero, which she attributed to late arrival on the course causing her to miss the explanation. However, in that case, the teacher gave her a "second chance to do another piece of work" (4) and continued to encourage and help her, so that she ended up with an A-pass for the course.

The other case had been less happy. She felt that the teacher had provided inadequate scaffolding for a text type which she had never heard of before, "talk[ing] the whole class through" and then inviting questions. The problem was, she said, since she had never heard of this type of text before, "I don't have any questions, I don't know what I don't know," and this was a very large class with no tutorials, making question-asking problematic. Her sense of competence had clearly been undermined by her poor result and she characterised the teacher as arrogant, having inappropriate expectations of a 200-level class ("I mean, we're not Master students") and discriminating against Asian students:

He probably have this kind of stereotyping thing, you know, in his mind that we English as second language and we can't do better than the Kiwi students, so, you know, 'cause all the students, I mean, Asian students in the class, as long as I know there weren't somebody got high marks. (4)

5.7.3.2. Group projects

A number of students were required to do group projects, and the anticipation of the group formation process was extremely stressful for several students:

I don't know anybody. Because I go to the course they just like that know each other. They will sit together. I just separate to sit on the other chair or tables, no one around me because I don't know anybody, just made me to feel sick. (May 4)

However, for Gao and Saul group projects proved to be times for important reflection. Gao worked with a group of students of diverse nationality, including one New Zealander, who were already known to each other. The group worked well together in a non-hierarchical way, for example, helping Gao with his English. Gao, though, assumed administrative leadership, taking on therefore a little more of the work.

He did not resent this, using it instead as a source of new understanding about leadership: “the leader doesn’t need to be the best, but need to do the best thing for all the group members” (4).

In Saul’s NZDB study prior to enrolling at the university, he had worked with domestic students and, for all that he was one who claimed Kiwi friends outside the university, within classes he had found it rather unproductive because of their impenetrable use of speedy colloquial language. On the other hand, he was also apprehensive of working with Chinese students, not expecting there the comfort suggested in the literature. He feared that Chinese students could be quite competitive and unused to seeing group study as a collaborative exercise:

In China it is quite weakness about the team work, because everybody think I’m the best, I’m the good and I don’t want to cooperate with you, and when I need help I just call you. (5)

Chinese sometimes quite lazy and some time they very like to complain each other, such as “Oh, why you late? Every time you late.” “Oh, why only do two papers [pages]? See I did five papers [pages]!” (5)

In the event, he decided that the latter situation posed the least risk.

Saul’s fears proved ill-founded: the group worked together in great harmony, all students working on encouraging others rather than berating them for inadequate performance, and the result was one of just two A-grades among the nine groups. Saul attributed the cooperative atmosphere of the group to the fact that they had acquired new ways of learning and relating from their New Zealand study experience to which he ascribed great value, and which provide interesting insight into a divide often characterised as between individualist and collectivist:

But what I find out when I come to New Zealand I find in New Zealand culture, in Kiwi culture it is very important element to the work or in the school, in everywhere, they focus on the team, they focus on this kind of organisation, this kind of motivation, these kind of things, rather than you single, how great you are, how smart you are. (5)

These two experiences form an interesting contrast to those reported in the literature. In neither did speakers of the dominant language carry the balance of power, and they seem to have been characterised by harmony and mutual respect, and to lead to personal recognitions of growth beyond the content of the project itself: “I think that’s what I learned from H301, I think this is very meaningful” (Saul 5). In fact, none of the participants retrospectively reported difficulties arising out of interethnic relationships

in group projects, and in spite of her reservations, one of May's Kiwi classmates, encountered via WebCT, had asked to join the otherwise international group she was part of. The most negative experience she reported was the presence of another Chinese student who did not pull his weight in that group.

5.7.3.3. *Taking study outside the university*

Other assignments took students into interactions with the world beyond the classroom, and these were challenging but enormously rewarding. For YQ, this provided her with important connections with New Zealanders at a similar age and stage to herself, and May was able to recognise her own agency in making connections in the local business community.

YQ had a part-time job at a motel, and needing to find research participants for a project, approached the young women who worked in reception. Their openness in responding to her questions and talking about their lives far beyond the requirements of her research project was revelatory to her of misconceptions she held about the local culture, which she had not up to then had any opportunity to test:

They have told me lots privacy and I never thought the Kiwi are so open about the privacy, because I was taught the western people seems privacy is quite important and it is not easier to get some private information from them. (2)

This was, she said, "quite special."

May's project required getting permission from a local company to locate and solve problems in their operation. Clearly in this respect international students were likely to be deficient in symbolic capital to facilitate the first step, on two counts. Social networks that included very small numbers of locals and restricted connections with the community considerably constrained the identification of an appropriate company. Requesting permission for the potentially intrusive project required a degree of contextualised communicative competence which must have been daunting. Indeed, initially this process was very stressful for May and her friends, with ideas proving fruitless ("they go to invite the high school or somebody to do it, but they get hold for a whole month, didn't get any answer," 5), but eventually a learning institution she had attended early in her stay accepted, enabling her to complete the assignment successfully and to achieve a taste of the practical component that had been a hope of so many from the beginning.

In both these cases, the course processes provided a framework for seeking out connections with the community which did not seem available when they were simply reliant on some notion of taking the initiative themselves.

5.7.3.4. *New roles*

New less powerless roles were opening up to them and more access to audibility was evident.

Saul, for example, who had been a Group B student in his first semester, repeated C101, the course he had failed, in Semester Two. Having the previous year's notes, he was now in a position to listen to the teacher's spoken words and his suspicion that he was missing something important by concentrating on writing (5.5.2) proved true: "she can point out which part is quite important" (4). His existing knowledge put him in a position where the "power to impose reception" (Bourdieu, 1977) was restored:

So our study group, it's like I'm small leader of that. 'Oh, Saul said this.' 'Oh, that's very important, better write that down.' 'Saul thinks...' You know, like little teacher. (4)

Gao found himself adopting leadership roles in the group project and as captain of a sports team.

Apart from the growing expertise in specific discourses and strategy use which will be traced in the next chapter, other indicators of membership included knowing what to focus on, being able to self-evaluate assignments accurately, and general feelings of competence and coping: "Best thing I think is I can get on well with university study" (Saul 4), "Feel very successful" (May 4). There were metaphors of continued trajectory: "I can find my way in study" (Saul 5); "keep going because I am on the right route" (Gao 4); "so I have to keep going, keep going" (Scott 4).

There were nevertheless remaining and persistent difficulties, such as failed tests and exam results which did not match those for internal assignments. Four of the remaining students failed courses after the first semester.

5.7.4. *Re-discovering dreams*

Nevertheless, in many ways, in the later parts of their courses they were able to find some of the elements that had been part of the original dream that emerged in the first interviews.

5.7.4.1. Seeking self-motivation

A recurrent version of the initial imagined identity as university student was of someone driven by their own goals and the joy of learning in an area of personal significance. For some participants, this image had been battered by immersion in the challenges of the first semester. However, it gathered strength again in the second semester as most were beginning to define their own courses of study to some extent rather than just doing core papers.

5.7.4.1.1. Mixed motivations

For all the participants motivation remained an important consideration and, as Dörnyei (2003) would suggest, it was far from unitary. Intrinsic motivation could be called on for courses students found congenial to their taste, and there was a general indication that self-discipline was working better. Among the motivations experienced later in their degree was a sense of deferred adulthood driving them to complete study and begin their careers. In any study situation working towards a qualification over a number of years, the extrinsic motivation of assessment has an important place and that was certainly so here. Intersecting factors can be seen working together in Mike's response to a question about what motivated him to study:

There's assignment or test. Because I think my study is not enough and my result is not good so I need to study hard. Because I don't want to spend too much time in university study, because I'm already come to two years here. (4)

Mike and Scott were happy simply to pass: "At least I achieved my target so I think that's all I need" (Scott 5). Others aspired throughout to more than that, driven to continual reflection and hard work which paid off more and more often at higher levels with A-grades, 3.9 out of 4, 28 out of 30 (May, 5), for example, though there were less spectacular results as well.

Saul, who had always worked hard and sought just reward for his effort, was much more successful and content after Semester One, but preoccupied with his failure to get A-grades. It was clear that grades had different meanings in New Zealand:

That day I am quite angry about that H201 assignment, you know. I got B, and the lecturer said, 'Why you not very happy?' I said, "Oh, B is not very good mark, I think is A.' And he said, 'Do you really know what that mean?' I thought 'What that means?' 'C means satisfied, is very satisfied, I give you C,

so B means good, very good.’ I think, ‘So what is A+? I think A+ is outstanding, is the fabulous.’ So I said maybe just a bit too harsh to myself. (4)

Saul continued to put lots of his own and his teachers’ energy (see Vignette 5) into achieving the elusive A, with occasional success.

Once they were attainable, however, good grades were not the only point. Gao and Saul began to question them as a measure of worth and felt they should free themselves from too much reliance on them as an evaluation of personal worth. However, this resistance appears to have remained imagined rather than actual. Table 5.5 provides schematic representation of shifts of motivation over the period of study.

Table 5.5 Shifting motivation

Study phase	Extrinsic pressure <i>Representative quotes</i>	Encouragement and interest <i>Representative quotes</i>	Self-discipline <i>Representative quotes</i>
Study in China	in China I forced to study. Gao 1 that is kind of method in China, to force someone to study. Saul 1 If you don't come to the class they will ring you up. Li Ming 1		
English language centres		the lecturer try to encourage... every student to enjoy and participate. Saul 1 I like study in the class at [language centre]. Sky 1 we can learn all the stuff for fun. Gao 4	
First semester	I must need to try it very better to get the higher mark. May 2 before the test I spent two days to stay in library. Saul 1		Just because myself I study hard. But for me I can't enjoy to study hard. Gao 1 I give myself pressure to study. Saul 2 I cannot control myself very well. Li Ming 2
Later semesters	if I fail the exam my parents will be upset and I will be upset. May 4 you pay the money and you should work hard on it. Gemma 4 and my result is not good so I need to study hard. Mike 4	everybody [fellow students in group] just encourage. Saul 5 didn't need to pressure, ... I'm interesting to do that. May 4 That [course] actually bring me much fun. FW	it's really depending on you. Gemma 4 self-discipline become stronger . JN I can balance my study and part-time job. Mike 5

5.7.4.1.2. A case of absence of motivation

A significant barrier to achieving intrinsic motivation through choice of congenial courses, though, was the parental persuasion which had led Gao to enrol in BIS rather than the social sciences, and DX to enrol in BBS. While Gao managed to maintain his momentum (see Vignette 8), DX made no headway in her business studies and after two entirely unsuccessful semesters began study in the humanities. She provides a valuable contrast to the others in the study, therefore, being the only one able to reflect on the abandonment of this goal. It is salutary to look at the conditions that militated against

her success. It was not from lack of effort. Striving to meet “my super parents’ great plan for me,” she said,

I put all my spare time in studying actually, only Sunday go to church, but it’s quite bad. There was still lots of voices always saying ‘You can’t do it, you can’t do it, you hate it.’

The result was that the time expended on study was time wasted: she found she could not concentrate and learned nothing. Like TY (5.3.4), she had found herself unable to admit failure to her parents: “They didn’t ask my result. I don’t know why, they just don’t ask! OK. They doesn’t mention and I keep quiet as well.” Eventually a tutor, who shared her Christian faith and to whom she had divulged her growing despair, advised her:

He said, ‘Yeah, you say you love your parents, you will done for them, but be honest with them.’ I never think that way. I say, ‘OK, I think you should be honest with them.’

They accepted her decision to change her course of study and she was several weeks into her new courses and imbued with the desired joy of learning when she spoke to me, in spite of the language challenge (“I found sentence double longer, whoo, double longer!”): “Now I don’t ‘Oh, I have to do something.’ Not like that. I have assignment, I want to do that and pleased.” She completed her new degree successfully.

5.7.4.1.3. Catching glimpses of the imagined university

As students entered higher levels, small classes and growing familiarity with both teachers and other students doing the same major made interaction more extensive and satisfying. In this by now familiar atmosphere they could cross boundaries impenetrable at earlier stages:

The small class the more people we will, how to say, we will talk to each other. On the other hand, for example the big classroom we will talk to the similar people, for example, the Chinese, or friends, already friends. (Mike 5)

Saul, who was majoring in a discipline which used extensive group interaction, experienced a supportive cooperative attitude:

I find encouragement from ... the classmates this semester. I think that’s touch me and move me, and that’s kind of change, and I think it is kind of successful about the New Zealand education because nobody, not nobody, just a few people to complain each other, most of them is quite encourage. (5)

However, there were limits to the connections. Scott's firm second-year resolve that "this year I try my best make one Kiwi friend can go out have fun with me" (4) seemed to be achieved as classes in his major allowed for relationships which he could characterise as friendships and which led to out-of-class contact. Unfortunately, though, they did not survive beyond the occasional ambient "how's it going? when classes changed in the following year. In spite of the increase in contact which he appreciated and found interesting, Mike found local students determinedly (but nevertheless normally) monocultural: "But many they, to be honest, I would say they don't understand other people. They think this is my home, New Zealand" (5).

By the second year, of those remaining in the longitudinal study only Gao could count Kiwis among his university-based friends through sport, the group project and church activities. The photos he brought to the final interview showed social groups which were very mixed in terms of ethnicity, gender and age. Still, he did not feel that the majority of students treated international students as equal: "us international students we are treated as foreign, that is what I feel still. Yeah, it's not like part of the community" (5). He valued his non-Chinese international friends highly:

I feel international students share a lot of things rather than with locals, 'cause sometimes, some experience, the local people don't really have, don't really feel like that way. I feel like, you know, I would like to share those special experience with international students. (6)

Interaction with teachers increased. Scott experienced a sense of legitimacy asking question of tutors in the tutorials which does not seem to have been available to him in the first semester (see 6.3.2.2), and he and others were invited by teachers to come to them for assistance. Finally, some of the aspects they had attributed to New Zealand education at the beginning were emerging.

Chapter Six: Entering discourses, developing skills and strategies

Chapter 6 looks at specific aspects of the experience with trajectories that stretch over the length of the study. This chapter is responsive to the realisation that not all aspects coincide with university-imposed cycles, that there are developments across and within semester boundaries, that students' experiences of these features may take different routes and come to significance at different moments. These features include the development of learning practices and English language skills enabling the students to take surer steps into academic discourse. They have been chosen because of their salience within the accounts, a salience arising both from their place as areas of interest within the interview guide, as in the case of language use and development, and as a result of a more co-constructed process as they emerged within early responses and were followed-up in later interviews, as in the case of the strategy of talking to teachers outside class time. This chapter's major focus is on the second research question investigating what students learn in order to succeed.

6.1. Writing assignments

Writing is definitely the hardest one. (TY)

TY was not alone in this judgement. By far the majority of the students had enrolled on an EAP course to improve their writing. Perhaps the reason for this apprehension can be gleaned from DX's description of the distance between the discourse she had mastered in China and the new texts she was being asked to produce:

I just got the general idea about essay writing, the structure, three part. Totally different with Chinese writing. You need to present the key sentence first. Don't hide them. I think I was proud of my Chinese writing. I think I can do that beautifully, I can hide my idea. Because maybe they will say, 'Boy! You have high level, high emotion level.' Maybe I can describe a flower or weather, and in that side maybe have my exposition of my general idea, in there. (DX)

The journey from one to the other was fraught on many levels, but the focus of this account will be on the particular dimension of struggling for a balance between

incorporating the voices of others and finding a voice of one's own. In other sections in this chapter, a movement towards the adoption of more autonomous practices is evident. In terms of this aspect of writing, though, instances of retreat from such a position uphold TY's assessment above (see, too, Skyrme, 2006a).

6.1.1. The voice of the academy

At the level of what Ivanič and Camps (1998) refer to as voice as self-representation, pre-sessional courses had alerted students to the fact that there was a particular style of presentation appropriate for the university, "the structure" DX refers to above. Saul talked of "very traditional report format, one, one two three, example" (3). This was a point very strongly made in a first semester study skills workshop:

Because [the presenter] said, lecturer want chocolate cake, but you think you can cook fruit cake is the best, so you present your fruit cake, but you will got zero. (DX)

This student was left in no doubt that there was no personal choice offered when more experienced friends advised that "the lecturer just want to know this, this and this, so what [you are] thinking is rubbish. So I copied idea, oh, OK, this part, this part" (DX).

Other students, too, sought the favoured recipe. However, that it is of the old wives' variety, a bit of flour and a pinch of salt, that it varies between disciplines, and that parts of it remain shrouded in mystery, has been discussed in Chapter 3. Participants were conscious of the limitations of their knowledge and craved further support. In-class explanations seemed impossibly brief: "they just maybe spend just two or three minute to talk about the assignment" (Sky 2), leaving these L2 listeners gasping for air and confused about what was required. Samples seemed the most obvious source of guidance:

I don't care the sample bad or good, because I can get a mirrors for what should I do and how should I avoid this wrong thing, and this good thing. (Scott 2)

If lecturers would not supply samples, there were other sources, previous years' marked assignments provided by friends. The chocolate cake comment notwithstanding, many university teachers reject samples because of the risk of encouraging a formulaic approach to academic writing. It would seem, though, that without other accessible

forms of guidance, they were an important tool, though not necessarily the samples lecturers would have chosen.

In fact, the chocolate cake analogy can be elaborated: one can always double the cocoa or add some walnuts, and eventually Scott discovered that he did have choices in his writing: “In western country one thing is really important for people is creative, so you don’t need to follow another people’s idea to copy. ... So, yeah, trust yourself” (4). However, his next interview revealed that his enthusiasm at the prospect of using a more personal voice had crumbled in the face of the risk of getting it wrong:

At least I know, I followed this to do, I will get pass. That’s what all I need. Maybe if I make it creative, two result for me is worse, is best, ’cause sometime I never tried it, I don’t want to take this risk because it’s too risky. Especially every assignment or every work for me is important, they all count in the internal the result so I don’t want to take such a big risk. (5)

The conditions at the university were not conducive to the experimentation which was necessary to develop confidence to deviate from the “format” (Saul 3) and be sure he could “innovate acceptably” (Allison, 2004, p. 195). Scott returned to producing chocolate cake.

6.1.2. Incorporating others’ ideas

From the beginning students were aware that another presence required in their writing was authoritative voices from their reading, and this was a major cause of apprehension: “Confusing. Assignment. Sometimes you have to find a lot of resource and I don’t know how to do that, lots of book and newspaper and so on” (Mike 1).

This was a challenge for which neither IELTS study nor their previous education in China had prepared them. IELTS writing tasks were based on “your background and your knowledge” (Saul 2), and DX claimed that to be seen as a good student in China “you just can copy, copy what your teacher said correctly.”

Initial concern, as suggested in the literature, was with surface features:

But in here, you have to gone into the APA¹² style, and then if you broken this law you will lose lots of mark in your assignment. It is very base problem for all Chinese students. (Scott 1)

¹² American Psychological Association

Other sources were seen as a way of inflating word count to allow for the sudden increase from the 250-word IELTS task to the 1500 words typical of a first year assignment:

Most of time, people write not enough words because they don't know how to use the reference. They just say what they think, not from any other information, so the words also not enough. (Connor 2)

They could be seen as an end in themselves. May, given a choice between writing about work and the family, for which “I can use my own idea to write maybe half words,” and genetically modified food, about which she knew nothing, chose the latter because “I can borrow heaps and heaps of books” (2). Having books, it seemed, was more important than having ideas. Inevitably, she found herself very dependent on these sources and was reprimanded for having overused them, but as she said, “GM I have no idea, I can't do it on my head so I just can do that” (2).

For a considerable number of the students it was this first round of university assignments that brought awareness of the tension between using other people's ideas and expressing their own. The problems lay in two directions, the implicit injunction against excessive reliance on sources, in particular the failure to distinguish one's own words from those of others, and the lack of cohesion that arose where there was no framework provided by a process of personal analysis, no evidence of voice as having something to say. These two will be dealt with in turn.

6.1.2.1. *Understanding citation*

DX said she learned a “blood lesson” when she failed her first assignment because of unintentional plagiarism: “Because Chinese student, we don't know that we should mention the author or something.” This ignorance had survived a pre-session course where it probably was covered, “but at that time I don't understand fully. Maybe just some writing style or culture, western, so I just, yes, do some. I forgot, immediately actually.” Such courses rarely deliver the blood lesson of failure, their assessments being formative rather than summative.

University experiences were obviously taking the students beneath surface level features, and as the first semester progressed, mention ceased to be about APA and was now about the function of supporting and elaborating one's own learning and ideas: “You should use a lot of reference, how to say, to support what you say” (Sky 2).

Students began to align themselves with the university's injunction on plagiarism: "I don't want to use. ... I think that's illegal, and it's useless. Why people teach student just copy what another people said? That's useless for you" (Linda 2). Linda argues for both the legalistic issue of ownership and copyright, and the pedagogical one which sees the integration of new ideas into one's own knowledge structures as indication of learning, an integration which is most readily manifest when those ideas are presented in one's own words. If plagiarism is to be avoided paraphrasing is called for.

6.1.2.2. *Paraphrasing: fine lines*

This, however, was very difficult to put into practice. May suggested above that writing about an unfamiliar topic left her very dependent on her sources. The BBS, with nine core papers, required students to enter a number of new disciplines, and inevitably topics would be unfamiliar. At this point, as we shall see below, their reading was not at a level where they could readily draw deep understanding. This left them negotiating a fine line:

Actually I find it's a little bit hard, like how to paraphrase other people's work to get yourself away from being plagiarism, because it's hard, you know, it's really fine line ... it's not general information, it's not general knowledge, so you've got to get someone else's idea. (Gemma 2)

This was particularly difficult in view of the limited flexibility of their L2; it seemed counterintuitive to turn perfectly expressed academic English into what DX described as "kindergarten language": "I think these two words the same, but actually it's different, so you paraphrase a lot, maybe it's change the meaning, so not to paraphrase this very well" (Saul 3). This created a contest between the idea of academic language as a special variety they must aspire to and the exhortation to use their own language resource as the means of incorporating others' ideas.

Nevertheless, university is intended to provide a challenge, so we might expect to see development towards greater expertise across their careers. In terms of paraphrasing, expertise might be seen as the integration of new ideas into one's own understanding, permitting effortless expression in one's own words. There is, however, a less expert approach, often taught in EAP courses, which is more a matter of manipulation of language: changing a passive to the active and substituting a few near synonyms for the content words.

In terms of developing autonomy as a writer, May's case, then, is interesting. From the outset she was very keen to integrate new ideas into her own knowledge and words, and her interviews had numerous assertions to this effect: "And now I try to understand what the tutor is talking about, I try to conclusion by myself, by my sentence" (2). This was her initial impulse as a writing strategy as we can see from the description of her practice she gives here:

I just asked them, 'When you write the assignment you just read through all the book and then you get your own idea and combine together and just write down your own words?' (5)

This comes from an account of consulting her friends for advice about writing, the skill she found most difficult. Her friends adamantly recommended a strategy of close dependence on the original text:

They says, 'No, you need to find the book. Your all ideas come from that book so you need to paraphrasing the book, you can't just write down on your own sentence. You need to sometimes paraphrasing and get more professional document or something on there.' (5)

She adopted this practice and began working very closely to the original text. This served her well and reversed her fortunes as a writer: "I done really well last semester" (5). She flourished, then, only when she reduced her autonomy as a writer and adopted what DX described as the "language game" method of paraphrasing.

In her talk to me, May made persistent grammatical errors which certainly had not abated by the end of her undergraduate study. As an experienced listener to learner English I rarely found it difficult to understand her message or to detect the committed student and inquiring mind behind her words. It is certainly possible though that her teachers found it more difficult to recognise the position that she was developing when it was expressed in her own voice, suggesting that when one's own voice is heavily accented, it may be very much less welcome in academic writing.

6.1.3. Owning an argument

The final perspective on the question of voice is the requirement to have something to say, not simply to compile other people's ideas together but to do so through the filter of a developing argument. Saul was alerted to this need from feedback in the first semester:

Cut paste, cut paste, cut paste. Because that is not my work, so it is unlogical, you know, but just ‘you said,’ ‘she said,’ ‘I said,’ you know, all combined together, so it’s quite rubbish. (3)

As they developed as writers, most of the students’ accounts indicated a selective approach to their sources indicating a degree of personal analysis: “I just write down the idea I accept” (May 5). An argument may be supposed to be developed by means of such a process of evaluation, of critical thinking, testing new ideas against knowledge of the world: “Even if the main idea is came from the book, but I make understanding and use my own, myself’s opinion, relevant about this idea’ (Scott 2). As Hoadley-Maidment (2000) attests, knowing how to apply personal experience in intellectual debate is not straightforward for students, but Scott indicated it was an explicit demand at higher levels. Whereas at 100 level the requirement was that you “stick with the theory,”

for the 300 level they want the student to show them their knowledge, maybe ’cause the lecturer think you already get more knowledge 200 level, so you must combine some creative, not just means make up maybe you can combine them, real life, experience, real story. (5)

YQ struggled with this aspect right to her final semester:

when I get my assignment back and I usually studied the teachers’ comment carefully, and the common problem of my assignment is I do not own an idea myself. That is the weak point of me [whisper]. I try to build a new idea, but it’s hard to. ... the lecturer want you to find something new and your particularly own idea. (2)

In every other aspect of her achievement she had presented herself as a confident student able to fulfil such defining aspects of being-and-doing a university student as being an active participant in class and seeking help from teachers (see 6.4.2). However, the conspiratorial whisper with which she confessed this guilty secret revealed its importance to her as a measure of her achievement of the desired autonomy.

Vignette 2: Whose voice? Mike and Saul

I would like here to return to the two students I contrasted in relation to their response to the first test in Vignette 1, and briefly consider their subsequent journeys from the perspective of the preparation of assignments.

Saul, as I illustrated in 5.7.4.1.1, was greatly concerned about the assessments awarded by his teachers:

I don't know why I am every time not satisfied with my assignments. I try hard, I got C+, rubbish! I try hard, I got B-, rubbish! The lecturer said 'Well, which grade you satisfied of?' So every time, so I really tried to make a big progress about my assignment, A- or A. (4)

From the second semester his study was more centred on the areas of his major disciplines, and there he found the possibility of the "long conversations" that very much suited his learning preference for oral interaction. He asked how he could improve his grades and found that teachers there were amenable to multiple visits in relation to each assignment:

they said you just to write assignment again, again, again, again and give it to me, I check it, give back, to check it, you know, to hand in, and then, you know, several times, I think it is brilliant, very, very useful. (4)

He continued to make use of this approach to developing his assignments through the rest of his study. In his final interview he derided the habit of other Chinese students of trying to "guess" what the requirements of assignments were as "totally rubbish and waste of time. Why don't you just go and ask?" It was clear that he credited little value to the presence of personal voice:

Because all the assignments is all from the lecturers. So why we need to do assignments? How the assignments will achieve his opinion and what's about his idea to analyse this assignment, what's he think about assignments.

As Saul worked at aligning himself as closely as possible to his lecturers' intentions, Mike showed growing independence of mind. His motivation was from the start more self-driven. He believed that the main purpose of going to university was "study what you want to study, because you choose your major and you choose your paper, so you study what you want" (2). In his final interview, when he described his increased ability to study without the help of his girlfriend on whom he had been very dependent at the outset, it was with evident pride that he proclaimed that even when they discussed his study, "sometimes my idea is different to her" (5).

His writing was firmly rooted in his own experience:

The first I will write what I think and what I read at the books. (4)

First I will get the topic of this class, of this paper and then I will think about my previous experience and if I'm no experience then I will looking for some book, some sources, and then relate to the situation, to the experience, to the real world. (5)

In fact, he was the only student who indicated a practice of wilful disregard of at least part of what teachers wanted:

I have my own study style, so sometimes you ask me to do what what what, sometimes I will feel not good for me so sometimes I'm not doing that. (5)

Neither student achieved spectacular results, but Saul was happy to wrest the occasional A-range grade for his efforts, whereas Mike derived immense satisfaction from his speaking in a more personal voice.

6.2. Learning to read for the university

I just open the book, I look at the book and book look at me, and I was so nervous. Nervous and nervous. DX.

The first lectures were enough for participants to realise that they could not serve as the major learning source in the university and that it was imperative to find others. Reading became an important alternative or supplementing source for many: “I depend on myself and read the book. I think, you know, my speaking is poor, so I didn’t go to depend the lecture” (Thomas 2). The contribution of reading was multifaceted. In itself it could provide the understanding of content, but done in advance, it could also provide more access to the lectures, thus deepening learning, and, of course, more fully embodying the imagined experience of being a university student:

If I did preview reading and then I go to lectures, everything after the lecture finish, everything’s in my mind. I will understand really better and I know all the details and I know what’s going on there. (TY)

It was also essential for assignments, and after the first few weeks of a semester, the time needed for this type of reading was such that they often could not manage any other. Reading contributed as well to the advance of other English skills:

The amazing thing, reading help listening I find, not only writing. Reading I found in the four part, reading, speaking, listening, writing, I think is the key point. DX.

Dependence on reading was not embraced readily by all participants. DX’s quotation was prefaced with “before I really hate reading,” and Li Ming felt it represented an outmoded teaching approach (5.6.6.2). Such resistance can be at least partly explained by the fact that at this stage their reading skills were limited and not able to produce for them the results (such as quick access to understanding of course content) that they were seeking. If reading was a matter of high importance, it was also a matter of high concern.

6.2.1. The difficulties

In the interviews there were numerous instances of assertions of the value of preview reading followed by admissions that it was not something they managed to implement. TY's description above, for example, was followed by "I always want to but never done it. Sometimes I did. And I find it's more efficient for study, because you understand like more." In reality they managed preview and review reading patchily, challenged by time and initially the difficulty of using texts functionally (Freebody & Luke, 2003).

Breaking the code (Freebody & Luke, 2003) of the texts was painfully slow initially: "I read one page maybe I use one hour, two page maybe two hour, or something like that" (May 3). More was, of course, required:

You know, sometimes not just read, when I read, I need to think and understand and connect with a lot of parts. It takes me time. (Linda 2)

Participating in the meaning of texts (Freebody & Luke, 2003) required top-down input, but in unfamiliar disciplines they were novice readers lacking schema: "there's no blueprint in my mind" (JN). Strategies were needed to wrest meaning from dense and extensive texts in order to be able to use them functionally for the purposes of the university (see, too, Skyrme, 2005b).

6.2.2. Strategies for reading

6.2.2.1. *Rejecting textbook reading*

Given the importance accorded by others to reading textbooks, Saul's choice to reject the practice (Vignette 1) is significant. Saul read none of his textbooks in the first semester and called on the testimony of an incontrovertible authority to support his decision, a postgraduate Kiwi student: "I think she said the textbook is useless" (2). The textbooks were daunting, and if he had a problem, consulting a classmate seemed a better option:

You give me the answer, or we can discuss at the telephone, just five minutes, but I must go the thick textbook, 'Oh, this new word!' I must check the dictionary, so maybe there is half an hour or one hour to read one part.
(2)

As we have seen (5.6.6.3.2), as an assiduous student, he had been depressed by the absence of any sign in the first semester that he was making headway as a student at Rutherford. It seemed that his resistance to reading could not serve him well, and in the second semester, protesting that “I still think they are rubbish” (4), he began copying out the summaries at the end of the textbook chapters and using them to review his lectures. Although his reading increased by his third year, he still found it difficult to structure his own meaning from the text:

I like to practice like, you give me a lot of topic and ... I can read the book and find the answer. But not like I read the whole chapter and then I do the practice. (6)

6.2.2.2. Multiple reading

For others, understanding came as the result of considerable effort. For students who had enrolled with an IELTS Band 5.5 like Connor, the dependence on bottom-up processes predicted by Macaro (2003) was evident:

First time I should find some words which I don't understand, and try to clearly what's the meaning, because sometimes the word have a lot of meaning, I don't know what meaning is good, fit for the principle ... write some notes in the textbook. (3)

However, the patched-together sense of the text that such a process gave was insufficient for the understanding that he needed, so he followed this reading with another where he could think about the whole meaning more, but which still did not give him a firm enough grasp to allow him to integrate it for his own use:

I know something but hard to describe it and explain and write the whole thing, essay, for explain the question or the problem. But in the third time maybe faster, reading is faster, because I have done it twice, so -- also I should write down something and make some notes by myself. I choose one of the principle is I think the important and maybe in the test will be in the question. That's my way. (3)

The third reading was thus clearly a process of participation, achieving the fluency necessary to unify the meaning for himself. Interestingly, he said there was also a gradual transfer from thinking about the meaning in the first reading in L1, “because it is easy to understand the meaning of the principle” to trying to commit it to memory in L2 on the third reading “because the text in English.”

Other participants, too, spoke of this multiple-reading approach ending with a final holistic reading, “fast and deeply” (Scott 3). For CN, this had made the difference for him between a first semester failure and a second semester B+ in a challenging subject, “because in the second semester I read the book five times, but the first semester just only one time, even [if] it’s hard.”

This is one explanation of the participants’ repeated judgement that their input of time was far higher than that of their local counterparts.

6.2.2.3. *Reading with a “blueprint”*

In the previous section, we can see the first two readings provide what Scott (3) called a “frame on my mind” to guide the final fluent reading. Another source of such an advance organising device mentioned by two of the students was the Study Guide prepared by the teacher to give information and guidance about the course. It provided a summary of key points which allowed them to draw from the more general textbook reading what was important to the course. Scott found it helped him to select which of the textbook chapters he needed to read and, more importantly considering the time constraints, which he could ignore. For DX this was a belated discovery:

Oh, I found the Study Guide, so helpful! I think, ‘Wah, I was so stupid, why I didn’t realize that earlier, because before that I just concentrate on text.’
But now I just felt, ‘Wow, the Study Guide, so helpful,’ and just follow that.

Greater familiarity with a discipline, as concepts and vocabulary became accessible, similarly provided such a frame.

6.2.2.4. *Guessing meaning and reading for gist*

Gemma, by Semester Two had found incessant dictionary use impeded understanding, and so instead chose to “read the whole thing through without any hesitation, and then just highlight the words that I didn’t know and go back” (4).

Reducing or eliminating dictionary use was a method that depended, though, on a high degree of tolerance of ambiguity. May said, “I just know what they normally talking about but not actually what sentence for that, what sentence for the other one” (4), and Gemma, who had had one of the highest levels of English on arrival, felt by Semester Two that she understood about 60% on first reading. Part of her difficulty did not arise from words that were unknown to her: “even though I understand every word,

but still it's quite hard to get at the whole message" (4). A bottom-up approach alone would not suffice.

The strategy of reading for gist and guessing the meanings of new words from context was definitely one that could be called on only when there was a closer match between level of proficiency and demands of the text than most had arrived with. Notably no accounts of reading this way occurred in Semester One. Nor was it always appropriate: May was flexible in her reading strategies, pointing out that when she was reading for assignments, "I will read very carefully for each sentence and try to catch it and understand it" (4).

6.2.2.5. *Reading for retention*

Mike's first step in improving his reading has been reported in Vignette 1. His progress was further advanced after his poor performance in his first exams:

I realise when I read the text or books I think [if] I understand, I can remember, so I just general read the books and then actually I can't remember. (3)

He realised that reading for the purpose of university study required another step, retention of the meaning in order to be able to produce it on demand in exams. Other students described a range of means, such as using bullet point notes, to achieve this.

6.2.2.6. *Reading on target*

Another way that participants became more efficient readers was by learning how to locate and record relevant material readily. In the first semester, a number of students mentioned the difficulty of identifying which books, and which parts of books, would be useful. Mike had found sources for one assignment, made copious notes, and then, when the library recalled them for another user, realised he had not referenced them and would have to find a completely new set to meet the requirements of the assignment. By his final semester, he had a very careful system for keeping records of ideas from his reading, and found

it's more confident to find the exactly useful book and then I will just looking for the major part, so it's more quickly, more effective. ... and then I will compare this book and the other book, the ideas, and textbook so I will choose just one useful. (5)

6.2.2.7. *Reading more widely*

At various times participants talked of hoping to read more widely, but any attempts were usually truncated by another due date. Gao was able to add value to an assignment by doing so, though:

actually the more reading the more knowledge I can get, which is not included in the paper, I can get extra experience. ... I did some extra reading, so I can use different technique from other students. And I enjoyed.
(Gao 3)

By his final year, Mike, who had seldom in his life read a book even in Chinese, was discovering the joys reading could offer: when “I need to find resource, sometimes I’m read a book find a related topic, but another topic is interesting, I will still read a little bit” (5).

6.2.2.8. *Reading critically*

Critically analysing and transforming texts is the fourth role identified by Freebody and Luke (2003), and one of the university’s core values. This was a matter of discussion in the later interviews. It arose spontaneously in Mike’s fourth interview when I asked him about the most important way he was learning at the university at that point. His response revealed once more his desire for independence of thought:

Sometimes ... I can read the book in different way and I get the opinion in my own. Because in China they always use one way to look at the question.
(4)

Not all participants were confident that they had reached this stage, YQ nominating it as a particular difficulty. May, once again showing flexibility, said that she questioned what she read at all times, but would suspend her disbelief in cases where it seemed that the course materials supported a particular reading. It seemed that she was ready to read with a questioning mind, but was judicious in her decisions on how to act on that, recognising it as an area of curtailed permission within the university.

Vignette 3: Mike, learning to read in the university

Mike's development as a reader is discussed in the previous section and in his response to his first test (Vignette 1). Over his interviews he provided a coherent account of the process of developing expertise, and the conditions that prompted reflection and the adoption of new approaches. Table 6.1 illustrates his progress from reluctant and struggling reader to adept, interested and, his account suggests, critical user of library resources.

The implications of the fact that this entire journey took place during his university study, rather than in his pre-sessional English course will be discussed later.

Table 6.1 Mike learns to read for the university

Int	Situation	Mike's account	Strategy adopted
1	Preparing for lectures	Before the lecture when I read the books and see the WebCT and then the tutor say anything I know.	Preview reading
2	Unable to draw meaning from reading. Looking at course material in conjunction with test paper Notes taken from reading without careful references	No idea about study and worry about the textbook. Many vocabulary I don't know and I've got no idea what they are talking about. I borrow my friend's last year's test, I saw that and, 'Oh, this question relates to the textbook and my notes and I should read my notes and text carefully with the lecture notes.' I read the books and I just generally read and, 'oh, this idea is good, I'll write down that.' And somebody called this books and I return to library, and a few days later I read my notes, 'Oh, what did this idea come from? Oh, I think it's this book but I returned.'	Preview reading abandoned Careful reading with purpose provided by course materials Systematic recording of references
3	Connecting textbook reading with course work Recording dictionary translations on reading materials Low exam results because of poor recall from reading	First time I will general read the books and second time I will more focus on the notes on the textbook. <i>Notes?</i> I draw it at the first time and I will according to the lecture notes. just like the concept, if I use English to explain what it may be a long ... if you translate Chinese just two words, I understand what the whole thing is. I realise when I read the text or books I think [if] I understand, I can remember, so I just general read the books and then actually I can't remember.	Multiple reading Using L1 to support L2 reading Reading for retention
4	Locating useful material efficiently Keeping track of ideas from reading Confusion arising from trying to incorporate a range of similar sources.	First I will look at the book's name and the table of content, and I found the [headings] and I open the book. First I will write some [heading] and I will read the books and mark the page on the paper. And later I can find. I read many books but final maybe I will just use one or two. ... Because I found if I read too many books and I think this is important, it's useful and mark down and later that book is the same, and so I will find confused sometimes.	Using layout to assist navigation Recording page numbers with quotes Being selective after initial wide reading

	Finding reading involves personal interpretation	I can read the book in different way and I get the opinion in my own. Because in China they always use one way to look at the question.	Evaluating reading
5	More efficient preparation of assignments Using reading to support a personal stance Reading beyond assignment topics	It's more confident to find the <u>exactly</u> useful book and then I will just looking for the major part, so it's more quickly, more effective. then I will compare this book and the other book, the ideas, and textbook so I will choose just one useful. In the first year I will put all the related topic together, so sometimes confused. [when] I need to find resource, sometimes I'm read a book find a related topic, but another topic is interesting, I will still read a little bit. (5)	Locating useful material without wide initial reading Being selective based on personal ideas Reading for personal interest

6.3. Classroom interaction

You can see the tutor and the student, just like they can connect with, and students can feel free to ask questions. (Sky 2)

This was Sky's verdict on what teaching and learning should be like in the university. In this section I shall examine the different affordances offered for connection.

6.3.1. Being audible in lectures

6.3.1.1. Asking questions

In spite of their belief that there was an invitation to ask questions and even "voice out your opinion" (Li Ming 1), from the beginning most participants did not have a high expectation that it would be available to them, as it exposed them to risk. Very public shame could arise from L2 limitations of production (questions not understood by the lecturer) or reception (not having understood content readily perceived by others):

If I don't understand it I don't know if it's my language problem and I didn't understand the teacher's English or if it's my own understanding. I'm afraid if I point it out and everyone else understands, it's my own language and then I'll make myself a fool. (MB)

Another inhibiting factor for Chinese students was strong cultural injunctions against such practice throughout their previous educational experience:

We think the bad manner, when the teachers talk very important so [if] you ask some question, because it's also you spend other people's time, you spend other classmates' time, and you have some problem and question, you can ask the teacher after class. (Connor 1)

in China it is forbidden and it is very, very rude. (Saul 1)

Scott revealed insight into culturally influenced different interpretations of the situation.

Students from other countries sought instant gratification:

They all think, I don't know actually, I have to know right now. I have to get understanding right now. They don't think this is my weakness. If I solve the problem that is my strong point maybe. (Scott 1)

The final comment once again reveals the complexities around concepts of student autonomy.

There was very little use of this strategy before students entered higher levels and smaller, more familiar classes.

6.3.1.2. *Volunteering responses*

Some teachers provided opportunities for student audibility in lectures by eliciting responses to questions. Volunteering an answer was subject to the same risks as asking questions, as Saul's observation of the Korean student revealed (5.6.1.1). There was a point of tension between the imagined self and the personal resources one could actually draw on in a real situation. There was often a desire to take up this opportunity but inhibition prevented it. DX described a lecturer who wanted to offer a voice to international students by asking them regularly about practices in their country, but, "not brave enough," she regretfully kept silence. She noted that this kind of information-seeking question was different in kind from the tutorial questions common in China, where "maybe asking, just teacher skill, not really to want to know what is your answer. I think teacher doesn't care about what I'm thinking."

6.3.1.3. *Coerced responses*

Another strategy that teachers used to engender class contribution was actually nominating who should respond. Being coerced to address the class could result in fear and helpless muteness, or in a sense of legitimacy in contributing to the class. Students who were too shy to volunteer a contribution could be quite pleased to be forced into a position where they needed to respond, since success could give a strong sense of legitimate membership, as May discovered in her first semester. She was called up to the front to participate in an activity:

The first time I very shy, I just, 'No, there's too heaps people, there's 200, I can't face, no, don't watch me!' Something like that. But now, no, in the last workshop I really enjoy it. I go up there, I say, 'I'm very confident. I didn't need to nervous anything.' (3)

Several of the students suggested that lecturers' practice in this regard excluded international students in an unwarranted fashion:

The lecturer was very rude to international students. When he asked questions, he asked for some information, he just asked the Kiwi students, he ignored the international students and say something rude. (LH)

However, further probing revealed that they recognised the teacher's dilemma, that "we want to speak more in the lecture but we are too shy to speak more, but if the teacher just ask you directly, I will feel more shy" (LH). In another course, where she had not done requisite reading in advance, May stopped attending lectures because of the teacher's habit of asking questions of individual students:

Actually I didn't been to that course, any more. I just nervous. Next time I said, 'No, I didn't prepare this time, no, no, don't going today, maybe tomorrow.' But tomorrow I still didn't finish, so I didn't been to that course. (5)

However, far from condemning the lecturer, she felt this was a very helpful practice which, had it been implemented from the beginning, would have been a strong motivation to do the reading in advance.

It seemed, then, that the in-class elicitation of responses from Chinese students was fraught with difficulties. Being audible was highly valued but very threatening of face.

6.3.2. Participating in tutorials and workshops

6.3.2.1. *Discussing with Kiwi peers*

In the imagined interactive university of the students' hopes, tutorials seemed to offer the possibility of a meeting place with their New Zealand peers. In fact, this was a relatively complex discourse to enter. It involved comprehending the content of the course, comprehending the unadjusted language typical of young New Zealanders, and having the confidence to impose reception, which could appear to be contested by Kiwi classmates. In early days this was being navigated alongside the reticence of the local classmates also negotiating identities in the unfamiliar setting. Consequently, it was a

little more limited than the participants had dreamed: “They just talk one sentence, two sentence and then all finish” (Mike 1). It was particularly hard for international students:

In fact, I want to talk about anything, the other things, but I don’t know how to say, so it’s difficult for me, and it’s like I think but I don’t say. (Thomas 1)

By the end of the semester, things had not changed much: “In discuss the Kiwi speak more. We just most of the time listen” (Thomas 3). GZ’s account did not describe a sophisticated exchange of ideas:

I think the main idea I can understand and some general words I can talk, I can say. I think I can understand what they say and they can understand what I say.

Mike found that by virtue of sitting near Chinese students in his classes he could confine classroom discussion to L1.

Nevertheless there was evidence of a developing discourse, initially mostly for those students whose interviews demonstrated more developed oral skills. This produced pride at being able to participate (“and that time I think, ‘Oh, good, I know how to talk to them,’” May 2) and even to outshine (“I find some Kiwi is quite shy, and sometimes I talked a lot but they just keep quiet, so I think that is quite good,” Saul 2). This was a valued part of being-and-doing a university student.

Teacher intervention to encourage mixed groups was appreciated and made a difference. These measures were often absent but were prevalent in one discipline and were happily recalled:

Today is really fun ’cause we just finished tutorial and it’s really friendly group and really special, so just fifteen people sitting on the ground, making a circle, just like kindergarten students, playing game. It’s really fun. So I think after this semester I can make a real Kiwi friend, or maybe not Kiwi, maybe not only Chinese, another country’s friend. (Scott 4)

For all students, smaller higher level classes and increased experience of the university environment led to greater engagement:

As I understand more, I tend to speak more and ask questions, more questions. (KT)

’Cause they already got most of them got 100 and 200 their foundation so they can use the knowledge they already knew to combine with the release their opinion. (Scott 5)

Mike suggested, however, that there were cultural barriers that remained between them:

Sometimes they talk about the topic is talk about the experience, Kiwi's experience. It's totally different in my experience. Sometimes I'm still not understand it. ... if I talk about my experience I can feel they have question mark about it. (5)

For Mike, this provided an opportunity for learning about cultural difference; he was not so sure that local students saw it the same way:

But many they, to be honest, I would say they don't understand other people. They think this is my home, New Zealand. Yeah. Some Kiwi students. (5)

6.3.2.2. Consulting the tutor

Interaction with local students was not the only aspect of tutorials that made them a closer match with the imagined university than lectures. It was possible to talk to the tutor while other students were discussing, and this was the only forum in which Scott risked asking questions in his first year:

Because tutorial you got a time to have a talk with the lecturer, and they ask you maybe have you got any question, so I, 'Yeah, I have,' so maybe not so long the time, maybe just several minute, but it's really important for me because those time is all for me, nobody interrupts, just ask the question and why. So it's quite good. (5)

It was a private public space in which he found legitimate ways of asking without the fear that he might be imposing inappropriately.

6.4. Talking to teachers outside class hours

I prefer to ask the lecturer. It's straight and get answer easier. (May 4)

This practice proved important for some of the students as a source of understanding and an important way of establishing some sense of connection. As a strategy it was available in the scant ten-minute whirl between classes or in office hours which lecturers designated for such consultations.

6.4.1. Attendant risks

These encounters were subject, once again, to risk, including communication breakdown: “I’m afraid the tutor can’t understand ... communication is not a problem but sometimes you ask a question, maybe use some academic word, a lot” (Sky 2). Or of being seen as inappropriate. For example, one lecturer said:

‘Don’t ask me some silly questions in my working time.’ So after this, you can imagine that how many students can bear to ask his question. No, no students. (LH)

Once again, the effect was to silence the student voice, because what was not made clear was how to judge whether a question was stupid or not. Institutional mystery prevailed and students found there were varied responses. There were some teachers you could ask, “but some teacher just didn’t answer your question. It’s just like the gamble sometimes, we don’t know it nearly” (Connor 3).

The process of trying to resolve this question and become effective users of this strategy can be observed through the experiences of May and Saul, for both of whom it became very important, but who used it rather differently and in ways which reveal important aspects of it as a tool for learning.

Vignette 4: May, seeking understanding of course content

May seemed to work out very quickly ways that were recognised as appropriate within the university. In the very first interview she recounted a discussion with friends as to what they might be:

One time my friend tell me, ‘If you go to that course, and you ask the tutor like that, your tutor will say, ‘You can’t ask me that stupid question.’ I say, ‘Is it? I try.’ I don’t know and I can’t find on the study guide and that course haven’t a textbook. I can’t find in the dictionary. I said, ‘I must need to ask. If I don’t understand what can I do?’ (May 1)

May had invented a university in which she had a right to understand, but she also had responsibility to work towards understanding herself. She manifested in each of her interviews a strong personal quest for understanding (see Vignette 6) and this made her willing to invest in this risk-taking strategy and to use it in quite demanding ways. In her second interview she indicated the importance it held for her:

I remember last time I asked her for half hour, just one question. I said, ‘No, I don’t understand.’ She said, ‘Like that, like that.’ I said, ‘No, I still can’t understand,’ and she said, ‘OK, maybe the other example, and do that so --’ (2)

It might be assumed that she was overtaxing the teacher's time in this instance, but on the other hand she was espousing one of the values recognised in the university, that of not simply accepting what cannot be understood, a necessary first step towards critical thinking, and perhaps for that reason her approach was tolerated at this point. By the end of the semester, though, she was receiving a slightly different message:

She always tell me, 'You can ask on the web.' I say, 'No, I don't know how I can ask very properly what I want to ask, so I think I go face-to-face and you can solve me every problem.' (3)

The over-reliance on the teacher indicated in her last sentence clashes with another value, of course, that of student autonomy, and although she resisted the message at first, by the next semester she was more compliant:

They just give the answers not very properly and they just to say, 'I just can tell you this, and otherwise you find by yourself.' So I try to do more on the internet to find the information, to find the solution, how to do it, and go to the library to find the books, how to do it, or something like that. (5)

Significantly, by now she had more resources available than the dictionary and Study Guide she consulted in her first query. Also of significance is the partial response that the teachers gave her. Others, too, referred to this practice, generally recognising it as a teaching strategy to encourage greater autonomy.

While May reduced dependence on talking directly to teachers in her second semester, in the interview at the end of her second year, by which time she was doing 200- and 300-level courses, she reported that she was using it extensively again, but as part of a multi-layered approach in which she herself had vigorous engagement. She recounts here what happened if she could not understand what the teacher told her:

If I ask the question, and explain for me and I still don't understand ... I will ask her again. Not same question. I will ask the different way. ... But I can't catch at the same time. But I'm pretty sure I can catch it maybe later, so I tell her 'OK, I can catch it maybe later. Let me to think about it.' So I will get back to library and read the book, and when you read the book you will say, 'Oh, that's what the teacher say just before.' So you will catch it. So maybe couple of hours later you will get what she say. And then you will go back to the teacher and say, 'That right? I got the ideas right?' She will say, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'

There was no indication in this interview of any teacher resistance to her approaches; on the contrary she had been invited by at least one teacher to come and consult him.

Vignette 5: Saul, seeking guidance on course processes

Saul's oral proficiency far outweighed his literacy in English and his verbal skills were germane to his sense of identity. This then was a strategy that readily suggested itself to him, and his most important source of learning by the second semester. However, his ways of using it were not always accepted, which remained perplexing to him to the end.

The most common trigger for his use seems to have been issues of process rather than content, for example, his request for preview test questions which elicited the response that that was "a kind of cheating" (Vignette 1). He often found it difficult to see how assignment topics related to course work:

So I just go to the lecturer several times, and of course the tutor, and the lecturer point out the main problem and main issue, and we discussion, and he is quite satisfied with my answer. (4)

His routine approach to preparing assignments was these multiple visits (Vignette 2). He found the written feedback on assignments difficult to understand so on their return, often sought out the teachers for a further face-to-face consultation.

Such a dependence on teacher guidance sometimes elicited responses which caused him dissatisfaction on several counts. First of all, he found he could receive two kinds of answers, direct and indirect, and he very much preferred the former. He did not see indirect responses as strategic on the part of the teachers but simply

not good for the answer question. Because I just want to know how to use the pen, and you have to tell me why there is a pen, and what's the pen's history, rather than you just tell me, 'Click this.' (5)

He also sometimes received "aggressive" responses to questions considered "stupid," especially in unfamiliar disciplines as he completed his 100-level core papers, even towards the end of his study: "Lecturer say, 'Oh, no, I can not answer this question, oh, no.' I don't know if it's kind of grumpy or if it's kind of secret' (5). It seemed that Saul had still not managed to solve the institutional mystery around these matters.

Comparing these two usages of the strategy, May's was generally to enhance her understanding of the course, which was her very clear reason for embarking on study in New Zealand. She exercised far greater agency than Saul in the face of unsatisfactory responses, imposing her sense of her right to know, or accepting her own responsibility to supplement answers that were less than lucid. The university is, however, a broad church: Saul's skill lay in finding a place within it where his appeals were responded to and he could be the student he wanted to be.

6.4.2. Seeking personal recognition

It seemed there was another purpose in the use of this strategy for some of the participants alongside the two (content and process) already identified. It was clear that for most who used it one of its functions was to re-build some of the overt social mediation they had enjoyed at the language centres.

This can be seen very clearly through the accounts of two other participants, YQ and Gemma. YQ said she often went to talk to her teachers and “if I have some question I will ask her” (2). That was not the main objective, though. YQ was an active participant in class and knew that this was noticed, but she used her Chinese name, which New Zealand teachers found hard to remember, “so usually the phenomenon is teachers know me but teachers do not know who I am.” Her objective in talking to the teachers was to impress herself on them so that “when I handed in my assignment, I really want teachers to relate my image and my work together and give me a reasonable mark” (2).

In another instance, Gemma had been to a teacher to ask a question and he had spontaneously discussed with her his surprise at the mediocre mark she had received for her first assignment. She commented that she was glad he had remembered her because “always good to get lecturer’s attention” (3). There are many reasons why we can imagine that that would be the case for a gregarious young woman finding herself rather lonely in a large institution in a new city. However, of particular interest in Gemma’s account were two instances where this recognition led to enhancement in her learning. The first of these instances was the conversation recounted here. The lecturer indicated he believed she could have done better since she appeared to be an able student in class. This, she said, gave her the motivation to work hard at the second part of the assignment for which she received high marks. His recognition of her as a person with potential to do well enabled her to fulfil that potential.

The other instance arose when the same teacher, in the first few weeks of class, asked her to report back to the class on her group’s discussion of a point. I suggested that not all Chinese students would have been willing to do that and she responded that “perhaps he thinks that I can do it” (2) because she had talked to him several times and he knew a little about her. She found this coerced contribution to the course in class really useful to “get ourselves into the work” (2) because “when you say it you remember it” (3). Here, then, was another instance where the personal recognition arising from encounters with the teacher led to improvement in study.

6.4.3. Instances of lack of uptake

6.4.3.1. *Inexpert non-use*

If, then, such outcomes were available as a result of using this strategy, what could be read into its non-use by other students?

An obvious reason is inhibition, and Sky reveals that clearly. She was excluded from the “connection” of her imagined university (6.3) because “I’m afraid to ask” (2). She could get no closer than being a wistful observer at the edge of the questioners at the end of the lecture, a physical position of marginalisation.

Two other instances of non-use were Mike and Scott. Initially they claimed that they preferred to solve problems by calling on other resources like the Study Guides and friends. However, later comments suggested that this was not the complete story. When asked how he would advise prospective students, part of Mike’s response was, “if have any questions, ask teacher or friends. Don’t do it yourself, because I’m do it myself so not good” (4). Asking for help from others was “good and save energy.”

As indicated above, Scott had begun in his second semester to venture questions within tutorials (6.3.2.2). In the following year, as he grew more familiar with the teachers of his major papers, when encountering them around the campus he would engage in conversation with them and then bring in a study-related topic. With awe in his voice he commented about one:

He’s really nice, because any time or anywhere when you meet him, he don’t care talking about some for him speaking is work, some job stuff, but for me is study, he don’t care, just say, ‘It’s OK. If you got problem, just come and see me, any time anywhere. If I meet you we have a talk.’ So it means during the daily conversation I can also ask him some study stuff as well. (5)

Whereas YQ and Gemma had used approaches to teachers to forge personal recognition, it seemed that for Scott, it was personal recognition that opened for him the sense of legitimacy in approaching the teacher.

6.4.3.2. *Expert non-use*

Gao was the only student whose evolution towards non-use seems to have been self-chosen. He had reported extensive use in the first year, seeming to value the contact it gave him at a time when he felt alienated by other aspects of his experience: “I always ask question after the lecture. And you know it’s the individual communication” (2). By

the second semester he was able to claim a language-centre-like relationship: “Some of the teachers are my quite good friends” (4).

His voyage towards autonomy, a vital aspect of the experience for him as we shall see (Vignette 8), led him to reduce reliance on this strategy, however:

I don't go to see my professor very often 'cause I want to sort of test myself to see what can I do by myself rather than getting some help from my teachers. And also I would say if I want to really carry on with my study I got to have that ability to do it by myself, self study and things. (5)

6.4.4. Understanding a genre

Talking to teachers outside class time served students in many ways, helping them meet content, process and affective goals. More than that, as participants described instances where their approaches had been experienced as appropriate and responded to helpfully, a sense emerged that this moment of speaking eye to eye with a member of the academy in English about an academic subject, being understood and understanding in return, represented a high degree of being-and-doing a university student, a central moment of membership. However, it also carried the threat of revealing one's exclusion from this status if one got it wrong, and the question of discernible norms that could to some degree unravel the “secret” (Saul 5) and turn it into less of a “gamble” (Connor 3) is considered in Chapter 8.

A tabulated representation of variable factors in the full range of strategies for talking to teachers one to one can be found in Appendix 12.

6.5. The question of English

All the people in China think that if you go outside for your education it must be very good for your English and you have to do your best and even better than other people in our country. (Li Ming 1)

The English language dimensions affected every stage and every aspect of the experience of study abroad. It acted as motivator, gatekeeper, filter, medium, continual challenge, threat to face, ongoing barrier to easy social relations, goal and both facilitator and measure of success.

6.5.1. Entry level

Most of the students in the study began their university careers with an IELTS Band 5.5 or 6. The Band descriptor for 6 indicates a “Competent User” who

Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations. (IELTS, 2006, p. 4)

While this level of English is certainly not negligible and represents a considerable language-learning journey, reading tertiary textbooks and attending 50-minute lectures in large halls were not familiar situations to the students and predictably they suffered language shock. There were several overt or implied references to the difference between IELTS and university level. For example, YQ had found the first lecture “totally different with the IELTS test” (see 5.5.2), and May’s first essay result caused this reaction:

Oh, feel terrible, because I go to the IELTS, I got 6 point for the writing so I think my writing is all right but the essay to give me to let me to know my writing is terrible. (3)

Rather than the endpoint it had seemed, IELTS was just the entrée to a more challenging journey:

’Cause for the language school student thinking, ‘Oh, I got 6, in the university, I can relax!’ That is the point they think are wrong, totally wrong. It’s not true. They have to work harder, harder, harder than language school. (Scott 4)

6.5.2. English as a filter of the experience

For these students, the university experience was like a cloze test with very high stakes. They could not receive the richness of input that was available to native speakers and so had to make their way through the intricacies of the language-intense university journey with certain means not at their disposal. At times this had seemed like an absolute barrier, especially during periods of initial blank (for example, feeling like “wood” at the first lecture, YQ 1). For some, the cloze gaps left shorter stretches of accessible text than for others, as the interview encounters revealed.

Connor was one of these, regularly misinterpreting my questions. He was clearly intelligent and independent of spirit, and was frustrated that his poor English counted against him:

We come here not just for study about English. I don't think some Chinese who can speak English is good than some Chinese can't speak English. It's not about English, it's about thinking and different view. (2)

Inevitably, though, thinking is mediated through language and its communication to those with the power to allow progression in the university was necessarily in English, a complicating factor Connor himself recognised: "language different veil the thinking different. Maybe the general idea is same, but how to thinking in English, how to writing in English important for Chinese student" (2).

Connor provided a prime example of the importance of a threshold level of English to allow other learning factors to come into play, receiving very low marks from the beginning. Reading was a long-winded process (6.2.2.2), and as he also had great difficulty disciplining himself to study, it fell well short of what was required (for example, in one course he had read the principles but not the cases that elucidated them). He also had to resort to surface level memorising approaches (5.6.4.2.1) which clashed with his rather liberal beliefs, that university should be about learning to think rather than getting a job, for example.

Other participants' accounts indicated, however, that in general they managed to strategise to make compensation for many of the gaps, copying down any written texts displayed and reading the textbook as a substitute for dependence on the lecturer's spoken word, guessing new words from context, eliciting extra explanations from more expert others, calling on prior L1-based knowledge and their own intelligence, and making a greater commitment of time than was necessary for local students to achieve the same task.

Some of these strategies, though, carried a degree of risk. For example, guessing from context is an important reading skill, but could potentially lead to an imprecise understanding, and imprecision about the nuanced and fluid meaning of words was a pitfall:

That is disadvantage to the international student, because that is our second language and also that is understanding problem. ... I find that is quite tricky is in the exam and they always have this kind of question, such as you just change one word and whole meaning is changed so, and A B C D, which one is right, you know. You just remember the definition, and if you

not understand very well, only change one word and whole the things are changed, so it is making me very, very confused. (Saul 4)

Thus, in spite of the high completion rate among participants, it must be acknowledged that for most the filter was still there to some extent until the end, as these two comments, both made in the final semester of study, illustrate:

I can't get all the meaning from the lecture, especially for speaking English, because if writing is I can read again but speaking is not. ... but just get the main point, it's better, it's better than before, yeah. (Mike 5)

If the teachers talk very interesting issues and stuff, and using a flexible way I feel comfortable with that, and I can understand 70% or 80%. But I couldn't understand 100% of what teachers said. But for me I think it is enough to get understand. (YQ 2)

It is important, though, not to suggest that ESOL status was entirely a matter of deficit or to make an absolute correlation between knowledge of English and ability to meet university challenges. These students brought with them, for example, their life experience and skills as communicators, which meant that sometimes the more confident could find themselves leading mixed group discussions in tutorials, as Saul and FW reported, rather than being silenced observers. Local students, observing their control of the class content, could seek them out for help (May 3, Gao 3). Another area of their existing expertise, their diverse cultural experience, was also sometimes able to be used as cultural capital within discussion, though most frequently in courses with an obviously intercultural focus.

6.5.2.1. Meeting oral goals

As would be expected, students experienced improvements in their English. Scott, for example, found that “after several assignment is quite improvement for me in my writing” (3). May began to internalise grammar to the extent that she could self-correct draft assignments: “just maybe I read the book much and I listen the tutor what they talking about so sometimes I can correct the grammar” (3). We have seen, too, there was evidence of reading becoming more skilled and vocabulary increasing to facilitate that by allowing non-use of dictionaries (6.2).

The skill that seemed to improve least in the first year was speaking, and this was a cause of disappointment. It was as fluent oral communicators in encounters with foreigners that they had imagined themselves on return to China, so this skill was

significant to their quest. However, opportunities for talk were much more limited than hoped in the first year. Mike had been told by friends

you study at university you don't need to talk, you don't need to talk. You just attend the lecture, take notes and library and do your assignments. You don't need to talk. (1)

Li Ming had suffered a setback in his speaking because of lack of opportunity “so I think that is quite sad for me” (2). May had thought that English for “accommodation” would improve through daily activity, “but I don't think so I got that thing I imagined that thing” (3). Scott's improvements in academic English were not matched in his “daily English” (4). Mike, who designated himself as “not a talking person” (1) even in L1, had not noticed any improvement in his oral skills, but did feel he had experienced an important change, in overcoming his fear of speaking:

Even I speak I am still wrong or not a grammar, they can't understand, OK. I need to try, this time wrong and this time fail and next time right. I think everyone should have this experience. (Mike 3)

After the first year, there was more evidence of improvement in oral use, especially for Gao, who was engaged in a range of extracurricular activities in mixed groups. In Interview 2 he had wished for lecturers to slow down their speech, and in Interview 3, for Kiwi students to do likewise, but by the end of the year needed neither adjustment: “I'm sort of getting used to the Kiwi accent” (4). By the end of the next year, he had achieved automaticity, saying “now I don't really care if my English is good enough or not. I just use it” (5), and this use included trained voluntary work as a telephone counsellor. His talk was beginning to echo its influences from the talk of young New Zealanders, with noticeable use of high-rising terminals (5) and phrases like “And she was like, ‘Are you kidding?’” (6). It was clear in his final interview, though, that he was adept not just in informal varieties: as he talked of the meaning of this study abroad experience to him, he demonstrated a command of the discourse of the university and an eloquence that would be the envy of many native speakers, discussing his “exploration of my religion identity” and developing an extended metaphor around a walk in the bush he had taken in one of New Zealand's national parks:

I really want to relate this to my life, feel like in my life I'm walking in a bush as well, I don't really see the destination, the only thing I can do is just explore all things. I'm still in the bush I would think even though I could see a little light somewhere. Still. (6)

However, even Gao, whose speech clearly manifests Miller's (2003) measures of proficiency in contextualised communicative competence, reported sometimes encountering situations where he could not understand the talk.

Other students attributed improvement in English skills to part-time work (Mike, Scott), a non-Chinese ESOL girlfriend (Scott), homestay communication (May, who, after a few months with a young New Zealand family used a number of mild expletives in her interview) and to conscious use of English in a wider number of domains (Saul, YQ). Although the evidence of the later rounds of study was of steady improvement, none of the participants felt they had entirely fulfilled the goal of effortless fluency by the end of their study. In one sense, though, this was partly because they had moved the goalposts. Scott's had changed from being "at least I good at maybe general English" for "good communication" with "foreigners clients" (2) to the "really formal format and speaking in a specific business way" needed for working in a New Zealand company (6).

6.5.3. English as de-stabiliser of identity

You need to think about it, how to act like an English speaker (FW)

English was more than a medium for learning. It was an important means of the presentation of self and being-and-doing a university student, as FW's comment attests. Participants were aware that their language limitations masked their intelligence, and wistfully protested their perceived positioning as inferior by others:

Sometimes you can't catch up the words or stuff like that. But it doesn't mean that we're more stupid than Kiwis. Actually we have ideas to exchange, stuff like that. (TY)

Most shaming and undermining were public pronouncements from teachers:

Some friend told me, have some tutor, they ask some question, made us feel so bad, because it's the first time assignment, they spend a long time and the tutor ask them why the Chinese student, their grammar so bad. (Sky 1)

Once one of my lecturers said in class, say too many Chinese students here deteriorated our education standards. That certainly make me sad. (Graduate student in pilot interview)

It is hardly surprising that some of the participants initially avoided situations that might reveal such deficits.

6.5.4. Choices around L1 and L2

While use of English was often dictated by requirements to communicate with co-participants in the educational encounter, its use as the means of expression for participants' inner speech was more subject to conscious consideration and choice. Its choice for complex internal cognitive tasks was available, Guerrero (2005) suggests, only when a certain level had been attained.

6.5.4.1. L1 domains of use for learning

6.5.4.1.1. Using L1 to scaffold understanding in L2

The discrepancy between the vocabulary load of tertiary texts and the limitations of the participants' own lexical store made L1, through the medium of a bilingual dictionary, an essential tool at the beginning of their study. Its role as scaffold to deeper understanding is made very explicit in Connor's account (6.2.2.2) of moving from thinking in L1 for the first reading to L2 for final retention of ideas, and from May: "I need to translation for Chinese and free on my mind and then read again, read again and then go to the exam" (3). This role was also evident in discussion and elaboration of ideas with Chinese classmates:

We sometimes talk to the concepts, use Chinese, because use Chinese I have idea what is it and I relate to English, 'Oh' and I read the questions and I know what they are talking. (Mike 2)

Until a threshold of proficiency was attained, the effort expended in retrieving L2 to express new ideas would have been in too much competition with the cognitive activity of understanding and learning them, and so L1 was the most reliable medium.

In response to unforeseen poor results in his first semester exams bringing a realisation that he had not sufficiently scoped his task, Thomas resolved to increase his reliance on L1 by translating all his second semester study guides into Chinese: "I think for me the translate the book is very important" (3). Unfortunately he did not participate in the extended study, so it cannot be reported whether the effort proved worthwhile.

6.5.4.1.2. Using L1 for remembering

Another demanding cognitive activity was retaining learning. Reverting to Chinese proved more reliable for remembering where any complexity was involved:

Some notes, such as some bullet points, I think it is quite easy to remember in English, but if you have the whole paragraph and we explain one

meaning and every time just to translate into Chinese and to remember it.
(Saul 3)

6.5.4.1.3. Using L1 for accessing existing knowledge

Participants brought existing learning with them, and sometimes, particularly in calculation-based learning, translation of a concept into L1 could unlock an existing fund of knowledge:

If I read the statistic in English I will, 'I don't know this word what the meaning,' so I will still translate into Chinese, and then I find this word, 'Oh, this word!' So relate to this word's knowledge, it will all come up, so it's more easy for me. (Mike 5)

6.5.4.2. L1/L2 transfer

6.5.4.2.1. Rendering L1 understanding visible in L2

The difficulties that made L1 the more reliable choice for these cognitive activities also produced risk. The new concepts came wrapped in new vocabulary, often polysyllabic, and those words needed to be stored for written retrieval: "maybe that is new word, so I have to remember how to spell" (Saul 3). Expression of retained ideas needed to be in L2 for assessment purposes, and this occupied the minds of students who relied on L1 as they prepared for exams:

But my friends told me it's not a good way because we think in Chinese and sometimes Chinese cannot directly translate to English, so when we direct translate from Chinese it's maybe wrong, or other people can't understand.
(Mike 3)

May's strategy was to finish preparation with a return to a final visual encounter with the English version:

Just remember the first that Chinese word it'll be easier, but before the exam I will try to read the English word, what I found in the dictionary I try to remember the words so on the exam that time I can write down. (May 4)

Initially, neither of these students could avoid this risk; they were dependent on L1 for deep cognitive processing.

6.5.4.2.2. Two domains of learning

In his second semester of study, though, Mike was making more use of L2 inner speech, depending, as Guererro (2005) suggests, on the domain of initial learning:

Some knowledge relate to the past I will translate in Chinese. Even after I go back to China and talk to business, some part of I will relate to English.
(Mike 4)

Increasing proficiency in English was releasing more of his working memory to operate in L2.

6.5.4.3. *Relying on L2*

In contrast to Thomas above, other students tended to move towards more extensive use of L2 for learning. For those able to achieve this, it proved helpful on various counts. Scott made a conscious decision to “use the English to think the English problem” in Week Seven and found “it feel better than before, so I learning quite a lot after Week Seven, sharp change” (3). He was not the only one to use metacognitive effort to change to L2 inner speech. Both Saul and YQ in later interviews talked of striving to use English even in domains where it was not required, such as e-mails to Chinese friends. YQ used it when alone to comment on things around her, “to speak out what I am thinking, what’s my view about that thing,” (2) and felt really rewarded for her efforts when she dreamed in English.

The benefits of being able to work directly in L2 for writing were attested to by several. Cutting out the translation process saved time and prevented the conundrum of working between two very different media. “I mean the way you talk is definitely different from the way we talk. And just the thinking, the logic, thinking is different” (Gemma 3).

Appendix 13 gives an account of one students’ complex web of language-switching.

6.5.5. Entry level: retrospective views

In the light of their own experience of using English in the university, students’ thoughts about an appropriate English proficiency benchmark for enrolment were revelatory. Ten of the 24 participants had enrolled under the special arrangement with the Wideweb agency requiring the lower IELTS Band 5.5 result. It is possible that their existing (though lower level) discipline knowledge compensated for some linguistic limitation, although this claim was rarely made. The question of whether they would advise beginning study with that level was pertinent.

Several participants expressed the view that such a low entry level was inadvisable: “Please be 6. At least especially, please be 6 in your writing part. Otherwise assignment is so painful and waste your money and time” (DX).

On the other hand, Scott felt that the track record of students who had come under the Wideweb aegis showed they were willing to accept this burden: “they already graduate, they work really hard, they already start going on their study. I think generally speaking is good” (4). Discussing problems he had had with a course in his third year, he suggested that there were other causes of failure:

I think the question that I couldn’t understand well doesn’t have a relationship between the level of IELTS that I have. The main reason I think I couldn’t get the point of the question in my assignment is I can’t go to the correct area that the lecturer want the student focus on, probably I will just go to the wrong way. (6)

Louise summed up the apparently conflicting views on language level:

Actually if students just want to pass his paper, the IELTS result is OK, but if want to get more better result or learn more knowledge and enjoy his study, this IELTS result is not enough. (3)

The essential question was about whether the achievement of the qualification goal was enough.

One point that was consistently made in this regard was the value of achieving as high an English level as possible before leaving China to obviate the struggles that some of them had experienced in their early period in New Zealand. Even those who advocated this emphasised the value, nevertheless, of an English language course on arrival to orientate to language and culture in New Zealand and to ensure that the focus after enrolment could be firmly on study,

because you can learn the culture, and the people how to live and the people like to do what and the information about the local area. It’s very important. Yes, and then you will easy to take the university course. So now I’m studying in the university and other things I don’t need to worry about because I know. (Mike 1)

6.5.5.1. IELTS as a benchmark

Only May actually questioned the value of IELTS as a measure of ability to use English within the university. She recognised that the test was a different kind of discourse from undergraduate study. After her first failed attempt she had left her

English language centre and undertaken a period of intense self-study, looking at sample tests and working out what was required to pass them, that is, conquering the specific IELTS discourse. Consequently, she did not believe that results were a reliable measure, in the middle levels between 5 and 6, of differences between her and her friends that would be significant at university:

Maybe I'm poorer than them, but maybe I go to the exam I just one time I know how to listen, I know how to reading, I know how to writing, just like that. (3)

The final word on this question goes to CN who considered it from the point of view of the university itself. As a marketing ploy to increase numbers, he found lowering the IELTS level misguided:

It's really bad for the school, really bad for Rutherford. Because every Chinese will think the best school must be the difficult one to get in. This is China. It's different in New Zealand because you can come, anyone can come, but it's difficult to graduate, but Chinese is different, so you go down [lower] the requirement so Chinese will think this school is not good. That's a really big problem, and mistake. (CN)

The exemption has since been discontinued.

Chapter Seven: Sources of Learning

7.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, complex journeys have been discussed as students learned to navigate the requirements and solve at least some of the mysteries of the university. The focus of the first part of this chapter is on the processes and events that made those changes possible, addressing Research Question 2. It will first examine the ways different people facilitated growing expertise and then turn to focus on the students themselves, beginning with their beliefs about learning and then looking at the different ways they found that to some degree allowed them to be the students that they wanted to be. The chapter will finish by looking at the final outcomes of the journey from a number of perspectives, to understand something of the nature of the changes they had undergone (Research Question 3).

7.2. Key people

In spite its DIY aspects, people are an essential ingredient of learning within the university as elsewhere. The students were exposed to many new and unsettling requirements, and a mediating presence could help overcome frustrated bewilderment and restore a sense of agency. There were also people whose contribution came in providing a background environment in which participants could recognise themselves as supported and accepted human beings, areas of their lives in which they did not have to grapple with constant new challenges. People who proved to be significant to their experience were to be found within the university, but also within other arenas of their lives.

7.2.1. Teachers and university staff

The most obvious source of such mediation within an educational institution is the teaching staff, and this section will examine the qualities that participants identified as

particularly helpful, and accounts of teachers who made critical contributions to their development as students.

7.2.1.1. *Helpful teachers*

Helpful teachers were described on both imagined and experienced planes. When I asked them during the first year what advice they would give to a teacher who had a large number of international students in their class, one student described the ideal very much in terms of “long conversations” and personal awareness:

Sometimes even encouraging and like what I say motivation would be really, really helpful, because I was saying my friend, like she would be much more motivated if her lecturer pay more attention to her and said, ‘Well, this is your advantage and you should keep that and carry on with this and then what’s your drawback.’ Gemma (3)

The measure most frequently suggested was slower speech delivery. Frequently, however, the suggestion was immediately followed by the caveat that this could compromise the delivery of ideas:

If you ask the lecturer to don’t speak as fast, or not using hard words or hard phrase or anything, and then the lecturer themselves couldn’t express their knowledge as well. If they couldn’t do that, then the students couldn’t get as much information, or as precise as information could be, but if the lecturer is using simple words and speak slowly the students might get it but they’re probably getting not as much as sometimes they just need. (MB)

Mike asserted, “Teacher is just one person, but student is many. The teacher cannot change to suit many students, just the student” (2).

In their descriptions of actual teachers and teaching they found helpful, unsurprisingly students favoured detailed explanations of new concepts:

They explain the study materials in more details, I mean maybe for some specific questions they explain more details about the study materials, but generally they don’t do it. It’s much better than I learn it by myself. (Gao 2)

This desire was not necessarily straightforward either, though. While at times lack of explanation seemed like a derogation of duty, too much support was seen as demeaning, as Gemma’s dismissal of one tutor indicates: “she treat us like little wee people, like the student from language school” (2). Being a university student did mean, to some extent, being pushed to uncomfortable positions at the boundaries or beyond of one’s ZPD, the serious learning challenges that McInnis (1997) calls for. Success at operating on those

margins pushed them proudly to new heights, as when May and Gemma rose to the challenge of being called to participate in activities in front of the class (6.3.1.3, 6.4.2), and gave them an admiration for the teachers who judged the challenge well. In her second semester, an assignment for which there were minimal instructions (“he just to say, ‘I want to get that result, just do it’”) led May to work without break for two days and to conclude: “That’s make me feel, ‘Oh, cool, I can search something.’ And feel very successful” (4).

The most frequently mentioned characteristic that enhanced understanding was giving examples to support explanations of theories (“because I never work before, never work before so I need the example” Sky 3). A clear connection with life outside made these examples particularly pertinent:

Give us some examples of what realistic things, like, will happen in the organisation, what happens of the working process. I really want to know something exactly happens that’s real, like when you are doing advertising promotion, they give examples of McDonald’s, things like that. (TY)

Such examples, though, often excluded the international students, being too localised.

7.2.1.2. Long conversations

Repeated interactions allowing both parties to understand and respond to the contributions and conceptualisations of the other were not structured into the university experience, except in tutorials and higher level and EAP classes. Nevertheless, some of the students made proactive efforts to develop them (6.4). Saul explained why he found it important to have personalised relationships with his teachers:

Because we know each other and we know what do you want and what do you need and for students and what’s your weakness and what’s your strength, and how can I improve your weakness and how can I to emphasise your strength.
(5)

Saul took careful measures to engender such relationships, for example, including an allusion to the Bible in an e-mail to one lecturer to highlight the common ground of their Christianity, and, even when he was studying a paper by distance, making multiple visits to the teacher on campus:

I quite enjoyed it because when my first time to see Liz and she, I know -- she know I’m Saul, and next time we can talk like friend and we can talk, ‘You are Liz and I’m Saul.’ (5)

Such efforts were generally met with kindness but more than one student indicated that this was not always the case.

7.2.1.3. Key teachers

Standing out from talk of the generalised contribution of teachers were incidences of more marked help, where a teacher made a critical contribution to students' successful entry into a discipline, or indeed into the wider university community.

In two cases, they were teachers whom the students encountered several weeks into the course who had managed to shed light on a deeply distressing mire of incomprehension:

He's very patient with international, he ask about what international students are at, and he sort of explains every concept and helped us to explain the assignments, especially when it's a very hard subject. ... he offered a free session after every lecture. You know, it finishes at five but he continues to six, just for internationals or anyone who has problems, too. (KT)

The words he said he speaks very easily to understand, and even though [previously] I read book by myself, 'cause I review or whatever, but still there's no blueprint in my mind, so it's really hard to understand, but at week five I found I realised what is G101 (JN)

These teachers clearly accorded legitimacy to international students' particular difficulties affording them a personal recognition and respect that elsewhere sometimes eluded them. What was interesting about these accounts were that in several cases the same names recurred across several participants' interviews. It was clear that the tutor described above by JN, for example, was "quite popular among the international students" (DX) and sought out for advice beyond his own discipline, in DX's case enabling her to make the all-important decision to change her field of study (5.7.4.1.2). He also provided Li Ming with what seems to have been his only instance of face-to-face teacher scaffolding in the first semester, enabling him to complete an assignment with confidence.

There was one lecturer whose name recurred as well:

When lecturer walked in so gently and kind, and some students can asking questions freely and even though maybe sometime the response was not good, not smart, but the teacher still encourage, I so appreciate that. ... Actually [he] invite several times about international students. 'Is it any different idea from your country?' (DX)

This was the teacher who had spurred Gemma on to improve her performance (6.4.2). Appreciation of the apparent empathy that such teachers had for international students was not, though, based on any relaxing of standards on their part. Of this lecturer, Gemma said:

Really good, but people always scared of him as well, because he's really strict, like marking, but I found his lectures has been really comprehensive, ... he explained everything really clearly to us and he gave you examples and when in the tutorial time he set us into groups, we can discuss things. (2)

Saul's induction into ways that allowed him to get results more concomitant with the effort he expended occurred in the second semester within the discipline of his major study. Here he seemed to find the friendly relationships he had associated with New Zealand teachers, and teachers willing to provide close guidance in his university work through multiple checking of drafts that was not usual in this setting (Vignettes 2, 5). This helped him on both a personal and an academic level to achieve a sense of membership: help was offered "from the heart" (5) and his grades improved.

The teacher who was germane to turning around Gao's first semester experience from contemplating dropping out to becoming an engaged and achieving student with rich experiences in and out of class (5.6.6.3.3) was not from his university courses but from the language centre he had attended beforehand. This was a forum in which long conversations had been more available both within class and through the programme of extracurricular activities provided, and he returned to that point of personal contact to seek advice when the university seemed to offer no such thing.

7.2.1.4. *Contested views*

In the course of the interviews, very few teachers were mentioned by name. It is interesting, then, that two of those who were were judged very differently by different students. Thus, the strictness that Gemma appreciated in the lecturer she and DX described above may have been the quality that led to Connor, who really struggled with his study, calling him "the killer" ("some teacher don't like Chinese people so they give them the mark is very poor. Bias" 3).

Another teacher whose impact appeared to arise from high demands was the lecturer for C101, which included the test that features in Vignette 1, and which five of the participants failed on first attempt. Her lecturing style elicited a number of comments:

I think she quite enjoying to make everyone stressful (Saul 3)

Many people say her is not good, but I think she is good. She often say the important things in the lecture. Before the test every lecture she will say the same things. (Mike 2)

Because of the high failure rate, a number of students had a chance to re-assess her style, and Saul came to agree with Mike's opinion in Semester Two. Another student, too, felt that her initial judgement had been limited, and eventually found the teacher an inspirational role model:

I can feel her heart because I go to see her when I fail and [she] just said, 'Do it again, and when you got any trouble, just come to see me, and I'm going to help you to sort it out.' And she is very nice. That's make me feel, right, she is different. The attitude is different from the lecture course. When the lecture she need to be strong because there are so many student. But when you go to see her she try to help you. (FW)

Teachers' identities were evidently also under negotiation. It must be said, though, that it was this teacher's own course practices, providing no lecture handouts and instructing students to copy down the full notes of the lectures shown on OHT, that masked for second language writers the other contributions she was making to the course. Nor did Saul's attempt to elicit her help about the first test demonstrate the helpfulness attributed to her here. Eventually Saul judged her quite critically against teachers who had been more willing to explicate the process.

7.2.1.5. *Other support within the university*

The provision of a suite of support services was one of the ways that Rutherford was said to differ from Chinese universities. This was generally a highly appreciated factor:

This is so good environment to study. Quiet and perfect service, I think. Learning centre, kind lecturer, materials, notes, computer lab, library. (DX)

I think it's not only Rutherford but other European countries they tend to support you because you paid them and they tend to support you because they are there to help you, so I'm very, very, very glad about that, so that's why this year orientation when I met new students, when they asked me, 'Oh, where do I find help?' I said, 'Just make use of the resources that you have, lecturers, tutors, and those registry building people, they're there to help you, just make use of the resources, don't think that you're bothering them. They're there, they're waiting for you to come.' (KT)

The note of explanatory assertion in KT's comment arose, she indicated, from the element of cultural difference in this provision. One of the important learning steps recounted by several of the students was the realisation that there were sources of help and that strength lay in judicious elicitation of assistance when it was required, that self-study did not mean you had to do it all by yourself. The attendant revelation of one's own shortcomings seemed initially to carry risk, but at least in the area of study, eventually necessity prevailed:

At the beginning I was shy to show other people my assignments, because I was afraid my grammar. I'm afraid some people said, 'Oh, it was quite annoying and blah blah blah.' But when the study goes further I found it is necessary, you cannot avoid to bring your assignment to Student Learning Centre. (YQ 2)

On the personal front, the counselling service was a more difficult barrier to overcome: "I think some of problem is secret for me, I don't want to share it another people" (Scott 1). Two students did talk of having used the service and finding it helpful, and both lamented Chinese students' unwillingness to seek its help.

7.2.1.5.1. Bilingual support

As can be imagined, in the early days of their time in New Zealand, the bilingual support provided by a special assistant for those who came through the Wideweb agency was enormously useful for setting up a life in New Zealand. Pastoral care was provided for all international students by a dedicated office, but Scott reported retrospectively a perception that, although there was a Chinese speaker employed there, during his initial period at the university "I think they [weren't] supposed to speak Chinese even they know you're Chinese. I think the regulation limited them they can't do that" (6). This was clearly a tentative belief, but as he pointed out, this was a time students were anxiously feeling their way:

For some newcomer, maybe talking with people, even they know they're Chinese, but they don't know whether they can speak Chinese with them, so when in some situation they feel nervous and panic, they really can't express their feelings in English I think it's better to let them speak Chinese actively to them, probably they will say "Wǒ néng bāng nǐ shénme máng?" Means, "Can I help you or not?" (6)

Without clear permission, audibility was denied them even in L1 with a co-national.

Scott suggested, though, that the office had grown more responsive to the situation during his stay.

7.2.1.5.2. One-to-one learning support

Learning support was available by appointment for assignment consultations. Access to it depended on a degree of time management (making an appointment some time ahead, completing the assignment prior to due date) which eluded some in the first semester (often those, like Connor, whose limited spoken English suggested the greatest need), though others valued it for help with understanding challenging subjects and enhancing the quality (and grades) of their assignments:

I been to Student Learning Centre to check my assignment. It's really useful, help me to correct my grammar and maybe structure or reference mistake, so I can get the last assignment of my management I get B+, so it's really, really big different with the first time, C+, so that means one grade increase. (Scott 3)

Perhaps equally important, though, was that it was a place in which being a L2 speaker of English was respected and responded to: "I don't need to worry about my broken English" (Li Ming 2).

7.2.2. Peers and near peers within the university

As has been noted, teachers were not always a reliable source of guidance for new practices, offering, at the best of times strategically incomplete information. To fill the gaps, the help of "old-timers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was called upon. This section will look at other students as sources of learning rather than as social contacts.

7.2.2.1. Chinese near peers

The majority of the students had friends at the time of their enrolment who were already studying in the university. They proved invaluable in providing assistance on many fronts.

They were particularly important during the period of orientation (5.5.1), overcoming the conundrum of having to make all sorts of decisions that would define the university experience before the new arrivals had any developed understanding of their significance, or a relationship with the new institution that made them feel comfortable to approach it for consultation:

At first when I arrive I tend to solve problem by myself with my friend, that's the way we do it, Chinese people like to do, 'cause we don't trust people too much. (Scott 6)

The only source of advice on specific course choice that the students mentioned was more experienced friends, who were able to pass on folk knowledge, like which courses were particularly difficult to pass.

They were also very important in the first semester for providing scaffolding to new learning practices. They gave study advice, warning the novices of the need to work hard and to avoid too much involvement in extracurricular activities; they provided essential course artefacts that explicated requirements, in the form of their own marked assignments and previous year's test papers; they told them how to use the library and prepare for exams. They helped too with daily necessities like finding accommodation and the cheapest cafes.

This help was essential. Saul, for example, was very clear he would not have been able even to enrol without the help of one of his friends, and GZ's limited English left him entirely dependent for drawing learning from first semester lectures on more experienced friends doing the same courses: "after the lecture I will follow my friends and to copy the lecture notes."

Nevertheless, students came to see this dependence as a two-edged sword. It could lead to helplessness, and eventually one had to stand alone:

In the first my friend can explain to me but they can't always help me and what I can't understand I can't always ask them. So more and more knowledge and text and lectures I can't understand, and in the end many things I don't know and I can't follow the lecture so in the final I felt very very hard to study and prepare. (GZ)

TY and Scott both failed exams after friends' assistance for assignments left them inadequately prepared to manage the subject on their own.

As students progressed through their careers they demonstrated a reduced dependence on such help, giving instances of advice rejected. Mike's proud disclosure that his ideas were now sometimes different from his girlfriend's (Vignette 2) is an example.

7.2.2.2. Chinese peers

Classmates, too, through collaborative discussion of concepts in L1, could contribute to greater understanding of courses (6.5.4.1.1), and most of the participants engaged in this sort of discussion. It could help clarify new ideas:

I tried to talk with other students. I think it's very good way. Because sometimes I can't get really clear about some theory and talk with them and most useful. (Sky 3)

It was a way of penetrating the mystery and achieving greater clarity about requirements when instructions were too general: "We can do some research about what the teacher are thinking about, what the teacher expects we do. Sometimes we guess to meet teachers' satisfaction" (YQ 2). It was also an efficient way of operating in the intensive time pressure most experienced. Saul found consulting a classmate quicker than reading a textbook (6.2.2.1) and for Connor, during exam preparation,

some Chinese people to make a group and maybe just one people for one question, that's the save the time, and we together to discuss. Because we don't have enough time for reading for all of them. (3)

However, those who had developed the practice of consulting teachers cast some doubt on the reliability of classmates as a source of help:

I think ask the tutor will be better than ask the friend. Also my friends to speak Chinese, it's easy to me to understand, but they are not always right, maybe they are mistake or not good, so I ask the tutor first and if I still don't understand I ask them. (May 3)

Saul found his peers' predilection for "guessing" assignment requirements instead of consulting the lecturer "totally waste of time" (6, Vignette 2).

7.2.2.3. *Kiwi peers*

Interestingly, in an earlier interview, Saul had suggested another source which he seems to have seen as on a par with teachers:

If you ask the lecturer or ask the tutor or ask maybe Kiwi friend, it is much more helpful than just you sit by yourself to study or to read the book. (4)

In the hierarchy of possible consultants, local students were seen as a much more reliable source than other international students, and MB, who had friends from his New Zealand high school experience, found them to have false beginner status within this community, well in advance of his own understandings, both in terms of learning practices and life in general, "because in New Zealand they know the stuff more than I do." As interlocutors, too, they helped overcome the ever-present danger of too much association with Chinese students, resulting in an experience that was too little

differentiated from study in China to validate the investment, as MB's friends studying in the BBS had told him:

They say, 'Well, I come here, it's just like studying in China. Except you got an English teacher.' Well, you can get an English teacher in China anyway. What's the point?

Desirable as consultants though they may be, local students were elusive and help from this source was gleaned for the most part in tutorials (6.3.2.1) and around the peripheries of class time:

I meet some because just easy, we sit very close and I just doing, and he don't know, he ask me and I say maybe like that solution and sometimes I don't know I ask them. (May 4)

7.2.3. Community contacts

I want to get involved with local community, is very important step. At least I want to speak out, I can share my opinion and share my idea with the local people. (Scott 5)

Although the imagined friendships with local students did not develop to any extent within classes, other aspects of the participants' lives brought them into contact with a range of people who contributed to their sense of living and learning within the New Zealand community in various ways.

7.2.3.1. Accommodation

A secure home environment provided a background stability and support against the stress experienced in the university. Choices to live with other Chinese students or within a New Zealand family were made with this same end in mind by different students.

Li Ming found himself on the horns of a dilemma at the beginning, trying to resolve his need to be the best speaker of English that he could be as a university student with his need for accessible, meaningful friendships and emotional support. Immersion in a living environment with maximum affordances for speaking English might enhance his language learning, but would, ironically, deprive him of communication, because "if you talk to the native people here maybe sometimes we have got different interest and

we don't know how to communicate" (1). He chose to flat with Chinese students and it proved to be a source of satisfying personal growth (5.6.6.3.2).

May, Gao and Saul lived in homestay, which offered them a family environment, extensive access to English, contacts with others in the community, participation in important life events and a great deal of cultural learning, such as a very New Zealand perspective on finding yourself in a low status part-time job:

And I talked this problem with my homestay and they say that is good because some day if you become the director or you become the manager, because you participate all the lower job and you know what they feeling, and what's the life, and that time you can know how to become the good director, how to become the good manager. (Saul 1)

Accommodation, and one's ability to deal with its requirements, proved to be an important part of the learning experience. An unhappy flatting experience taught YQ a great deal about human relationships:

I learned not to give lots comment on the flatmate 'cause there is the old saying in China, the more you say the more mistakes you make, and the less you say the less mistakes you make. Nothing you say, nothing mistakes. So now I do not make lots comments on other peoples and I just keep reasonable distance between me and my flatmates. You know, we treat each other politely and do not build much more close relationship. I am so afraid to have conflict with other flatmates, but now we have a very good relationship. (YQ 2)

None of the participants changed their type of accommodation by choice during their involvement in the study.

7.2.3.2. *Christian groups*

Another important source of support was Christian groups which provided a sense of community to counter the confusion and apparent disregard of the university. They provided a range of activities, from bible study to choir practice, potluck dinners and camps, and they provided regular encounters at weekly meetings which could become the basis for friendships not available from the sporadic proximity with classmates on campus. These friends were helpful for consultation on aspects of study and checking assignments. Another important function they had in relation to study was to put it into perspective:

It's not really about religion, it's about how to become a real person and how to honest and how to treat the people around you like yourself, and how to love each other and how to care each other. ... in my opinion I can say how to

become the real good people is much more important than how you get how many A, how many A+, because it's influence of your whole life. (Saul 5)

A number of students had become committed Christians during their time in New Zealand, and this was clearly an important source of their sense of identity, emerging frequently in their talk. For others, the Christian message was too high a price to pay for the resultant friendships. Connor had been attending a group at the time of his first interview, but by the end of the semester had stopped: "If I go to the church someone just tell me something about Jesus Christ and try to make me to believe the Jesus Christ" (Connor 3). Although none of the others mentioned such pressure, CN was disapproving of those who attended Christian groups without accepting the message:

I know some Chinese are really bad, because they don't believe Jesus but they go to church for help. I don't like it. Someone told me that this is a good way to get help and they can practise English, get some free food, free drink. I don't believe, so I didn't go. (CN)

7.2.3.3. *Part-time jobs*

Part-time jobs contributed enormously to the participants' learning on a number of fronts. These students came from families who had a certain social standing in China, and finding themselves in low status jobs such as cleaning, dish-washing and agricultural work was a new experience, and one that Chinese families obviously did not see in the same light as Saul's host family: "If my parents see me doing that job [fruit-picking] they would be crying. We have one child each family so we pretty much like princess" (Gemma 1). Issues around status were a frequent part of the discourse on jobs. Participants were very conscious of deriving value from being placed in lowly positions, as we can see from Mike, whose work in China had been for his family's business:

When I worked in China, I'm not start at the base level. Middle level, I'm start in middle and top, so I think, some problem if I can't solve that some people will help me solve that and actually I -- a little like waste time, nothing to do and just do the simple things, so I think not useful. So now I try to get some working different, I can do that. I want to get some experience. (Mike 4)

A sense of being "fair" arising from reflections on this experience was one of the New Zealand influences highlighted by Scott:

For example, if I'm a cleaner in New Zealand, no matter where am I going no one discriminate cleaner, they still be friend with you, even you told them, 'Oh, I'm a cleaner.' They, 'Oh, doesn't matter, cleaner is cleaner. No problem with being friend with me.' But in China some of the people will consider about, 'Oh, you're a cleaner,' means you come from probably low status, don't want to make kind of those friends. (6)

On the other hand, employment experiences could provide a welcome sense of competence and status. FW was proud of being given a position of responsibility in a fast food chain, and when Saul's ex-homestay asked him to do a telephone marketing job, his confidence that he could operate in a skilled communication job in English was boosted, in spite of the assumption the student employment service had expressed that such jobs were not for international students.

Jobs often provided affordances for connecting study with reality through insights into business management, human resource issues and understandings of the New Zealand economy. For example, Saul consciously put holiday employment to use to develop his analysing skills:

I tried to use my knowledge to analyse, if I'm the manager and how can I improve the environment and how can I improve the motivation, how can I improve this kind of working environment? (6)

Another important value was the self-respect they could gain from relieving their family's financial burden to some degree. The role of jobs in participants' experience is further revealed in Vignettes 7, 8 and 9. In spite of their values, part-time jobs were important contributors to the time pressure that remained a feature of the experience throughout.

7.2.3.4. *Entering the community*

Scott's determination to be part of the wider community which began this section was satisfied only through a degree of public contact in his job, and in fact he counted his interviews with me as a way of filling part of the gap. The time demands of study certainly militated against it, but there were few obvious avenues for those unwilling to listen to the Christian message. Sport seemed like one possibility but was actually often divided on cultural lines, with Chinese and New Zealanders passionate about different codes, and few having the very mixed devotees of Gao's chosen sport.

A number of participants had met older members of the community willing to reach out a hand to them, often through early homestay, but this was not the central

relationship being sought: “You have a Kiwi mum is good, right, but Kiwi mum is not the real friend, like you expected” (JN).

Gao felt teachers treated him appropriately as equal in his classes, but this did not extend beyond, where “us international students we are treated as foreign, that is what I feel still. It’s not like part of the community” (5). The assistance of his language centre teacher had enabled him to make wide contacts, and he was critical of the university for “milking” international students and not providing such opportunities: “Maybe I still need some help from my teachers who can help me to get involved, you know. It’s so hard to make the first move, first step” (5). He felt activities should be organised to bring students together and to explore aspects of New Zealand culture and natural attributes (6).

7.2.4. Families

You know, in China, each family just got one child, so my father give his all to me. (Andy)

When I asked him what aspects of his Chinese self he valued and would keep proof against New Zealand influences, Gao (among others) mentioned attitudes to family:

Families are very, very important for me, very close to my own life, which is the European culture I personally feel like it’s a little bit further than Chinese culture to define families. ... I feel like I’m more comfortable with the Chinese way of defining the family. (Gao 6)

Geographically distant though they might be, families were an important presence in most aspects of the experience, taking on a number of roles, being sources of financial backing, emotional support, advice, love and undeniably pressure. In this final role, they were also backed by the larger entities of “my country” and “society.”

Families framed the journey. They were essential to the decision to come, as supporters of their children’s aspirations, whether enthusiastically or reluctantly, or as initial instigators. They influenced degree choice, in some cases against the inclination of the students (5.7.4.1.2). Their expectations constrained choices, making giving up harder than staying:

I have friends that failed the paper twice and they sort of doing the third one, well, they tend not to give up because their parents expect them to finish their degrees, so no matter how hard it is, no matter how they don’t like to do it, they just have to carry on and do it. (KT)

Their financial provision made failure an act almost of disloyalty, with the monetary implications it carried. They were, too, proud applauders of milestones attained (5.3.4). And finally they were a measure of the students' developing independence and tendency to see the world in new ways.

It is of interest to contemplate the basis on which families committed themselves to the financial burden and emotional separation that study abroad implied. Andy's father worked in an international arena and had a preference for western education based on observation. Others, though, had perhaps been swept along on a wave of meagrely informed enthusiasm, which waned at times under the pressure of financial change and Chinese news reports of crime involving international students in New Zealand. They shared the sparseness of the students' prior information:

I think my parents had no idea about as well. Just no idea. I think my parents if they know, I think my mum is like start regretting to send me over to here.
(TY)

In thinking about advice for prospective students, some clearly felt that the naïve enthusiasm of parents was an equally important target:

If the parent think their children not enough independent and they didn't got the personal opinion, don't send out to the overseas. That will be waste their money and waste the children's time, too. Don't do this silly thing. Don't always thinking about go to overseas, that's cool. (Scott 2)

Inevitably, considering their life stage, there were changes in the degree of influence parents exerted. In interview one, Andy reported that, after two years in a New Zealand high school, he returned to China for the holidays and spent two months staying with friends in a university dormitory, at the end of which he asked his father whether he could stay on and go to university in China. His father's response was an unequivocal "No way" which Andy accepted without demur: "I'm the males, not the females, so I will accept everything ... and just need one night I will be all right."

Later on, though, there were incidences of confrontation as independence emerged, such as with YQ, whose parents found aspects of her appearance carried unacceptable connotations in her city on her return for the holidays:

They control me a lot what I wear even I was 23. Yeah. And I couldn't wear. Maybe, maybe before, in the past I would listen to my parents but that time we had a big fight about my hair colour and my clothes. (YQ)

On the whole, though, parents accepted and valued the emergence of their offspring into adulthood: “They found also, ‘Wah, you’re changed, you’re grown.’ ... They found quite good” (DX).

7.3. Learner beliefs: The value of persistence

The previous section has considered the influence of other people on participants’ learning path, but we shall move on now to focus on the learners themselves, the beliefs they held about learning and the processes that they experienced to achieve it.

Over the course of the interviews, a range of beliefs about learning were expressed. Prevalent among these and pertinent to this discussion was a widespread belief, as signalled in the literature, that learning was a matter of personal responsibility and persistence. Students were therefore ready to accept blame for personal failure, even when it might seem that conditions for success (such as access to an explicit understanding of the discourse) were not available to them, as in the case of these two explaining their failures in the first semester:

I think all of them [teachers] are doing a good job, it’s my own attitude, I think that’s pretty much applies to everyone else. The lecturer was doing his job, it’s the students who are sleeping. (MB)

But for me the fail point, the point, was not university fault, is my fault, because I done nothing about my study. Actually I done nothing so when I face, ‘Wah! The paper is here,’ it’s just like new for me. (DX)

This belief implies an active role for the student: “we have a saying that you can’t get food from the sky, people don’t give you things, you have to work for this” (KT). In spite of the common assumption that the work favoured by Chinese students would be a matter of rote memorisation, these students seemed to expend most of their energies in a mental process of achieving understanding not just of information but of underlying purpose and of connections with the world beyond the classroom:

I think the core concept is you understand course, what is talking about and connect the information you have got and thinking about how it works and why teacher should teaching that way, why it’s useful for you, how you can use this for your future study, and just you need to think. (Linda 2)

Achieving this depth of understanding in L2 was hard work and subject to faltering progress: this was where the value of persistence came in, and we have already seen how an eventual triumph over difficulty could enable a retrieval of face over humiliations experienced on the way (5.3.4). Such beliefs were implicit in the advice participants proposed for prospective students following in their footsteps:

And also if someone can't work hard, I advise someone don't go to oversea country. (Connor 2)

So if you ask me to give some advice to the students in China, I want to say it is a dream but you do something to make your dream come true. (Saul 1)

Persistence was seen as valuably supported by clear goals:

So, if you got goals, then you do things step-by step, that's be much easier. (FW)

You must know your goal, your purpose, you know. You cannot to go overseas and then make your decision. I mean, definitely waste time and waste money. (Saul 3)

Saul discussed the fact that he found the Chinese belief in the efficacy of diligence to be at odds with the prevailing western view as he understood it and also his own experience in the university here:

So in China the parents ask us to diligent, diligent, diligent. Keep working, working hard. But in Kiwi culture and they said, different people has the different part they good at, and such as you very good at linguistic, and very good at the language, so you have the language brain. So that is maybe you never do the assignment, you never go to the lecture but you can get A+. Because you have language. (4)

Because in Chinese we think if you try hard you will pass or if you try very, very hard you can get A, but actually in here, in Rutherford, I find that if you try hard it is not equal to A or B, maybe just a C or C+, and it is quite make you very, very upset and frustration. (4)

The point was often made that local students did not have to work as hard as Chinese students, largely because of language difficulties: "we have to probably spend a lot of time, like three times more than the Kiwi students" (Gemma 3). It may have been this discrepancy that fuelled the thought that local students could achieve high grades with no work.

The strongest belief in the value of diligence is still not always proof against "I haven't the feel to study" (May 2), and these young people admitted to "wasting time," especially during their first semester study break, but the self reports of most of them,

especially those who continued in the second phase, indicated a readiness to apply themselves to achieve their goals. Their eventual success was certainly due to their having done something to make their dreams come true.

7.4. Step-by-step learning

The next question to contemplate, then, is what it was they had done, and this leads us into a consideration of the processes by which they acquired understanding of what was required and then the ability to do it with increasing competence. One process that was clearly signalled was step-by-step learning.

Learning always implies a journey, and that was a metaphor used by more than one of these students. On this journey there were many calls to accommodate to the new demands being made. The importance of building up new skills step by step, acclimatising oneself to one new demand and readying oneself for the next, might seem like an utterly normal process of learning and hardly worthy of being labelled as a finding. However, it warrants attention because it was strongly present in the students' expressions of their beliefs about learning, and because the data gives insight into which elements could be taken up in this way, and, by contrast, where such progress was unavailable because of treads that were too high or missing footholds.

A step-by-step process keeps in view the last step taken and the new one that awaits. This vision could maintain the sense of being on a forward-moving trajectory. As confidence grew at each step, participants often reported making their own decisions to reach further in a process of conscious experimentation to extend themselves as students.

7.4.1. Expressions of belief in the process

A brief kaleidoscope of comments will indicate the importance of this belief:

Because I think step-step work, and the teacher introduce you and you just keep going on that way. (Linda 2)

Then when you going to study, that problem going to sort out one by one.
(FW)

'Cause pass the language, pass the IELTS, just the one of the target of the whole study oversea. Maybe just the first step, ah, you succeed, right now you can go to next step, and right now for me speaking is just the second step and the first step is, different year got different step. (Scott 2)

Maybe do next time better, [im]prove, step by step. (Connor 2).

If you want to build a house, you can't to carry one very, very big stone to do this. If you carry every day just carry one little stone, and it's very easy to build, you know what I mean? It's the same with study. (Saul 3)

7.4.2. Early decisions

In spite of its hold, the belief was in conflict with a strong desire to complete as soon as possible in order to relieve financial strain and enter into appropriately adult roles, which made apparent shortcuts attractive. This section will consider early decisions made in the light of these two viewpoints.

7.4.2.1. *Strategies for manageable first steps*

7.4.2.1.1. Extra preparation

Only one participant, FW, who was with the Wideweb agency, indicated that she did more than the minimum preparation required of her, taking a three-month language course in New Zealand in spite of having attained IELTS 5.5 in China.

7.4.2.1.2. Course choice

Participants reasoned about ways of bringing the initial task within their ambit in a number of ways:

- Two chose to do three courses instead of the full-time load of four in the first semester.
- They considered the language demands of different kinds of papers. For example, May read parts of her textbooks in advance to see whether she could understand them; Connor rejected his first choice of history as being “too hard for overseas student” (1).
- Most of the participants chose an EAP paper hoping that it would scaffold them into the new practices they would need, but also in the belief that as it was designed for English learners it would be easier than the majority of their papers.

- Some chose subjects for which previous study had provided them with knowledge. While this generally improved results, though, it did not necessarily contribute to a greater belief in oneself as ‘being-and-doing’ a university student, as the struggling Saul lamented:

So what I really want to do is something, before I came to Rutherford I totally don’t understand, but after I study hard and I can get or pass or B or B-. (Saul 2)

7.4.2.1.3. Deferring other activities

A number of the participants made conscious decisions in the first semester to restrict activities in other spheres while they scoped the demands of the central task. Some chose not to get a part-time job: “I think pass the paper is more important for us, so I didn’t find other job. So this year I think study is my life,” (Louise 2). Others deferred the exploration of leisure opportunities: “At least got all the paper pass. And then go to think another thing” (Scott 2).

7.4.2.2. Decisions increasing the initial burden

One shortcut a number of students felt they could risk was to take advantage of the provision allowing for cross-crediting of courses completed elsewhere, which saw them entering 200-level papers in their first semester. This certainly put them under extra pressure, and in one particular discipline led to failed courses.

Another decision which added pressure was taken out of ignorance, because “nobody suggested me that I shouldn’t,” KT explained. This was choosing a paper that had the reputation of having the greatest language and content demands of all the core papers. All of those who did this course in their first semester found the demands extreme, although in the event only two actually failed it at first attempt.

Missing the first week (or more) of semester was not uncommon, but constituted risky behaviour in a 13-week semester. This happened in most cases because of the availability of cheap flights after return trips to China, and in both first and second semesters, where, for Thomas and Louise it coincided with their first experience of 300-level papers. They discovered these were very demanding and that one semester of study was scant apprenticeship for classes pitched at the highest level for their degree.

7.4.3. Experiencing step-by-step learning

Step-by-step learning is the expectation in most education systems or theories. We can see it, for example, in the notion of scaffolding learning in the zone of proximal development in neo-Vygotskian approaches, where the expectation is that a new skill that is initially mediated by a more experienced Other, will later be able to be accomplished alone. The university, being set up as a structured learning environment, certainly provided many such experiences. The staged structure of the learning within each discipline led to incremental demands on the student, which allowed appropriate progress to be made:

If you got the foundation of the 100, you won't have too many difficult, because you just gradually doing the things step by step so you won't feel hard, but if you just jump to there, maybe first year call you to take 300 level paper, it is quite hard and impossible. (Scott 4)

Processes that provoked initial anxiety were often repeated leading to familiarity and ease. For example, taking part in tutorial discussions:

The first time for me is of course I feel a little bit uncomfortable, but the second I already, I feel better than the first time. (Scott 1)

Responses from teachers, positive and negative, could also be used as a useful guide:

I think part of my problem was more like lack of confidence because I don't know what's the lecturer looking for and I don't know what will I get for such work, but I did get quite good marks and then I just feel that, well, that's not too bad, what I did. (Gemma 3)

Each new cycle then promoted a growing sense of familiarity:

I think second semester is more smoothly compared with the first semester, because I already habit to do the assignment and listen to lecture, and to make friend and do everything what I want. (Saul 4)

Sometimes it seemed that the first step was more like a leap, and 11 of the 24 participants failed courses in their first semester. However, even this could prove to be a useful first step in a staged process of learning, as Saul and CN found, passing with B-range grades in the second semester courses they had failed in their first.

7.4.4. Contrary experiences in the university

It might be expected that the university would provide a graduated approach to learning, but the passage was not always smooth.

7.4.4.1. *Large steps*

There was a marked contrast to the carefully scaffolded learning of the language centres:

In the lecture, maybe the teacher will talk about maybe a hundred page in the textbook, but in the IELTS, the teacher will step by step to express what kinds of thing you have to study. (Scott 1)

This sweep through the materials was often in disciplines of which they had no previous experience on which to build and could leave them flailing for understanding:

I didn't understand a single ... no, he said something, and I understand what he spoke, but I didn't understand what he was teaching about. I didn't understand the whole concept of G101, so I sort of, like four chapters I was just sitting there and attending class (KT)

The situation was exacerbated since internal assessment left very little prospect of checking their new learning without potentially dire consequences, which was in contrast to Chinese practices:

They got the assignment, but that assignment isn't like Chinese, the Chinese one is like a little bit, and the tutor will correct it and give back to me and write down what problem on that one, and I can go to ask the tutor, but no now, that assignment they will get the marks in the final exam, that is a little pressures for us. (May 2)

The fact that they did not share the same sort of life and education experiences as their local counterparts meant they were not always ready to take the steps expected within a course:

'Cause some teachers they just think ... because we are adults, we're university students, we should know, you know, but a lot of the knowledge not common sense, we didn't learn it before. Maybe the Kiwi students they have heard of it, but we never ... So we just study from zero. (Gemma 4)

7.4.4.2. *Sequence of papers*

Scott suggested above that the sequence of papers stair-cased students to a readiness for the higher levels. In fact, though, the structure of the BBS meant that business students continued to enrol in 100-level core papers right to the end of their degrees. There were comments that a 100-level paper in a new discipline could be more challenging than a higher level paper in one's major study. This echoes Lea and

Stierer's (2000) assertion that such modular courses of study pose a challenge that is not always recognised by the academy.

These introductory courses tended to have a very wide focus: "I think sometimes 200-level papers only focus on one concept, but for some 100-level paper they are include many kinds of concept" (Louise 2). This had dual disadvantages, one being the difficulty of encompassing the ideas within a framework and knowing what to focus on, and the other being the tendency to have a team of teachers, none of whom was centrally focused on this paper. Altogether the conditions made the teaching staff on these papers less approachable for problem-solving than higher papers:

The 100 level there's heaps of [students] maybe 200, 300, and a different level and a different nationality, and a different personality so maybe they need to answer some very rubbish questions. (Saul 5)

The three courses that Saul failed in his degree were all 100-level, the last one in his third year of study.

Nevertheless, missing out the first course by cross-crediting could be even harder. Typically some of these papers were in the intended major discipline for the students, which meant they continued their study without a foundation in the discipline as taught at Rutherford. It was to this factor that Scott, who had had several years of work since getting his Chinese Diploma, attributed his failure within his favoured major, a source of great disappointment to him:

'Cause I got a cross-credit of J101, means I didn't have any foundational study of my 100-levels paper ... 'cause the way the lecturers during the lecture they really relies on 100-levels information. (6)

He found it very difficult to connect the material that he had learned in China with the content of the second level courses at Rutherford.

Vignette 6: May's multiple approaches to understanding

An important factor in maintaining the energy required to keep going along this extended step-by-step process was an ability to maintain a focus on the possibility of progress and of personal agency in effecting it. This will be illustrated with the case of May, from the point of view of her very active approach to learning, the affordances that it gave her for progress and the barriers that nevertheless sometimes stood between her and achievement at the level she hoped. May's proactive approach to learning has already been examined in relation to seeking help from teachers (Vignette 4).

May was one of those motivated towards study abroad by disappointment at the results of her earlier educational experiences, in particular because, although she had been a successful student, she felt she had not retained any of her learning:

The main, main, main purpose I think is in China of course I studied many thing but I always forgot what I study and I can't use it again because I don't know, I forgot it and I come to here I want I will remember all of the core paper, all of the technology information. (May 1)

She believed that the multiple opportunities for supporting her learning within the New Zealand setting would allow her to reach and retain understanding:

Now before go to the study I read the book, and now I continue to read the book and I need to try to remember it, what that meaning and they have many tests, and exam at the last time so I thinking about I go to that time maybe I understand all of the things. And if I remember a lot of the time, I will remember for long time. ... and I chose the course some of them is the computer lab. That is the practice or something, that is easier to understand. ... because they have many, like the lectures, tutorial, workshop in computing, that's different part and all of the parts just make it to get you to understand that really properly (1)

These many small steps thus each edged her towards the final goal of learning and retaining course content.

Being-and-doing a university student for her clearly meant attaining understanding because "if I understand what they talking about I will remember that" (1). This rang out loud and clear in her interviews. In her second one, which lasted for 75 minutes, for example, she used the verb *to understand* 75 times. The highest use among any of the other students was 12 in similar length interviews.

She had a strong belief in her personal right to knowledge, extending to a belief in her right to be quite demanding in her approaches to teachers as we have seen. She backed up these approaches, though, with her own work on finding understanding:

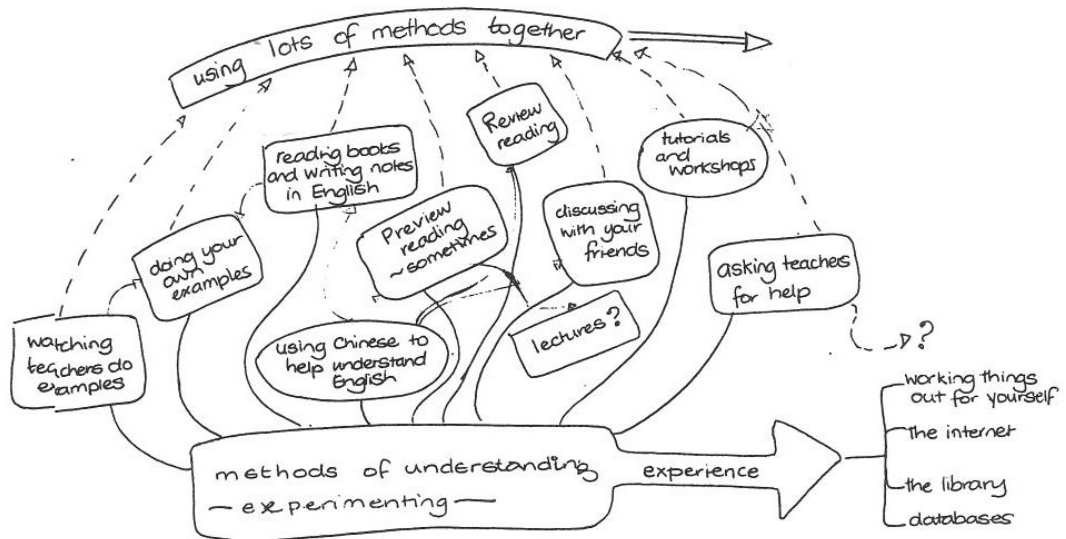
I have experiment is that I try to understand what the tutor in the class and then I read the book, and they have some example. And try to understand what the example talking about. And then have some exercise. I try to do a little bit, not much because I can't have enough time. (2)

Another way that she maintained the energy to keep up her pursuit of understanding seemed to be through an acceptance of novice status and an expectation of step-by-step improvement. Although her first attempts at new learning practices did not always achieve what she wanted, she accompanied her accounts of them with assertions like, "I thinking about I will do it better, so not a good one" (2), "Maybe next term or the next year, try to do better. I will behaviour how to study in English, so that time will be great" (2), and by the end of the first semester, "just a little bit more know how to study, but now it's better than my thinking before" (3). Figure 7.1 represents these aspects of May's learning schematically.

This novice status was further legitimated by using other Chinese students as a benchmark for her own responses and finding that they too were struggling:

I was just thinking about maybe some new students will [be] like that, not just me, so after course I asked some friends they are first year too, I asked them, 'Are you understand? I don't understand.' And he say, 'No, I don't understand, the tutor talk very quick,' I say, 'Yeah, yeah,' and we both have the same idea and the same thing, so I thinking about maybe not just me, not it's my problem. (1)

Figure 7.1 May's big picture: multiple approaches to understanding



It was not only Chinese students that she used as a benchmark. A powerful incentive for her seemed to be to see herself as the equal of any:

I thinking about every people is at the same level. ... Yeah, I must can do that. Any people can do that, I can do that, too. (2)

I just to think every people can do that, I can do that. Don't worry, they sit over there, they just to talk very properly. Why I can't? I can. (3)

Of course, there were times when such energy for the pursuit of knowledge flagged. She would find herself wasting time and day-dreaming and found it hard to motivate herself to study for a test until it was close upon her, as any student might, in particular in her second semester as she decided to reinvest her life with leisure activities. However, there were aspects of her experience that were more particular to her second language status, the crippling time demands of reading for assignments, and her slower processing of oral language, for example. An in-class preview of the exam for C101 left her unenlightened because the multiple choice questions were worked through too rapidly in class (5.6.4.2.1). This teacher assured the class that if they had followed all aspects of the course they would be successful, but in spite of her multilayered approach, May was dubious:

I go to the workshop, I go to the course, I never missing one course. Every time I will go, but I don't think so I got that enough, I don't think so I will got a high mark. That must need to make sure what I need to remember in my mind. Not all of the things I can remember. It's too heaps things, not just one course got exam, heaps course, so that's trouble thing. (3)

As an authentic beginner she found the series of steps provided by the course itself were not enough for her to feel in control.

In fact, May's marks varied widely. This was not the only occasion on which she was not properly prepared by in-class instructions about tests, whereas misunderstandings about assignments she could clear up by visiting the teachers and her marks there tended to be very much higher. She was very vulnerable, too, to losing marks because of the language components of tests: "Always I do the maths is right, but I write the sentence is wrong" (3). Thus although she appeared to have the conditions in place to be a highly successful student, and often received results that marked her as such which made her feel very successful, she was frustrated that this was not always the case. Though she did not shirk responsibility for her part in this (such as having the study/leisure balance wrong in Semester Two), it was upsetting that tests and exams could so easily reverse the good record she established through internal assessment.

7.4.5. Conscious experimentation

Allied to the idea of step-by-step learning was a process of conscious experimentation, by which, when a firm basis of understanding or practice had been established, students would often reach beyond basic requirements challenging themselves to take up opportunities that had previously been avoided. To be gained were aspects such as a better balanced lifestyle (and a sense of achievement at being able to manage that), a greater sense of full membership through richer interactions with the community, and self-knowledge. This will be illustrated through the two cases of Scott and Gao, whose use of this process had interesting differences.

Vignette 7: Scott, staged learning and careful experimentation

Scott's experimentation was built on a vision of staged learning along a regular trajectory. Although he often felt anxiety as he entered a new cycle of learning (the first assignment, the first exams, for example), he could remind himself of his legitimately novice status and, importantly, see sources of new learning, thus maintaining a sense of progress:

I think the English for me right now is all right. I can talk the thing I want to talk. I think for this stage I think is quite happy about this, but I will keep

going. I think is if you want be a, not expert, just a successful university student, you have to learn more about academic part is important. So right now for me I can survival, I got survival English, but later on, keep going, is academic English, academic experience something. Keep going. (2)

He was clear that he did not expect to be a brilliant scholar (“so-so is enough for me” 4), and his modest goals seemed to give him a sense of agency. What he aimed for was within his grasp. Moments of stress there certainly were, but he himself noted the pattern of emerging from them and continuing with the learning. This pattern can be seen in relation to different aspects of the experience, for example:

- lectures

Two really good thing is, firstly I was quite nervous before I took the lecture, but right now I think I can understand what the lecturer say, and I can catch up process, so I’m quite happy about this. (2)

- class discussion:

after several time, I know how to do, and because we are same group, we keep same group for one semester, so we getting familiar with each other, so you know different people accent, so I think the quality is increasing. (3)

- exams:

But for me because I’m the green at the university last semester, even though I know what times question appear in the exam, I still feel nervous, because it’s first time. But after my first final exam finish, B101, I think, ‘Oh, exam like this,’ so I feel confident a little bit increased because I can handle well, and that is keep going, keep going, keep going, so that is after all the exam finish, I think, ‘Oh, this is the exam in the New Zealand university. Not bad.’ (3)

In fact, he failed one of these exams, but his self-management allowed him to cast failures or failings as useful steps in the journey, not a reason to see himself as incapable. On this occasion he noted of the course failed: “I think it’s hard one, so hopefully I can use last semester’s experience doing well in this semester” (3). He used assignment feedback indicating shortcomings as another opportunity to learn:

From the result, I know my effort is not a zero, so that is good, even if I’m still make some mistake, I still make some silly mistake but next time, I can avoid them. But try to do my best, then better than the last one. (2)

It would seem that Scott’s sense of competence rested on his belief in his personal agency to achieve his modest aspirations. He exemplified the Chinese value noted by YQ that “to be outstanding [to stand out] is not encouraged” (YQ 2) claiming to be “just very, very common person in China” (Scott 1). Nevertheless, he regularly sought to extend himself beyond the minimum and as he developed confidence within an arena he would often cautiously push himself further than was absolutely required. As he said:

You build up confident your communication skill, and then you want to go

out to get the new thing, try the new thing, I think it's human being like this, they want to try more. (5)

We can see this happening in various spheres. In his first part-time job he had a Chinese boss, but in his second year he had two jobs, one for a long-term Indian migrant, "so right now I start expand to the foreigner, only foreigner, and to get contact," and the other door-to-door marketing, which linked with his career aspirations and required him "to speak, speak out with just stranger, I mean with local people, yes, to catch their taste" (5). Ensuring that his work extended him in this way was important because "I'm not younger already, 'cause I'm 26, 27, so I can't waste my time on doing some not worthy thing, so I have to step one by one" (5).

Likewise, in his social relationships in the second year he was beginning to look beyond the Chinese friends who had provided comfort in the bewildering atmosphere of large first year classes and "expand my friends' number and nationality" (5). His circle expanded to include a range of nationalities but the sought-after close Kiwi friend eluded him to the end.

These efforts to extend himself were always circumspect and subject to reversal if risks appeared to be greater than he had anticipated. This is exemplified in his decision not to try to be creative (6.1.1), and also in his meandering journey to fix on his major. By the end of his first semester more experienced friends had apprised him of the fact that the major he really wanted to do had strict criteria and did not have "Carry Forward," the backstop position for failing a paper, as it allowed you to sit the exam in a later semester without repeating the course. To Scott that represented too great a risk: "it might be two option, might be happy, might be sad, might be a big shock for you" (4). He therefore resolved after discussion with his parents to repeat the major from his Chinese business diploma. During the course of the next semester, however, an uncle suggested that this was in fact too safe: "Just waste of time, because you already know, already learned this knowledge in China, if you go out, try another one new" (4). He had therefore resolved on a third major, felt very happy with it and progressed well with his study. As a result, by his third year, he felt ready to return to his first dream and take on a double major, though with a certain amount of apprehension: "Even I know it's hard, I want challenge" (5). This was one of the few times that he proved to have stretched himself beyond his capabilities, and we saw the disappointing results of that experiment in 7.4.4.2, characteristically attributed to the absence of the first step. Figure 7.2 Gives a schematic view of his journey through his first year of study.

In all the other areas of his experience, though, his measured process of step-by-step learning and careful experimentation led to a growing ease with his life as university student and beyond. Early in his third year he was claiming full membership in this community of practice: "I think I'm doing the role is a Rutherford University student. Equal. Same as a Kiwi" (5). In spite of his disappointment at not completing his double major, overall his verdict on his experience was of growth towards personal agency: "being a person can survive in the overseas, that's important, yeah, 'cause for me looking back I'm did have lots of difficulties and also I overcome them" (6).

Figure 7.2 Scott's big picture: staged learning

The diagram illustrates a staged learning process, starting from a 'First major' and progressing through various levels of learning to a 'Second major'. The path is marked by a jagged line, with various boxes and notes indicating different stages and challenges.

First major:

- Too solve problems by myself
- too much learning too risky
- too little learning too risky
- Thinking and embedding in English
- TIME MANAGEMENT
- Survival English informal
- 100 levels
- 100 levels
- 200 levels
- 200 levels

Stages and Challenges:

- Survival English informal:** Includes a box for 'Survival English informal' and a note 'Confusion! - campus - choosing courses'.
- 100 levels:** Includes a box for '100 levels' and a note 'too much learning too risky'.
- 100 levels:** Includes a box for '100 levels' and a note 'too little learning too risky'.
- 200 levels:** Includes a box for '200 levels' and a note 'learning from life'.
- 200 levels:** Includes a box for '200 levels' and a note 'get back on track'.

Second major:

- not enough learning already known
- major point
- not enough learning already known
- not enough learning already known

Other Notes:

- too much learning too risky
- too little learning too risky
- learning from life
- get back on track
- not enough learning already known
- major point
- not enough learning already known
- not enough learning already known

Vignette 8: Gao, strategic preparation and adventurous experimentation

Gao began his studies with an approach that indicated considerable caution. He enrolled for just three courses, one of which was the more scaffolded EAP course, “so basically I’m doing two papers this semester” (3). Under parental pressure he was studying information sciences rather than the social sciences, which were his own preference, so his independent bent was not immediately obvious. However, after an initial period of “disaster” (5), he quickly took the measure of the task and set himself on a path of self-exploration with a trajectory far beyond simply becoming a successful university student in New Zealand. This was demonstrated in terms of his

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study, his extracurricular activities and the spiritual journey he found himself on.

Study

Gao's early use of the strategy of seeking help from teachers followed by a decision to 'test' himself by foregoing that help (6.4.3.2) was an initial indication of this pattern. The same process of embracing risk was visible in his unconventional choice of elective courses, puzzling his friends as he pursued his interests with courses in food science, the humanities and the social sciences. This took him into the new territory of dealing with relativism and encountering much greater language demands. He was very conscious by this stage that his was a process of self-discovery:

From the first year to second year I personally changed a lot from just meet the requirements that everyone need to graduate but, too, to explore myself, see what I do and what I really want to do. Also that's kind of growth. (5)

One of his suggestions for improvement for the university was to allow students more chance to experiment with course choice:

I feel like for international students, because we pay a lot, it's a huge amount tuition fees, so we don't really have a chance to explore. Just like if I want to do IT just do it, might be in the second semester or second year really want to change it, but because of the tuition fee we can't. (6)

Figure 7.3 shows his progress through his first year.

Gao was, apart from one unforeseen failure, very successful in his studies, and this perhaps gave him the security to take risks ("I don't worry about it if I can get my degree, I know I will [laugh]. Yeah, sooner or later," 5). In fact, though, a growing sense of competence only produced new dilemmas, including that of an imagined resistance to what was generally the overall goal of study abroad:

The problem is the more high position you are, the more struggling you have. ... When you know more, you think about more, especially now. In the past I did what I should do, and now I am thinking, should I really do it? [laugh] Especially like my degree, I know I have to finish it, but it's something, you know, I don't really enjoy it, so should I really do it?

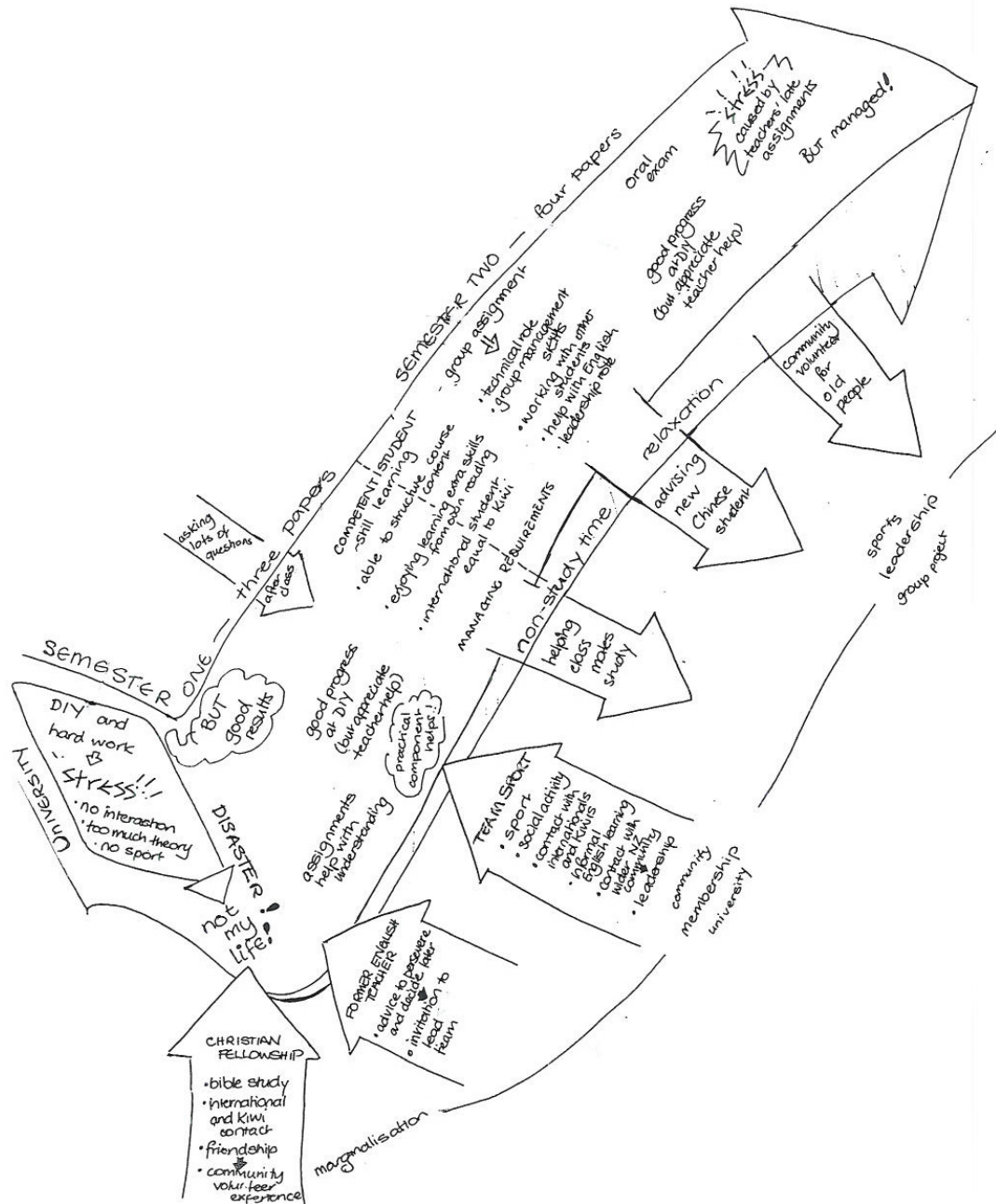
Extracurricular activities

This same spirit of exploration was evident in his other activities as well. The disaster of his first few weeks at the university sprang partly from lack of balance, and he expanded his activities to join a Christian group and a sports team. Before long, he was captaining a team with an eclectic membership in terms of age, gender and nationality.

Gao completed his BIS and, under further pressure from his parents, entered postgraduate study. It was at this level that he exercised his envisaged self-realisation,

deciding to withdraw from an incomplete qualification in the discipline of his major and enrol in a new one more congenial to his interests. Characteristically, he still found there were new fields to explore, in this case research: “that’s still something I would like to try, see if I can or cannot do” (6).

Figure 7.3 Gao's big picture: strategic preparation and increasing expertise



During the holidays he travelled around New Zealand by himself, moving outside his “comfort zone” (6) and relishing the opportunities that gave him to meet other travellers from around the world, either tramping in the outdoors or fruit-picking:

Wonderful experience to, rather than working experience but you know, the experience to meet people, talk with people, live with people from different

places. (5)

He chose demanding voluntary work as a telephone counsellor rather than a part-time job, finding it “more meaningful” than working in a fish and chip shop (5). In fact it did influence his thinking about a possible career.

All of these activities afforded him wide contacts. Gao, with his willingness to enter untried situations on his own, was one of the very few of the participants who achieved the desired rich and varied social network.

Spiritual and personal journey

The student Christian group with whom he had sought solace in his first year had provided for various needs: “First I can practise my speaking to communicate with them, and also I can study the bible,” which gave him “a new thinking method, and also new knowledge” (2). While these people remained a valuable part of his circle of friends, by his second year, the “exploration of my religion identity” (6) was taking him towards new horizons:

’Cause I like travel around, and meet different people with different religions. Made me think about more than just one way of the life. I don’t know ’cause for Christians they say they know the truth. For other religions they say they know the truth.[laugh] I don’t know who is right but I think it’s something in myself that lead me to sort of stand in the middle and try to find my way of the life. That’s the most important thing for me. (5)

Central to his experience then was a personal quest which he described variously as “self development” (5), “self responsibility” (5), “identity exploration” (6). He felt that this had taken him a step beyond an initial motivation to do things out of obligation to family or even country, and it was certainly something that he recognised as a New Zealand influence (“especially I like the way that people believe I am what I am, I am who I am, like those kind of self identities,” 6). Perhaps inevitably this brought him into a degree of conflict with his family over the question of postgraduate study.

The importance of Gao’s voyage of self-discovery became more and more prominent throughout his interviews, clearly occupying his mind more than any description of his purely academic journey towards a degree. A number of the photos that he brought to the final interview provided metaphorical representations of part of this journey, such as the walk in the bush (6.5.2.1) and a picture of him on a rock-climbing wall:

I feel like it’s just the life of my undergraduate study, challenging but well, I have to do it, and basically I’m climbing all the time and try to achieve something, yeah, in different ways. (6)

He saw it as a natural reaction to the de-stabilising effect of immersion in a completely new experience, but as an enormously important aspect of the experience:

Especially I like the exploration part, like after I came to New Zealand

actually I faced more challenges and more issues, more questions about myself, yeah, even like say self-identity, things like that, feel like things I never thought about before, 'cause back home that's the way I was and the way of my life, but here, coming to New Zealand is like open another window for me, even a door for me, I could really explore different things, different views. It's towering because I have to face different things, but I really enjoy the overseas experience. (6)

Scott and Gao, to sum up, represent an interesting contrast in relation to a shared intention to extend themselves within the opportunities study abroad offered. For Scott, these extensions were often driven by an eye to future career intentions and were always against a background of the risk of failure, which sometimes forced him to retreat, choosing the safe route to a pass: "That's what all I need" (5). Gao, whose strategic approach to Semester One had left him with the realisation that the study was within his grasp and that he would get his degree "sooner or later" (5) was less constrained in the way he reached out for new experience, and was conscious of its role in a process of finding out who he could be in relation to the world around him.

7.5. Learning from experience

But everything is learning from the mistakes. Sometimes it's painful. (Mike 5)

Another learning process that was clearly favoured by a number of the participants was that of learning by experience, by which I mean a process of entering into a situation for which previous experiences had provided minimal preparation so that the salient elements became apparent only as they were encountered, but they became the source of greater expertise allowing for future similar events to be better handled. This contrasted with the constant progression implied by step-by-step learning, as it began with something more akin to a plunge into the deep than a small step up from an established basis. It could arise unknowingly, from an ignorance of the fact that there were new elements to the situation, although it would seem also to respond to student beliefs: as Li Ming said of the lack of preparation he had had for study abroad, "no people can teach us [until] we actually got here, because many things you have to face it" (1). As a way of entering a new situation it had both advantages and disadvantages:

Otherwise if somebody I had connections, or some relatives here to tell me this and this and that, I might have avoided some of the experiences, so in some way it's good, because you can experience things that you never expected. In some ways it's bad because you might encounter a lot of trouble, it might change your life from that point so it really depends on the people. (KT)

Another way that experience contributed was as an adjunct to learning: experiential knowledge from the world outside contributed to the important establishment of goals (previous work), to verification of aspects of imparted theory (part-time jobs), and, eventually, to imagined employability in China (post-degree positions). It also produced important life lessons: YQ and Saul, for example, reflected on human relationships as a result of accommodation experiences, and May, from work encounters.

7.5.1. Learning from failure

One of the most potent sources of experience was failing an assignment or a course, especially for students who had previously been very successful, and I will illustrate this with the case of one of the participants in the retrospective study. MB had spent two years at a New Zealand high school and had emerged with excellent results. When one of his first-semester lecturers said, "Look to your right, look to your left, if he passes then you fail, at least one third of you will fail the paper," he thought it was a joke and certainly did not expect the victim to be him. He found the class very difficult: "I just don't have a clue, and in the end I just didn't want to go to the lectures, I just gave up," but nevertheless did not get the "message" that university was essentially different from high school and that the bulk of the work was to be done outside lecture times. He concentrated on developing the friendships that he saw as essential to this new stage in his life. Consequently, he was totally unprepared for the two fail grades he received at the end of the semester: "I was stunned, and when I calmed down I was thinking how could it happen, and I start thinking, 'What have I been up to in the first semester?'" The message was clarion clear at this point, though, as failure was costly in terms of both money and self-esteem:

The next semester I start assignments as early as possible, and go to see lecturers if I have problems and ask them which book I should read for this assignment.

False beginner New Zealand friends, too, provided valuable guidance, having an awareness of what was needed that his own two years within the system had not been

sufficient to provide for him. However, the failure honed his awareness, and his subsequent career was highly successful.

MB made the following comment:

It would have been helpful if somebody actually informed me what it's really like at university 'cause before I came I'd got no idea.

Whether a prior warning would have carried any more weight than that of the lecturer threatening a 33% failure rate is questionable, however. It was certainly Mike's contention that it had not worked for him:

From my experience my friend already tell me what is the lecture been and the test and I'm still no idea about it. I think I understand, but actually no. (5)

We shall now look at Mike's utilisation of his experiences a little more extensively.

Vignette 9: Mike, learning from experience

Just reading, so sometimes you easy to forget if put in practice or I'm experience about the real life and I will remember. (5)

Mike's account of his learning in New Zealand showed him entering each new situation with supreme confidence, then finding that he had seriously underestimated its complexities, and deriving learning from the experience. This began with his expectation of a quick passage to English (5.3) and was evident again as he entered the university. From his first interview:

So now I'm studying in the university and other things I don't need to worry about because I know.

I take the handbook and read that and then I know.

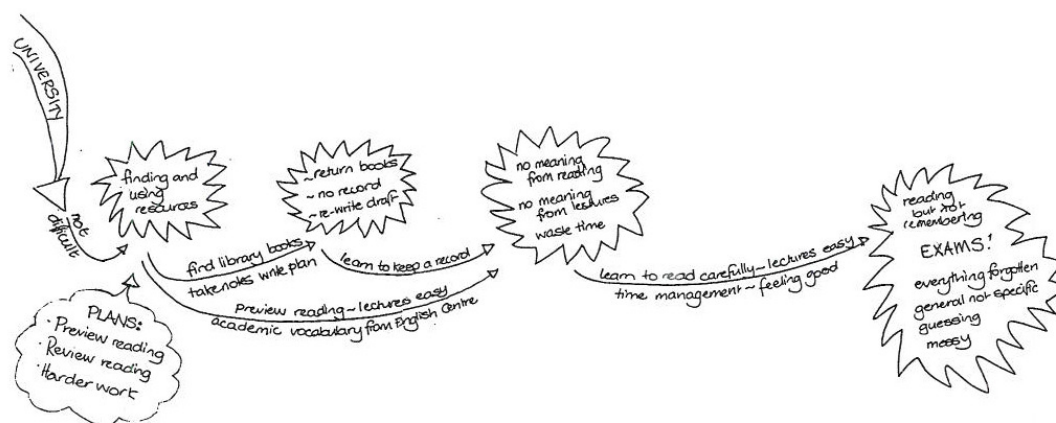
I see the words, vocabulary, and then, oh, I know!

Before the lecture I read the books and see the WebCT and then the tutor say anything I know.

At each subsequent interview he revealed that his confidence had been misplaced, but that his experiences had led him to new insights and he was once again fully confident he knew what to do next. We can see one such sequence in the account of his developing reading (Vignette 1). It was clear that he did not learn from being told things in a de-contextualised fashion. His discovery of the value of preview reading occurred only as the imminence of his first test gave reality to his need to solve the problem of understanding the course, although "I think everybody and teacher tell you

read the text before the class, but I haven't done that" (2). Figure 7.4 Illustrates a series of such sequences over his first semester.

Figure 7.4 Mike's big picture: learning from experience



Because of his predilection for drawing new insights even from his failures, he never appeared downcast at his interviews (though of course he may have had other ways of interpreting them in private). His sense of newly acquired expertise always carried him forward:

So last semester I failed one paper, OK. I failed this paper and I learn another thing. In old China people said, never afraid to fail. Fail you can learn more. I'm still young. I have many chance to try. It's OK.

As he progressed the value that he attributed to experiential learning over declarative knowledge became more and more explicitly expressed. During the 37 minutes of his final interview he used the word "experience" twenty-four times. For example, I asked him what his most important way of learning was, to which he replied without hesitation:

I think experience, also previous experience. ... And try something different and learn from that. If you always stay in one situation you probably cannot learn something. For example, you meet other people and do other things your situation will be different. So you can learn from that and think about the new experience or new situation relate to the previous one, so I'm that kinds of people I will think about now and before, I will always think about.

Focus on his own experience was at the core of his self-described learning style and his approach to writing assignments (Vignette 2).

It was a sense of ignorance about the real world that had prompted Mike to continue his education in New Zealand and by the end cross-fertilisation between the world of experience and study assured him that the journey had been worthwhile. His study was able to enrich his life outside the classroom: "I'm watching the news and newspaper and I will put the what I'm learn relate to that. Now think about more and

talk to friends” (5). And life outside the classroom was able to “help my thinking” (4) and enhance his understanding of his business studies: “part-time job I’m also learning the management practice. I’m seeing what they doing and how they solve this problem” (5).

In terms of his personal journey towards competence as a student, Pardoe (2000) makes the valuable point that optimal learning from an experience depends on knowing how to interpret its significant elements: “We can not assume that the significance of an experience is self-evident” (p. 126). There were distracters for Mike on the way that could delay learning, such as a false sense of security derived from early high grades in assignments masking the fact that he needed to put more time into study. Such an approach was costly on many fronts. He failed two courses in his first year as he worked out what he was supposed to be doing, and it was with a wry laugh that he said, “everything is realise at the last” (5). He was certainly dubious that his own experience could be put to use as advice for prospective students: “Because I’m already experienced, young people they don’t like to listen to old people and friends” (5). Like him, they were just going to have to learn it from experience.

7.6. Journey’s end

Having looked from a number of angles at the learning journeys of the study participants, it is time to attempt to sum up some of its significance for them. There are many ways of considering the learning outcomes of the participants, but I will consider three here, the university’s own “overarching purpose” of “fostering higher order intellectual capabilities” (Nightingale & O’Neill, p. 11); the personal goals that students themselves had expressed; and other areas of unpredicted personal change that students commented on.

7.6.1. Meeting the academy’s goals

Before looking at their other gains, it is timely to return to the academic goal of the university, that of producing “autonomous, critical, reflective and articulate students” (Nightingale & O’Neill, 1994, p. 10). Without abandoning the notion that there are many ways of demonstrating autonomy, at this point I will use the term with the notion of independent thinking skills favoured by the western academy, closely entwined with the concept of critical thinking.

Indications that participants gave generally suggested that these two attributes had not been encouraged by their Chinese teachers: “they put themselves in the centre, just

copy what I am saying and keep quiet” (DX). She had learned to suppress any questions she might have had: “I think what I think is all wrong, so OK, OK, just teacher you say, just like, well, I will do that.” YQ suggested that the issue was not so simple and that in China “we also require students to maintain a doubt when you are reading someone’s opinion, or opinion of an article.” She commented, though, that it was a requirement rarely met: “maybe to follow the ordinary way is the safest way. I think.” The expression of these attributes was therefore something that these students were not accustomed to on arrival.

These were aspects that were hard to test in a self-report, but there were certainly indications that they had been acquired in some cases. Mike valued having learned to read and think independently (Vignette 2). KT claimed greater intellectual courage, being ready to ask questions and contribute in class without concern for losing face (6.3.2.1). Gao, whose independent approach extended well beyond the classroom, made the point however that while he did sometimes question readings and teachers, in the face of new and conflicting ideas, those of the professor present were generally convincing.

Two students clearly felt that in this respect they had fallen short of the ideal. Saul was alerted in his second semester to the idea that he needed to “deep analyse” (4) and given guidance within one paper on how to do that. Asked in the next interview whether he felt he was managing it, he gave a long pause, and then a qualified “Yeah, sort of,” introducing a rather evasive account of the structure of knowledge as a tree with many branches and finishing with a hushed confession: “Very shallow, yeah. As far as my reading and my understanding” (5). This was reminiscent of YQ’s shamed whisper confessing to her inability to “own an idea” (6.1.3). Although both had been giving confident accounts of their performance in higher level classes, audibility faltered when confronting this important test of being-and-doing a university student.

7.6.2. Achieving personal goals

By far the majority of participants, and all those who stayed with the longitudinal study, completed their degrees, with at least two of them continuing to postgraduate study. Naturally this was a cause of great satisfaction in spite of areas where dreams had not been entirely fulfilled, such as shortfalls in expected language gain, immediately

applicable practical knowledge and local community contact. They can, thus, be seen to have had an important measure of success.

Their objectives in taking up study abroad went far beyond simply getting a degree, though: “I think study with good grades without any, like, changes in my life or without any new experiences in my life, it’s very boring life” (KT). They had definitely not fallen into that trap.

The students had conceptualised an important part of the journey as being about process rather than product, the development of independent study skills. This was perceived as a very highly valued aspect of what they had learned, a source of pride, and the essential added value of the New Zealand degree:

That’s why most foreign education systems are said to be better than our own ones and Chinese universities now is because you get your self study skills, your own skills, not being fed, seeking knowledge yourself. (MB)

Mike had found the demands of English difficult through the whole process, but when I asked him whether, given the chance, a university education in China would have been better for him, he responded, “I think this style is better for learning. Yeah. You do it by yourself, you look at the resource and everything” (5). For DX, this was the realisation of a real education: “Oh, this is study!” Gains in agency manifest in the ability to organise their complex new lives have been signalled throughout these chapters, and can be seen as a corollary of these self-study skills.

A point that several students made was that independent did not necessarily mean alone, as they discovered the value of seeking out help from others as an efficient and enjoyable method of living and learning, demonstrating “autonomous interdependence” (Littlewood, 1999):

If you want to study good and if you want to live in the comfortable environment, and if you want to cheer up, you need to communicate. You need to talk, talk, talk, and let people know you and you have to make friends and you have to talk to teachers. (YQ 2)

Another educational goal mentioned had been to retain and apply learning beyond the confines of their exams, to be educated human beings in their ongoing experience of the world, and Mike, among others, was pleased to have achieved this (Vignette 9). In fact, his new understanding had implications beyond himself. He envisaged a future self explaining the ways of foreigners to Chinese people, and this was an insight he would have liked to share with his monocultural classmates:

I'm already experienced about the foreign culture, so I will understand what they are doing in Chinese, so I am not surprised. ... On the other hand I want many foreigner to China to see what China is. It's better than stay in their own country and just the newspaper or other people say. ... Understand each other the world will be better. (Mike 5)

There was one case, though, in which the goalposts appeared to have been moved during the duration of their stay. The promise of enhanced job opportunities which had been a major motivation was fading:

Right now, some of the Chinese overseas students back to China, they can't find a good job, they just only can find a job who's graduate from normal Chinese university. They didn't have any strong point, because right now some Chinese people think English just a tool for you, not necessary. (Scott 6)

Participants were very aware, in any case, that whatever symbolic capital this sojourn afforded them, it had delayed their entry into new stages in the life trajectory that their Chinese contemporaries were already installed in. These included financial independence, the career path and marriage. Being still dependent at this age was humiliating: "a little bit shame to use parents' money in my age because lots of people has their own work and use their own money" (YQ 2). The delay was a disadvantage in the job market: "I would say the hierarchy in Chinese society more early, more better" (DX). The new source of competitive advantage appeared to be New Zealand work experience, and as the study came to an end, a few of the students had decided to look for career-related jobs here, in order to ensure that their first objective could be attained.

Other areas of growth, less directly related to the expectations expressed in their first interviews, are discussed below.

7.6.3. Questions of cultural identity

Talking about oneself is a way of assuming the power to decide who one is, and creating and representing their own identity in this way was one of the affordances of the interview process. I would like here to look at it in terms of one central aspect, that of being Chinese (and, concomitantly, not being Kiwi).

7.6.3.1. *Being Chinese*

Being Chinese was inevitably from beginning to end a very important aspect of identity but one that had shifting value, at times bringing a sense of solidarity as part of

a group which could be relied on to understand, and at others creating a need to mark oneself out as not reducible to an essentialised notion.

In its first value, it carried patriotic responsibilities with future roles for some of returning to serve their country, and a current responsibility of “not just representing yourself ... [but] representing your country, your culture, your people” (FW). This value made media coverage of crime and irresponsible behaviour by Chinese students deeply shameful, leading students to feel “not very comfortable” (Saul 2) and “not a good feeling” (Scott 2). CN claimed that his main motivation for joining the study was “to show ... that not all Chinese students are bad.”

Chinese culture is not monolithic and students differentiated its members along various lines, such as the rural/urban divide, geographically (“we come from different parts of China and something sometime think different” Connor 2), and, as suggested by Gao (2003) and Dooley (2001), educationally, Scott attributing his difficulty in attaining the requisite IELTS result (5.3.4) to the curriculum of the vocational high school he had attended. Students often chose to represent themselves as different from most Chinese students, for example, in being intrinsically rather than instrumentally motivated in their course choice or decision to study abroad, and often in relation to characteristics which moved them closer to ideals of the western university student, such as confidence to speak out in class. Claiming points of difference was for some of them one of the advantages of study abroad, since “nobody else in your range could have done it” (KT). There was here for Louise an investment in her future: “maybe after 10 years or 20 years I can tell my children, ‘Your mother studied in New Zealand’” (3), and she counted the enriching experience as of greater importance than the degree. In some cases, though, the comparison with other Chinese students highlighted their own difficulties, as for KT (5.6.2.1) and Scott (5.3.4).

Nevertheless, students were also ready to claim “Chinese” characteristics in common, such as mathematical skills (although there were certainly exceptions among this group), a tendency to feel shy in class, a lack of experience of independent learning but, on the other hand, adaptability and good learning skills. Often what was shared was the experience of adversity in comparison with what their local counterparts were faced with:

Maybe the New Zealand students should learn from the Chinese students that they are hard study. ... we spend maybe double money to study here, we spend double time to study, so we hope we can get some [respect]. (LH)

7.6.3.2. In relationship with Kiwis

I try to involve to the really Kiwi student life, not just international student, and not just Chinese student (Saul 4)

Domestic students remained the real arbiters of membership of this community, so that moments where one of the subjects was the focus of their attention were highly valued: “I was fortunate to be in my group because there were four Kiwi and only me is the international student” (Li Ming 2).

They were the benchmarks against which difficulty could be measured: “it’s just hard. You know, even some Kiwi students they can’t do it” (Gemma 4). And against which success was doubly sweet, as Saul’s reflection on the implied comparison in the lecturer’s comments on his group’s oral presentation grade (5.7.3.2) demonstrates:

There’s nine group, and only two group is A. One is all the Kiwi student, another one is our group, so I think that’s another encouragement to your whole study in my Rutherford life. ... The lecturer said, ‘Oh, your group is very good, excellent, good job, very good job, because it is very unusual for the international student and the all the Chinese student can get A in this paper but your group did, so that’s very good job, well done.’ (Saul 5)

Ideally, classroom interaction provided the opportunity for mutual interest and learning, and certainly the Chinese students experienced interesting revelations:

The tutor told us to find some news and choose six most important, and Kiwis’ opinion with Chinese opinion are different. In Kiwis’ opinion maybe the Rutherford’s news are also important, but for us, for most of Chinese they think the government news are most important. (Louise 3)

Mike suggested (6.3.2.1) that this interest may not have been generally reciprocated, and that New Zealanders judged China from prejudiced reports. Even critical attention, it would seem from Gao’s report of an encounter in his orientation week, could be countenanced where the usual indifference was replaced by genuine interest:

He is very interested in Asian culture, so we talked a lot. Sometimes we talked about Chinese culture, or some things are not good in China, for example politics, like people copy CDs or something like that, but that is good talking because he wants to know it, we communicate in a good way, in a friendly way, that’s OK. (1)

In higher level more interactive mixed classes in his second year, Scott felt his fellow students were interested in finding out about Asia, but, it turned out, not enough to do the more internationally focused courses that he took in his final year, where local students were rare.

The ultimate test of being-and-doing a university student in New Zealand was feeling oneself to be, and to be recognised as, equal to Kiwi students. By the end of his first semester, Gao claimed equality within the classroom, but felt to the end that they were treated as “foreigners” (5) beyond. Scott felt they were equal (7.4.6.1), but added, “But I think is I am a Rutherford international student” (5). This comment is interesting alongside YQ’s response to whether she felt herself to be a “competent student in a New Zealand university”: “I’m a competent international student and I think I’m a good Chinese international student, compared with my peer, especially other Chinese students.” There seemed to be a remaining reluctance to equate oneself with local counterparts, a reluctance Mike explained further: “It’s hard to equal to the Kiwi students because they already stay here, they haven’t got the other culture.” In terms of membership of the university community, having access to two cultures was clearly not seen as an advantage.

7.6.3.3. *A third space*

An experience that had demanded so much of them in terms of adaptation and immersion in all facets of life was inevitably transforming in unforeseen ways. Some of these may have been inevitable in any experience of maturing and travelling, but participants identified specific aspects of change which were attributable to observation of and involvement in New Zealand culture. Many of these have been described in more detail elsewhere, for example:

- greater self-discipline (JN, Mike)
- cultural insights that led them to question taken-for-granted stances, over issues such as fairness (Scott, Mike) and the related issue of guan xi (Saul, see below)
- greater freedom to explore and express the self (Gao, Mike)
- new understandings of teamwork (Saul)
- new understandings of non-family-based human relationships at close quarters (YQ through flatmates, May through her job)
- increased cultural empathy (Mike)
- the Christian faith and teachings (Saul, JN, KT, DX)

Others mentioned were greater openness in expressing emotions and opinions (Saul, TY), a less materialistic outlook (DX, Louise, Thomas), and an understanding of western ways of thinking:

Most of Asian people we think from general first and then to the specific point, which make us we waste lots of time to think surrounding area a lot, but western way we just think point to point very specifically so it's very efficiencies. (Scott 6)

Questions in the final interview of the longitudinal study, and for those in the retrospective study nearing completion, attempted to find out their attitudes to such changes as part of the answer to the third research question about the nature of changes. Change of values were seen as only partial, and, not surprisingly, certainly not a rejection of their identity as Chinese. They were often, too, a site of struggle, with a degree of conflict with embedded values. For example, Saul declared that treating employees differently because of *guan xi* was “not very good way to deal with things,” but minutes later described the tendency of *guan xi* to encourage work relationships to develop into personal relationships permeating everyday life, saying he preferred that over the separation of the two spheres he had experienced in New Zealand (6). In spite of Gao's desire to explore his personal aspirations, which brought conflict with his parents, he counted the Chinese understanding of family relationships as one of the aspects of Chinese culture that he strongly maintained (7.2.4).

The students seemed to embrace the changes they experienced. They rejected the notion that they might represent loss of a valued aspect of their Chinese self:

Lost? No! No! 'Lost,' sometimes for me 'lost' means you lost good thing, but for me I abandoned them, I dumped them. I don't think they are suitable for me any more so I adopt the new which is suitable for me the values. (YQ)

Valued aspects of being Chinese were not under threat:

I have a very good feeling of New Zealand, getting more and more, the feeling. It's increasing. Might be, as my parents say, 'Maybe next time come back you will say China not good.' I think, 'No, no, no, I won't, I won't, I won't, I'm Chinese, I still remember.' (Scott 4)

Grown up in Chinese culture. Still I will define myself as a Chinese. The New Zealand culture's of course influenced me a lot but not as strong as Chinese culture. (Gao 6)

The idea of a third space, where the best of both cultures were available to them, perhaps best conveys the influences they were absorbing into their new identities. The

third place could be envisaged as somewhere not completely accessible to either of the starting points:

So a lot of things I'm doing or I've done, from both cultures people would ask me why. Not like before back home I did something and parents probably won't ask me because they could understand. But now they don't really understand. (Gao 6)

It could equally be a place where aspects of both could be consciously drawn on. Scott said he thought about problems from both a western and a Chinese perspective and took the best of both. On the other hand, it could form a bridge between the two worlds, as for Mike, seeing himself as a translator of cultural difference, or for Saul, who found that an exclusively Chinese group could flourish by adopting New Zealand norms of class-based interaction (5.7.3.2).

Whatever form it took, they judged this a privileged place to be.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

This chapter takes a further step in interpreting the experience of this group of students in their passage through their university careers. It begins with reflection on the learning that participants achieved, both in terms of the university's prescribed pathways and by more subterranean routes, focusing in particular on those aspects particularly significant to their status as Chinese international students. The discussion will next turn to the roles of other people, teachers and their New Zealand peers, within the process, and then, on a more personal level, to issues of identity, agency and autonomy. The final section will consider the whole experience in relation to the expectations of it they had expressed at the outset. The following chapter will consider the implications of these interpretations.

8.1. Taking steps to learning

Chapter Five has described the sense of apprehensive readiness that the students derived from prior learning within New Zealand, a sense that was in many instances shattered by early experiences in the university which proved to be very different from expectations. These differences were in the level and opacity of task demands and in the scaffolding available to clarify requirements and support students to meet them. The basic task of the first semester might be summarised, then, thus:

- to penetrate and understand the content of courses,
- to decide how to distribute their attention appropriately to the content and course materials,
- to understand what the assessment format was,
- to retain their understanding of the content so that they could present it in a timely fashion in the assessment format,
- to work out how to do all these things in their second language and in an academic environment in which channels of learning familiar to them were not present,
- to achieve this without exposing themselves too readily to the loss of face attendant upon acting inappropriately.

Some of these things were entirely new, such as investing their own time in a relatively unguided way to consolidate and elaborate whatever understanding had been gleaned from actual class contact time, and structuring for themselves the mass of content within a course so that they could see what was important to study for exams. Others, such as reading textbooks, might perhaps have been assumed to be more familiar, but needed to be learned anew in view of the language levels of the texts encountered.

There were certainly moments in the early period of these students' university experience where footing was insecure and when strides rather than steps were called for. I shall take a brief look at some of these strides in terms of specific aspects of the discourse.

8.1.1. Written genres

Moore and Morton (2005) contend that there is a wide discrepancy between the written tasks for the IELTS test and the range of extended texts required of first year university students. This was certainly borne out in the data. However, the study that participants had done in language centres to achieve their target result had not been in vain. Bruce (2005) makes a useful distinction between *cognitive genres* and *social genres* in writing, the former relating to more micro-level functions such as being able to compare and contrast, exemplify and support with evidence, while social genres are the text formats that these build into, briefing reports, case studies and literature reviews, to name some that gave the focal students particular difficulties over their careers. Their prior study had introduced them to the notion of academic writing as a special variety, and to some cognitive genres which they could call on and enhance. A significant lacuna, though, appears to have been extensive practice at incorporating the ideas of others into their written texts.

In spite of their preparation, some of them were at an extremely low level of proficiency on enrolment. The only course that May failed, for example, was her first semester L2 writing paper, and Connor received 2 out of 10 for his first assignment in one of the more language intensive business courses.

Scaffolded approaches to developing writing were provided in a very few courses such as those concerned with English for academic purposes. These courses were designed to enable small low-stakes learning steps: DX's blood lesson about plagiarism (6.1.2.1) cost her the marks for only one part of a staged assignment, and May failed the

first stage of a similar assignment in which she had to produce a draft text, but “passed the totally one” (3). While such processes were helpful, the assignments in these courses could cover only a small number of text types, and meanwhile other courses were simultaneously making different demands of them.

The literature makes a clear call for a recognition of discipline-specific ways of knowing and presenting knowledge (e.g., Lea & Street, 1998; Zamel & Spack, 2004), and that generic courses, therefore, cannot take on the entire burden of preparing students for their writing demands. However, teachers immersed in a discipline, the nature of which they conceive of in content rather than discourse terms, might not even be aware that their textual preferences are not universal, and certainly may not have an explicit knowledge of the discourse, an ability to unfold it, see how it works, and convey that to novices. Hence students may not be apprised of the actual and explicable plurality of academic literacies and simply be puzzled by conflicting messages: “sometimes one teacher said this kind of that and other tutor said that kind, but I don’t know” (Mike 4).

False beginners, with native speaker proficiency and more than a decade of producing written English academic texts, can be expected to have far more flexibility in adapting to genre demands. An understanding of the distance the L2 students had to travel, though, renders Scott’s first semester longing for samples explicable. Examining examples of new kinds of writing and having their features pointed out is a normal way of developing skills in language classes. Another feature of such classes would be having the opportunity to produce highly flawed texts initially and receiving feedback rather than academic penalty on them. In most of their university courses, students found that both these learning processes had been removed, and, in the short 13-week semesters, first assignments were due soon after embarkation. Problems with new text types continued throughout the first year. It was the very brief and, she felt, inadequate instructions she received for one of these that really seemed to unsettle Gemma’s experience of her second semester (5.7.3.1).

As I have indicated, the participants did not, in fact, rely simply on the rather scant support that the course materials offered them for this learning, but sought the help of more experienced students. Vacuums will be filled. The point to ponder here is whether the models that were being provided were those that teachers would have wished for: Li Ming, who certainly did not present himself as one of the most highly accomplished

students, got a higher price when he sold his first semester textbooks by virtue of including his marked assignments with them.

In fact, participants did obviously develop the writing skills to pass their papers, but as has been demonstrated, without safe ways of experimenting in writing, they often achieved this by remaining within margins that limited the expression of their own voices, upholding Gee's (2004) doubts about whether authentic beginners can ever "become real producers and innovators in the discourse, [or] only ritualized producers and consumers of it" (p. 30).

8.1.2. Reading

Most second language teachers would regard some of the reading strategies listed in 6.2.2, such as guessing vocabulary and scanning texts to locate specific material, with frustrated recognition. Aren't those the standard strategies taught? For example, Seal's (1997) *Academic encounters*, widely used at the time of these students' preparation, includes dealing with unknown words, guessing from context and scanning in the first unit. Why do we see them being constructed under duress rather than immediately available as part of the repertoire on arrival?

In discussing the transition from L1 to L2 reading, it is sometimes noted that strategies acquired and automaticised over years of reading in the mother tongue need to be re-constructed on a conscious level in the second language (e.g., Macaro, 2003, p. 130) and this had no doubt been part of the students' learning in their preparatory courses. It would seem, though, that the transition to vastly more demanding reading in their university study removed re-gained access to the strategies and necessitated a painstaking second re-construction.

Let us look at some of the ways in which the reading in the university was likely to differ from the more highly scaffolded language centre norms.

8.1.2.1. Language level of texts

The most obvious difference would be level. One of the most time-demanding activities of teaching L2 reading is locating texts which are sufficiently demanding to stretch students but which still remain accessible enough to allow them to encompass the meaning. University teachers, in choosing texts suitable for first level courses, are

likely to keep in mind the fact that students are new to the discipline, but their attention to level can be assumed to rest rather on the false beginner native speaker than struggling international students.

However, teacher-selected texts were not the only ones that students read. Often even more significant for these informants was the reading that they searched out themselves from the library to support their assignment work. There are many books on the shelves of a university library which would not be recommended for a 100-level student. It is likely that much of this reading was even more demanding than the textbook.

Another contributor to the level of demand is sheer length. In language textbooks, reading texts are generally truncated to allow for adequate opportunity to attend to the features in focus within a normal teaching period. Thus, Seal (1994), designed for intermediate to high intermediate students, includes no readings that are longer than about two and a half pages of text. This controls the cognitive load, as students do not have to retain and build up meaning over an extended period of reading time, but can hold a relatively encompassable structure within their consciousness. It may not, though, be sufficient preparation for university reading.

8.1.2.2. *Structuring and retaining understanding*

An important tenet of recent approaches to reading is the idea of purpose, an idea incorporated, for example, in Freebody and Luke's (2003) role, using texts functionally. To encourage a purposeful approach to text, it is seen as good practice for language teachers to provide some sort of pre-reading task which alerts students to an appropriate purpose for engaging with the text, and thus helps them structure the information or argument it contains, looking for the salient or significant aspects which will help them build an understanding of it (e.g., Harmer, 2001, p. 213). A pertinent example of this would be the questions in the IELTS test, indicating to candidates what they should be looking for in this text, and often read by students first to guide their reading of the text itself.

Rarely does such a clearly matching advance organiser exist for university textbooks, especially if these are being read in advance of lectures to enhance understanding of the spoken word. For books taken in a speculative fashion from library shelves to support assignment writing, there is no guarantee that there is any match for the kind of meaning sought. For textbook reading, we can see in the data dawning realisation that

course materials can provide some guidance, in DX's belated discovery of the value of Study Guides (6.2.2.3), and Mike's critical realisation that test questions could unlock the purpose for him (Vignette 1). Later, Mike was able to use the book itself to prepare himself for reading: "First I will look at the book's name and the table of content, and I found the [headings] and I open the book" (4). But both had passed through a period of total incomprehension before that.

Another aspect that was new, too, was the necessity to retain the content of reading separate from the act of reading and recall it for exams. Typically EAP texts are arranged in themes, so that over a period of perhaps a week a range of texts relating to a topic such as the environment will be explored, thus enhancing the chances of acquiring related vocabulary encountered in a range of contexts, and providing interesting content for discussion, writing and thinking in L2. It is not the norm, though, that the content is called upon in any detailed way later in the course. Remembering in L2 is extra challenging, as participants pointed out, and the importance of putting targeted effort into doing so was one of Mike's metacognitive moments (Vignette 1).

8.1.2.3. *Re-constructing reading in dilemma-driven learning*

Under these conditions, students could not initially call on strategies such as reading for gist. Gist was inaccessible until they understood sufficient technical vocabulary, either from the two close readings they had just completed in a multiple-reading strategy, or as they became more familiar with disciplines. However, stakes were high and they invested a great deal of energy in becoming more efficient readers.

Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 33) talk of "the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity," and that notion is relevant here: these realisations were wrung from lived imperatives. Both Mike and MB, for example, recounted an initial response of giving up when there were no obvious routes to learning content, but the looming first test (Mike) and the shock of first semester failures (MB) acted as blood lessons. Hard-won insights led to very significant gains in reading skills.

8.1.3. Oral genres

Within the university it seemed that speaking was the skill that was least required (as it could be readily evaded, 6.5.2.1) and most feared (as it involved publicly facing one's

evaluators). However, as the central badge of language learning, a badge students envisaged wearing with pride on return, it seems to have been the most desired. Based on the interaction that characterised their language centre experience, it was also a strong expectation of study in New Zealand.

The teacher interviewed as part of this study saw taking part in the oral discourse of classes as meeting a responsibility to both teacher (“to prove to me that they’re thinking about things, to prove that they can actually understand what they are learning and apply it”) and local students, who, he said, resented international students “swinging the lead” by remaining silent. Significant here are Kubota’s (2004) reminder that willing articulateness is by no means a universal trait of western students, and Morita’s (2004) account demonstrating that silence does not necessarily signify passivity, and this study has upheld that finding (6.3.2.1). Carlin (2005) suggests that opportunities for such talk are “closely aligned to class size and to level of study” (p. 92), which this study also supports. Another factor could be added, that of teachers taking a role in working towards conditions where interaction between class members was facilitated, and these will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Useful insights from this study relate to the importance of one particular oral genre, that of seeking help from teachers outside class hours, and in view of the significance that it appeared to have, even for those students who made little use of it, and the developing understanding of its nature that participants revealed over the interviews, it is worth here looking at the features that students found to be appropriate to its use, that protected them from being seen as asking “dumb” questions.

8.1.3.1. *The time factor*

Students are very aware of the calls on their own time; it is essential that they also understand that teachers are similarly stretched. May demonstrated this awareness: “every time I go to the office I will ask them, ‘Do you have the time?’ Not for a little, maybe a little bit longer” (3).

8.1.3.2. *Partial responses and student responsibility*

It was important that students did not expect that this strategy would “solve [them] every problem” (May 3). They had personal responsibility at every step to do their own

work. Even Saul, who seemed to be the most dependent user of the strategy, recognized this responsibility as the first action:

Every time you need to do is prepare something, and then to ask the question. You need to prepare something. You cannot take this and say ‘Tell me, how can I do?’ That’s rubbish, you know. (4)

He retained, however, a residual feeling that the personal investment involved in making these approaches was worthy in itself of a response:

I think it is very hard for the international student to ask some question and if they ask some question it means they want to study and they want to know something, and they have this kind of motive to study. So how come you say, “Oh, sorry, I cannot tell you.” That’s kind of, you know, very cold.

This is an aspect of the “moral response to neediness” model of teacher role that Gee (2004) describes, indicating that such a belief presents a serious barrier to the development of appropriate autonomy in university discourse.

In addition to preparation, work was often required within the encounter itself, as co-constructed discourse, as we saw with May’s accounts of grappling to understand the teacher’s response (Vignette 4). Saul, too, found approaching teachers could be “quite scary” because “they maybe ask you some very hard question” (5).

Finally it was important to understand the strategic nature of partial answers and to be ready to take the final steps independently:

They don’t give you the answer, they tell you how you get the answer, by reading and studying this book. (CN)

8.1.3.3. *Choice of location and interlocutor*

For some students, being able to choose the privacy of office hours mitigated the risk of humiliation. Even the verbally confident Saul was “still quite embarrassed” to ask after the lecture, he said:

I still think there’s some communication problem such as I cannot to speak in the normal speed, or some very special word and I cannot pronounce very clearly, and maybe it doesn’t make sense (5)

Another factor was the attitude of the teachers. A number of students asserted that most lecturers were very amenable to requests for help, but Saul was not the only one to notice exceptions. Gao’s friendly relations with teachers, for example, were not universal: “some of them, no, they look very strict” (4). Unfortunately, it seemed that

the highest incidence of unhelpful responses were in 100-level classes, where, as Saul speculated, “they need to answer some very rubbish questions” (5).

8.1.4. The English language

Questions of identity, past (the self-concepts and expectations, public and private, which students arrived with), present (their desire to be recognised as competent New Zealand university students) and future (their imagined selves on return to China), were intricately bound up with English skills, as suggested in 2.2.1.3.1. Interesting, then, that only three of the students indicated that a degree of aptitude for language learning was part of their motivation for undertaking study abroad, and a number recalled struggling with high school English study. May speaks here with typically inaccurate eloquence:

When I in high school for the English course, I’m not going to. Or maybe I just hiding, to some other classroom. Or maybe I go to that course, but not listening. But also if I listening I get that one, but they talking is separate thing, is not made the whole sentence. They talking about, yeah, this is the word, words on the past time, what? Present time, what? Future, what? I say, “OK, I know that. How to combine together?” It’s no idea. ... I still looking for the book that tell me how to make the whole sentence. I didn’t interesting for individual words, I want to for how to make the perfect whole sentence, which words – like the formula. I prefer they change it to the maths one, like formula. And ‘T’ first and then pass word, pass word, pass word. If that happen I will go to the other channel, “What, what what. I know that.” I looking for it but I can’t find any book about that. (5)

Their willingness to undertake degree study under these circumstances may illustrate the strength of the Chinese belief expressed by Saul (7.3), that diligence is more important than aptitude, or perhaps of the myth of the efficacy of total immersion.

A significant issue here is the entry criterion. In discussions with teachers throughout the period of the study, they often identified problems not with the high number, but with the quality of the students, and this was generally associated with level of English on arrival. For example, from the pilot teacher interview: “Quality is about their ability to benefit from what I am trying to do. So firstly, language ability.” Consequently, an increase in the English criterion was often proposed as a commonsense reaction to improve the situation. The literature would certainly suggest that the (temporary) reduction to IELTS Band 5.5 allowed the entry of students whose level of proficiency did put them at risk. In the event, most of the students in the study who entered at this level completed, supporting Scott’s contention that their willingness to work would

overcome difficulties (4), though their passage was far from smooth, especially in the first months. However, at the level of the more standard Band 6, English level becomes less of a factor in success.

In the students' accounts of their growing expertise, there is only occasional attribution to English language learning. Much more frequent are references to discourse features, to feeling familiar with the university setting, to working out what is required (Mike's reading advance was not about higher English level, but about the connections between course materials, for example), to having clear explanations of requirements (as in Gemma's varying ability to overcome problems in her second semester, 5.7.3.1). If "quality" is to be improved, it would seem it would not be by increasing some free-floating de-contextualised "level of English," such as the IELTS band (thereby ensuring only that they were better at tasks such as writing 250-word essays about general topics), but through an initiation into experience of academic discourses, spoken and written, appropriate to the university.

Contemplating his difficulty contributing verbally in early tutorials, Thomas declared:

I think this is need time and to study English language and talk, talk, talk. I think maybe in future I can speaking anything. (1)

To some degree this proved to be the case, as we have seen. However, time and opportunities to interact in English were commodities manifestly unavailable in much of their university experience, so as a method of induction, this was inevitably flawed. As has been established, course and assignment failure proved to be an important source of learning. Such a pathway inevitably delays a sense of the competence which can allow students to experience the intellectual enrichment we hope university will provide, rather than being forced into a position of trying simply to pass. Implications of this situation will be considered in 9.2.

In terms of the current criteria, though, the students had met their side of the bargain, with considerable effort attaining the prescribed level, which they assumed readied them for the university, and they might have some expectation that the university community would reciprocate by accepting them as legitimate peripheral practitioners within it. This legitimacy and the extent of their journey so far were not always acknowledged. Rendered to some extent dumb by the language demands, they perceived they were often positioned as "dumb" in its more informal sense as well, and an unwarranted drain

therefore on resources. This was a position they protested, and seeing me as a potential voice to present other views of them seems to have been an important motivation for some for participating in the research (7.6.3.1).

8.2. Fellow travellers

This brings us to a consideration of the other people involved in this experience and their contribution to learning, change and meeting (or not meeting) expectations. Gilbert et al. (1997) see the study experience as a triangle made up of the student's own preparation and commitment, the relationship with peers, and the ability of the teacher "to facilitate the development of a positive learning environment" (p. 51).

8.2.1. Teachers

Accepting uncritically the judgements these participants expressed about teachers would be as questionable as interpreting their actions through the assumptions teachers so often make about Chinese students. The conflicting reports about some of the teachers reveal this (7.2.1.4). Representing a teacher as prejudiced could be an identity-protecting stance in the face of poor results as much as a measured judgement of his attitude to international students. An understanding of the teacher role needs to consider the situation more carefully.

If student expectations of the university encounter were not always met, neither were those of teachers. The traditional students in the university are false beginners, successful recent school leavers from the domestic education system with a pre-existing basic understanding of how learning "is done" in this setting, or at least an ability to pick up the subtle clues imparted through lectures, assignment topics and grades, "implicit induction" as Lillis (2001, p. 54) calls it, in order to be able to work it out for themselves before too long. Providing guidance into the learning practices and specific discourses of a discipline, as opposed to its content, is not generally how university teachers have envisaged their role. Comments about the quality of the new cohort of students reveal that the community of practice teachers had felt secure in was being destabilised and they, too, needed to negotiate anew a sense of competence. The sources of this sense of competence could vary, but two possibilities would be holding firmly to

a vision of what had been and berating the intruders as lowering standards, or joining with others to reflect on the situation and look for adjustments that could be made. Any such adjustments would have to recognise the importance of maintaining academic standards: Saul's assumption that teachers and students have a mutual interest in students passing courses (5.6.4.2.1) has to be tempered with the recognition that the very real possibility of failure is one way that teachers in higher education in the west maintain these standards. Being-and-doing a university teacher is different from being-and-doing a language centre teacher.

Nevertheless, these accounts have shown that there are different ways of being-and-doing a university teacher, and some provide considerably more access to the new community than others for L2 speakers and writers.

Some of the barriers to students' ready entry into the new discourse arose from teachers' decisions about course processes and materials, such as decisions about the provision of written material to back up spoken lectures; the amount of scaffolding provided for assignments, tests and exams; measures to elicit verbal participation in class; and the source of examples used to support understanding of theoretical constructs (drawing examples from the everyday life of students offered vibrant explanatory potential but also the possibility of exclusion of internationals if iconic brands, for example, were not known).

Where such decisions set up barriers, the question that arises is whether those barriers were an inevitable result of inadequately prepared students encountering appropriate university practices, in which case attention needs to be paid to the preparation of the students, or whether, in fact, a change in the practice might benefit even those students whose readiness for enrolment meets current norms (which must accept growing diversity) without either reducing cognitive load below appropriate challenge level, or imposing time demands beyond what is reasonable to ask of a teacher. Teachers tend to enjoy the exchange and evolution of ideas which is possible when students enter with understanding and confidence into dialogue around the content of courses, become, in effect, autonomous, critical, articulate and reflective participants. Measures which increase the possibility of this occurring for the greatest range of students must be applauded, and the experience of teachers who have sought to respond to the needs of international students seems generally to be that "a framework for developing a multicultural teaching repertoire can be seen as simply an extension of effective teaching for all students" (Anderson & Adams, 1992, p. 25). For other

examples of the same conclusion see Fishman and McCarthy (2004), who found the experience immensely rewarding as teachers, and Ballard and Clanchy (1997).

The effect of one teacher decision widely lamented in the study as raising serious obstacles to learning, that of the C101 lecturer not to provide printed or downloadable handouts, but to use extensive OHTs and instruct the students to copy them down during the lecture, has already been discussed (7.2.1.4). It is hard to see how it would benefit any students to spend their lecture time copying, rather than listening and reflecting. The practice that found the most favour with these students was a lecture outline (not the full script of the lecture) available in advance to act as an advance organiser for their listening. This is a widespread, and it would seem, generally valuable practice that facilitates depth of understanding without debasing standards, and takes little preparation time extra to that involved in organising the lecture.

It would be foolish, though, to suggest that there is some set list of behaviours to be adopted by university teachers which would work to facilitate the entry of all Chinese international students into centralised membership of the university community. To take a case in point, the factors that militate against easy oral contributions in large classes (by asking or by answering questions, for example) are complex and multi-faceted, including cultural injunctions, past practices, potential loss of face through language difficulties and individual variations in personal confidence. The students, even those critical of teachers who did not invite international students to participate in this way, recognised the difficulty of finding ways that could overcome so much, and there were accounts of frustrated attempts (6.3.1.3). In any case, the teachers themselves are faced with an equally complex set of separate factors that they are taking account of, including the need to convey complex material in a compressed amount of time.

There is another layer of complexity. The question of diaspora students migrating towards a third space of hybrid cultural practices has been raised to interpret outcomes of their university journey (7.6.3.3). This process had begun before the focal students' arrival at university, though, as the account of their language centre learning has demonstrated, thus, as Singh and Doherty (2004) point out, complicating teachers' ability to interpret students' behaviour (3.1.4.2.3). This may, for example, explain the C101 teacher's accusation of cheating when Saul asked for a preview of sample questions before the first test (Vignette 1). Saul's request was based on a western practice which he had experienced in his previous Polytechnic-based NZDB study ("every time when I take the [polytechnic] test the lecturer provide the preview, yes, the

test to review and to study,” 2), a practice which would be seen as anything but exceptionable for the first test in a 100-level paper. However, it is very likely that the lecturer misinterpreted him as requesting a Chinese practice, which a number of the students described to me:

I think the Chinese exam is more easy than New Zealand, because the tutor told you which topic they will examine, such as ten short answer, that is choice and you only see these is OK,” (Louise 1)

In a complex process where student attempts to enter a new paradigm were interpreted by teachers’ filtered understandings of the old paradigm in the course of brief encounters between strangers who did not share a mother tongue, the courses were inevitably “sites of struggle and challenges over the selection and enactment of curricula and teaching strategies” (Singh & Doherty, 2004, p.18). This situation was compounded by cultural diversity among the staff itself, and, of course, by the fact that some of the participants’ most constant informants on new practices, Chinese near peers, were themselves relative novices in these communities of practice.

8.2.2. Relations with domestic students

One of the key findings of Ward’s (2003) literature review of the impact of international students on local students was the disappointed expectation and desire on the part of international students, especially older students such as those in this study, of greater contact with local students. Local students were found to be relatively well disposed, but to lack inclination to initiate contact (p. 3), and each group felt that responsibility for contact lay with the other (p. 11), or with the institution “to increase and enhance intercultural interactions” (p. 4).

The question of initiating contact warrants consideration. Chinese students are often accused of isolating themselves in monolingual enclaves, and we see echoes of this from Mike’s employer, who advised that ““You should flat with other people, you can improve your speaking”” (4). It is also an admonition from Miller (2003), although her research was with high school students:

Students who find themselves in a new country, but surrounded by speakers of their first language, must actively meet the challenge to move beyond the sites and memberships of first language use. It is this movement which enables the project of becoming, along with language practice and acquisition, the possibility of success in mainstream academic contexts, and

the discovery that in spite of language difficulties, people share many things. (p. 109)

However, monolingual groupings result from complex factors. We have seen this in relation to accommodation and the need for emotional support (7.2.3.1). Flatting generally meant Chinese flatmates, but it was a choice driven by economic necessity, which certainly in one case stifled nascent contact (5.6.5), but also by the desire to try new things, for these young people who had thus far lived in the family home: “I think flatting is one of the experience, overseas experience” (Gemma 1). In fact, Gemma’s own choice of hostel accommodation did not lead to the diverse social network she had hoped for, as someone new to the city, but a single Chinese friend by the end of the first semester. Course choice was mentioned as another reason for lack of Kiwi contact, as some courses held much more appeal for internationals than locals. Even within mixed courses, though, monolingual groupings could be maintained. Spatial separation in lectures, which meant that any discussion called for occurred in monoethnic groups, seems to have been mutually though tacitly agreed to:

Most of Chinese students just sit there and look at them, and look at this side and that side. Because Kiwi student always sit the side, not in the middle, just the sides, inside the two sides. So I think it’s very funny, very strange, because there are a lot of space you can sit in and they go that side, that side. (JN)

Saul’s choice to work with an exclusively Chinese group (5.7.3.2) was not a knee-jerk reaction to avoid contact, but a rational weighing up of potential threats based on the importance of the task and his prior experience of the difficulty of feeling involved and equal in work with domestic classmates: “for me it’s quite hard to do that kind of team communication, team cooperation, [whether] the culture or some problem” (5).

One of the rationales for internationalisation is the benefits it will bring through exposing young people to diversity (e.g., Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand, 2003, p. 5; Knight & de Wit, 1995, p. 12). The participants in this study certainly identified that as a benefit to themselves (7.6.3.3), but its effects are largely one-sided if interethnic contact is minimised. Domestic students’ condemnation of international students for segregation fails to recognise the risk involved in initiating contact for those unsure of their footing in a new environment. There were no doubt equally complex reasons holding domestic students back from overcoming the divide, some of which participants identified (5.4.2.5.3).

Gao joined those reported in Ward (2001) in attributing responsibility to overcome obstacles to institutional processes:

Maybe I still need some help from my teachers who can help me to get involved, you know. It's so hard to make the first move, first step. It's not like, 'OK. I'll just go.' No, you need some push. (5)

Lack of institutional support in this area was Gao's major criticism of the university, though largely in relation to out of class activities:

The support would be providing more chance for us to get involved into the community and also into the whole culture, such as New Zealand just fantastic outdoor activities place, and like Rutherford might organise some activities for students, with maybe international students or like combined, whatever. I would say organising more activities for international students. (5)

It was a matter of deep concern to him, offered as an explanation of his sense that international students were to some degree being "milked" by the university (6). This suggestion, though, may be in itself a reflection of the divide between the groups, New Zealand students at university not being strongly attracted to a social programme established by the institution once they have managed to secure enough new friends to develop their own. In fact, Rutherford's attempt to operate such a programme during the first period of this study had been abandoned for lack of support. Bruch and Barty (1998) point out that the centres of social life, as much as the favoured topics of conversation and choice of music, of the two groups do not coincide. The fact that an event was specifically catering for international students might be a reason why domestic students would feel indifferent towards it.

The greatest hope for change may lie with in-class measures. JN, TY and Gemma all contrasted the university situation with their previous experiences at polytechnics, where interethnic interaction was the norm, encouraged by teacher intervention: "teacher should separate them, like you can arrange where they're going to sit, like sit between the amount of Kiwi, just divide them into different group" (JN). All three indicated that such measures had engendered a culture of mutual interest spilling out of the classroom:

I just feel students in [Polytechnic], they just influenced by the whole culture of the study environment, they just come to you, they come to you, 'cause you are just like a guest from the other country to visit their country, I just found they are motivated, just automatically to be friendly. (TY)

It may be by nurturing conditions conducive to interethnic interaction in classes that the university can best maximise the benefits of internationalisation, encouraging domestic students to recognise that “cross culture can bring a lot of ideas, because people have different perspective” (JN). The measure is, though, by no means guaranteed, as Scott’s experience illustrates. His warm relations with fellow students in small classes in his second year did not blossom into sustained friendships sufficient to withstand meagre contact and time demands in the third. They did, however, give him some taste of one of the imagined identities central to the study abroad dream, the student with local friends.

While in many ways domestic students are beneficiaries of the presence of international students, whose fees contribute to the financial viability of institutions, they cannot be coerced into recognising this by entering into sustained friendships with them.

8.2.3. The institution

The university itself, in the sense of those aspects that were beyond the decision-making scope of individual teachers, was, of course, a vital aspect of the experience. It was the university rules, for example, which established entry criteria, criteria which, as we have seen, created a mismatch between the expectations of teachers and those of students.

The fact that New Zealand universities offered a route to a university degree that was quick and cheap had been an important factor in participants’ choice to study here. One of the factors that contributed to that is the uncomplicated entry criteria offering open entry to those with 13 years of prior education and a prescribed IELTS band. Widely available access to university study is a feature of New Zealand higher education, with very few courses having contestable entry, reflecting an egalitarian philosophy deep-etched in the educational culture. Standards are maintained not by restrictive entry but by demanding coursework and the real possibility of failure. This comparative ease of entry, though, might be misinterpreted by students from a very different culture:

In China a student enter the university, they don’t need to study hard and easy to pass their examination. And no assignments. But at here maybe for us is more difficulty, ... China you must join a high school examination and take a good result you can enter the university, not anyone can enter the

university, but in New Zealand if you want to if you like, anyone can study at a university. (Louise 1)

It took several of the participants some time to recognise the degree of demands being made of them to reach standards for success. Marketing by means of ease of entry was a strategy roundly condemned by CN on the grounds of different cultural interpretations (6.5.5.1; see also Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand, 2003). Reflection on appropriate entry criteria will continue in 9.2.

The other important area where university systems had an impact on the students' experience was in the organisation of first year classes. Modular degree structures, individually constructed programmes and brief class contact hours all contributed to the anonymity and timetable rush that disorientated some severely in their first semester. While all of these factors may serve other important purposes of the university, there are measures that could mitigate their effects which were not universally adopted. The most obvious of these is the provision of tutorials, offering students the chance to meet regularly in a relatively small and unchanging group with a constant tutor rendered accessible by the less daunting size of the group and the explanatory, exploratory nature of the tutorial brief. The enthusiasm shown for tutorials (5.6.3.2) is revelatory: they offered the opportunity for the "long conversations" (Lillis, 2000) in which the responsive dialogue (written and oral) that so many have declared essential to university learning has the possibility of occurring. By giving students access to a familiar informant on course matters they can also usefully reduce demands on lecturers, who, both the literature (Gilbert et al., 1997) and the study (Vignette 5) indicate, are not always enthusiastic about involvement with novices to their discipline.

8.3. The lived experience

The first two sections of this chapter have looked at this journey from the more public perspective of meeting university requirements and engagement with community of practices. This section will discuss aspects more closely allied to the sense of self: agency, identity and related issues.

8.3.1. Autonomy

8.3.2. Autonomy and agency

This study has brought together notions of autonomy and agency which are related in that they both refer to a degree of independence in individual action. The question of constraints on the freedom to act independently have long been the subject of philosophical consideration. For example, Devine and Irwin (2005) in their discussion cite the work of thinkers ranging from Nietzsche and Kant to Foucault and Derrida. Citing Peters (1983), Devine and Irwin, discussing autonomy in an educational context, note that “the teacher is ... an authoritative contributor of knowledge and regulator of institutional and societal norms and regulations” (322), and that the vision of the neoliberal educator is of a rational individual who operates reflectively within the constraints of such norms. They find a need for a wider concept, which they associate with the term *agency*, which accounts for spaces in which individuals can “accept, modify, alienate or find alternatives to the prevailing paradigm” (p. 327), including their “motives, practices and self understanding of human beings in relation to the tangled complexities of the environment” (p. 326).

This is a useful distinction which can be expanded to the current study. Autonomy, as cited in the higher education literature in this study, can be said to refer to the individual’s acceptance of the institutional norms of the university, indeed those of specific disciplines, in relation to learning, and the activities seen as most closely related to being expert as a learner or participant in it. For these students, there were certainly complexities in a personal environment which included enculturated norms sometimes dissonant with those, and goals which might be jeopardised by a strict adherence to them. The need to protect the investments they were making in pursuit of “wider range of symbolic and material resources” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 17) did not always take them along paths sanctioned by the university. *Autonomy* is used here, then, as a more public notion than *agency*, as used in sociocultural literature, which tends to refer to more personalised ways of claiming identity and acting intentionally in the world.

Autonomy within a discipline has a degree of implicit constraint, as we have seen, for example, in Pennycook’s discussion of contradictory messages about the expression of personal voice and the participants’ dilemmas around that. If students exercise too much independence of thought, they stand in danger of not being accepted as members of the discipline. We might see the university ideal of the exercise of student autonomy

as being able to work on their own following the strictures of a discipline, for example, using their own route in arriving at understandings deemed appropriate to the epistemology espoused within the field, even ultimately with the possibility of stretching those in new ways that do not unduly de-stabilise existing members' concepts. Failing that A-grade ideal, just being able to get through courses without excessive dependence on teachers is probably a fairly satisfactory embodiment of the notion.

Our first question might be, then, did the participants achieve this kind of autonomy as students? By the second measure, it would seem that most of them did, making their way through the labyrinth to the prize at its centre, with a growing sense of competent membership. Saul, in spite of his ultimate graduation, may be an exception since he did so by remaining demandingly dependent on teachers to the end, which may explain the fact that he continued to fail 100-level papers, in which teachers were, he reported, less welcoming of student queries, into his final year. However, even Saul demonstrates adoption of more autonomous stances as well. His decision to increase the value (and lower the tedium) of his repetitive holiday job by analysing it in terms of principles he had learned in his study is an example of a degree of cognitive autonomy, of being able to make the learning his own and use it in new ways. Within his study, the success of his all-Chinese group presentation is another example of autonomous interdependence (Littlewood, 1999), and interestingly, one that occurred within a "third space," driven by diligence, a characteristic learned in China, and effective team work, which Saul believed derived from the New Zealand experience. His case reminds us, then, of the importance of not seeing autonomy as a "steady state," but responsive to context (Pemberton, 1996, p. 3), and of recognising the particular ways students, especially non-traditional students, might present it (Holliday, 2003).

8.3.3. Agency

If the notion of autonomy places the self in relation to institutional or disciplinary discourses, agency refers more to action in a personal sphere in relation to others and to the world around, more personalised ways of being expert. Thus, while being able to go to the library, research a topic and independently produce an assignment that met course requirements might be seen as the exercise of autonomy, finding more subterranean passages through the university which served one's own ends as a student, such as

borrowing the previous year's assignments or making multiple visits to teachers, can be seen as exercising agency. The distinction can be made clearer by considering the two qualities together. Is it possible to envisage autonomy in the absence of agency? Hardly, since the personal investment that is associated with agency drives the acquisition and exercise of autonomy. On the other hand, we might see Saul's choice to retain dependent relationships with teachers, and his success in doing so, as an illustration of the exercise of agency without autonomy.

Ultimately, it might be agency that is the more important quality for the participants in this study, both within and outside the university, since their own aspirations were not an exact match with those of the institution itself.

8.3.3.1. *Agency in the university*

In examining its exercise within, I am drawn back to Bartholomae's notion of "inventing the university," and Leki's (1995) description of her subjects ferreting out ways of succeeding. It seems that the success of these students depended not, in fact, on a notion of being-and-doing students in the image of some university ideal, but in inventing a university which allowed them to be the students they wanted to be, and negotiating a fit between this invention and particular locations within the university that were receptive to it. This implied, of course, some alignment between the student's invented university and that constructed by its existing members: as Wenger (1998) describes it, "we both adopt and contribute to shaping the relations of accountability by which we define our actions as competent" (p. 175). These inventions ensured that each journey, although sharing commonalities, was very individual, as the representations in Appendix 9 illustrate.

The process inevitably involved metacognition, a personal sense of what would serve them best as students. White (1999) uses a model of metacognitive knowledge involving knowledge of self, task, strategies and personal goals. For the participants, all of these deepened over the period of the study. There was an association, for example, between self-knowledge and maturity. Saul had used his three years at university, he said, "to know myself is more deeply and more clearly" (6), identifying his strengths and weaknesses in relation to study tasks, and Mike chose to work in his own way because "I'm did college in China and not a young people so I have my own study style" (5).

The “task” in this case was understanding the requirements of individual assignments, but crucially, too, learning the wider dimensions of the discourse, and significant instances of that have been recorded here, as has the quest to understand and (re)construct the strategies available to them within it. A deepening understanding of the new academic culture in some cases embellished the invention of the university, opening new possibilities of self-expression, for example. In terms of goals, there was a considerable range which shaped their investment in the process. In the short term, working out how to meet deadlines without undue stress was a mark of growing competence, but overarching goals, like the imperative to complete, or the decision that a pass is “what all I need” (Scott 5), as opposed to striving for A-grades (Saul), also determined how they proceeded.

Growing expertise in all these areas as they applied here, then, allowed the participants to negotiate ways of bringing them together to increase their satisfaction and success, and the bewilderment of the initial experience could be seen to arise from limited awareness, particularly of task and usable strategies. For example, Saul’s favoured channel of learning was oral communication: in his third interview, he had commiserated with students whose strengths were in reading and writing because of the disadvantage of not being able to communicate with “Kiwi and other foreign students” or lecturers, although other students were finding reading a key contributor to their passage. In his *invented* university, learning practices transferred from his Chinese study supplemented by oral consultation with teachers who would give him full and direct answers “from their hearts” (5) would see him through. He was helpless when this proved not to match the reality, when diligent study without guidance as to what was important failed to elucidate test questions, access to classroom talk was severely restricted and teachers provided inexplicable and unaccommodating answers to requests for help. It was not until the second semester that he located a place where he could negotiate better fit, with teachers who answered his eagerness to excel with tolerant responses to his frequent visits. In addition, entering smaller and more interactive classes and repeating C101 allowed him to gain audibility with his fellow students, thus allowing him to enact more fully his understanding of a competent student.

For most of the participants, we can see a similar negotiation of fit between the invented and the actual university, with a sense of membership emerging as they found how to adjust preferred practice to this context, May’s developing skills at using oral interaction with teachers to satisfy her belief in her right to understand being a prime

example. Such students took assertive roles in creating the relationships they sought, though within an overall compliance to the university requirements. Others, at least initially, invented universities where their positions were far more powerless. The one that Sky dreamed of (6.4.4.1) was a vibrant place in which teachers and students “connected,” but which excluded her, as both its teachers and its students were presumed liable to sneer at revealed ignorance or poor English, debilitating her agency. Scott’s university was more subject to discovery than invention, it would seem, and his approach to it was to take cautious steps to penetrate it, understand it and accommodate to its demands. Interestingly, all the photos that he brought to his final interview were of sites around the university itself, symbolising, perhaps, his success in this quest. Of course, in the competing discourses of the university, the sense of fit could be lost on entry to new courses.

The question of achieving membership of this community of practice in the terms that most met one’s personal vision could find itself in tension with the primary goal of graduating as soon as possible. Ultimately passing courses was generally more important than doing so in a manner that achieved this vision, so that Saul and Scott both chose to adopt practices that transgressed their ideals (5.7.2.4) under duress.

However, for Gao and Mike, the process of negotiating fit with the new academic culture seems to have hinged centrally around questions of independent thought and practice. In both cases, this seems to have been the highest point of recognition of one’s own membership, not an aspiration that they had arrived with, but one that they had derived from their university experience. Although Gao’s ideal university was one in which voyages of self-discovery took place, he continued to accept constraints imposed on that by both teacher requirements and parental pressure through the course of his undergraduate studies, finding chinks around the edge in more congenial elective courses. He *imagined* a more advanced manifestation of self-as-university-student which was free from such compliance (Vignette 8). Of the participants, though, only Mike, exercising a degree of personal agency that gave him immense satisfaction, implemented resistance that allowed him to operate the way he wanted to at the expense of meeting all teachers’ demands (Vignette 9).

8.3.3.2. *Agency in the outside world*

Participants' engagement in simultaneous extracurricular learning, in particular as a result of employment, greatly enhanced the value of "study abroad," as Li Ming's case illustrates (5.6.6.3.2). He struggled to see himself as competent within the university, but as a 20-year-old encountering independent living for the first time, his identity as independent young adult enjoying himself and coping with the demands of life in New Zealand could be weighed against that: "also is learning, but here I can experience about the oversea life" (3). In fact, in many ways, enacting that identity conflicted with being an autonomous student, for instance when his part-time job precluded the extra reading which he had belatedly realised was key to university learning. At the beginning of Semester Two, life was still winning over study.

The importance of this aspect of the learning was put most forcefully by Saul:

I think most of the reason why we come here is not because of uni. It's about our parents want to give us more experience and more chances to learn, to challenge, to, you know, to create your own -- ... I learn how do I can survive by myself, and can I earn enough money to support my study, and how can I deal with the relationship, how can I become independent? I think it's much meaningful and more important than you study Rutherford, you got a uni student. Actually it's about your life. It's about your journey, it's not about uni. (6)

Indubitably, though, the value would have been severely deflated without the degree.

8.3.3.3. *Exercising dual agency*

Bringing these two together represented the restoration of a degree of balance in and control over their lives which had often seemed unattainable in the first semester. This is evident in the importance the focal students attributed to achieving time management in spite of incorporating part-time jobs into the equation. It might be in this that we applaud their achievement, then, not in terms of achieving a high degree of student autonomy, but in terms of having found their own ways through the maze they encountered at the university and in everyday life, and emerging, degree in hand, with a rich life experience, and the possibility of using it to be who they wanted to be in their future lives.

Agency is bound up in the concept of identity and investment: what it is that one wants to be in the world and how much one is prepared to invest to attain that. I shall move on to consider both those aspects.

8.3.4. Identity

The issue of identity pervades this account because so much of it is about becoming, becoming a person who can stand proud in a new environment. Toohey and Norton's (2003) designation of the conditions under which second language speakers negotiate identity as "highly challenging" (p. 68) has been borne out by this study. Language is a key to being in a position to negotiate identity, but participants discovered that in the university they had to work in a specialised variety which was often beyond the level of their preparation. As Sky said, "communication is not a problem but sometimes you ask a question, maybe use some academic word, a lot" (2). Another variety, even more impenetrable, was offered by their Kiwi peers. For some of the students this imposed an initial inaudibility and acquiescence to anonymity; others, as we have seen, quickly set about strategising to gain personal recognition in manageable contexts.

The picture is further complicated, of course, by identity work being done within the interview itself which I have surmised at various points.

8.3.4.1. *Changing identities*

Although each journey was different, as I have established, it is possible to make some broad generalisations to give a sense of the trajectory of entry into this community of practice, beginning with a picture of the imagined identity of university student that they seemed to begin with, an image highly influenced by their New Zealand study experience.

This student was an active, interactive student, intrinsically motivated by an encouraging study atmosphere, in a non-hierarchical accessible relationship with teachers, and with emergent, though perhaps barriered, relations with Kiwi peers, the success of which might in some sense act as a benchmark of membership. He or she would have to learn new independent learning practices, but would be able to put the English level attained to use to draw understanding from reading, though time would probably be required to attain ease in listening to lectures, writing and speaking. Learning would take place step by step through channels open to new entrants.

This identity was interim, a stage on the way to another imagined identity, the endpoint of the process, that of graduate of a western university. This graduate would be

able to speak English, not perhaps as fluently as had been the expectation on departure, but adequately to engage in easy relations with foreigners, supported by intercultural communication skills. He or she would be prized in the employment market in China, and, if returning, would bring back skills that allowed them to fulfil responsibilities to family, society and to country. He or she would also be a fully realised, independent, educated human being who had retained learning from the study and could use it to understand the world. For some, this future might take place in a western country rather than China.

Various experiences were encountered which began to undermine these identities, leading them to the realisation that Scott's parents' prediction "you can be a university student" (1) was a little naive in one sense: being permitted to enrol did not constitute membership. The conditions that worked against their initial ability to inhabit the identity included time pressures and anonymity, which precluded mediated guidance through initial steps. Although some students were able to hold on to a sense of apprenticeship by claiming the right not to be expert, the course structure itself worked against that as even the first pieces of work assessed contributed to final marks, and there was little room for experimentation. Interaction was severely limited by class size, in some cases, absence of forums for student discussion, and self-imposed lack of voice arising from insecurities about English, understanding of course content and the right to speak, sometimes as a result of unwelcoming encounters with teachers.

On the other hand, some students were able to find glimpses of the imagined university, where interaction with accepting local classmates and teachers gave a sense of their legitimacy, or classroom discourse was made accessible, for example, by clear explanations and examples, especially in tutorials and workshops. For some of the students, too, new steps in learning could be recognised and valued, keeping alive the belief that the trajectory could be maintained.

For other students, such encouragement was delayed, leading to periods of depression and self-doubt. Nevertheless, all of the students who persisted with the research project did eventually move to a sense of membership, even where this did not match the notion of autonomy traditional to the university.

By the end of the study, however, it seemed to have provided them with a sense of self-efficacy, at least as far as day-to-day dealings in a globalised world of which they now had greater understanding were concerned, thus allowing them to assume important aspects of the identity as graduate that they had imagined. In terms of career

considerations, the world beyond the university had changed, making others more difficult of attainment. These will be discussed in section 8.4.1.

8.3.4.2. *New spheres of selfhood*

Aside from the identity issues arising in seeking membership of their various communities within (and, of course, outside) the university, there were two other fundamental spheres of selfhood that were evoked by immersion in a culture closer to the individualistic end of Hofstede's (1983) continuum. These were self in relation to thinking and expressing thought, and self as a philosophical, cultural construct.

Students' reports of the presence of an individual voice in their previous educational experience differed, as demonstrated in 7.6.1, indicating the dangers of essentialising cultures. The majority, though, recalling Gao's (1996) discussion of dependent learners from low-profile institutions reaching a stage in their life when they were ready to move on, indicated that thinking independently was a new skill, and one that they strove for with apprehension but relish. Its contribution to questions of identity is evident in Mike's pride at his achievements, and, in contrast, in YQ and Saul's embarrassed confessions of their shortcomings (7.6.1). It was a significant, though, as we have seen, not uncomplicated, aspect of the full enactment of the university student.

In terms of self as a cultural construct, some of these students were not simply negotiating identities in a new world, but also forming a new relationship with the self, a new concept of self as driving force and object of reflection. While some move in this direction might be seen as a natural product of maturing, Gao clearly saw new possibilities offered by New Zealand concepts of self ("I am what I am," 6) which were crucial to his exploration of identity. DX's epiphany that honest expression of herself was a truer offering of love to her parents than blind obedience to their wishes, and Saul's reflections that becoming a good person was more important than getting A grades (7.2.3.2), both resulting from contact with New Zealand Christians, provide other examples.

8.3.5. Investment and motivation

The dual concepts of motivation and investment located in Norton Peirce (1995, see 2.2.1.3.3) prove useful in contemplating these accounts. The students' made ready

reference both to the psychological drivers drawn on to push them towards the long hours required for immediate tasks, happiest when the rewards were intrinsic, but calling on external sources as necessary (Table 5.5), but also to overarching trajectories leading ideally to imagined future social identities as successful sought-after returnees wielding degrees, but certainly with other possible outcomes. The relationship between the two is significant.

The sea-change experienced from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation on arrival in New Zealand proved to have been somewhat delusory as a preparation for university study and initially sent some of them into turmoil. Of interest, though, is that although some, such as Saul, were intensely unhappy in their initial study and failed courses, none of them claimed to have considered withdrawal. The topic was discussed in response to a third-person question I asked, whether they knew of anyone who had failed and decided to go back to China, but it was a course few envisaged, as CN makes clear: “they can’t go back. How can they tell their parents? Or maybe, someone, some really lucky guy [laugh]” (see, too, Gemma, 5.7.2.2). The sense of being trapped in an inescapable situation was echoed by a clearly conflicted and wistful Saul in his second interview as he talked of a friend who had recently dropped out, overwhelmed by the difficulty of her courses:

And she can make her decision, I think, is quite good and very brave.
Compare with me. But sometime I think that is not very good because she
just lack of the perseverance and not to, you know, have to very strong faith
to study, so maybe she’s a girl or – (2)

Tinto (1993) identifies conditions such as isolation and lack of institutional fit, clearly experienced by some of these students, as common factors contributing to a decision to quit university, and in considering why that was not the case here, the notion of investment seems to offer better explanatory force than motivation. These students and their families had made enormous investments in the strong expectation of “a wider range of symbolic and material resources” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 17), including richer world knowledge, fluent English and better job prospects. The monetary investment from the family was an oppressively experienced personal burden, especially for the older participants, whose peers were by now financially independent, preventing Scott, for example, from dropping his part-time job even when time demands were huge and his parents urged him to. But, as Scott’s impassioned declaration in 5.3.4 reveals (“I give up everything”), the investment was far greater than that, with huge consequences

to sense of self in the event of failure: to return as a “loser” (Scott 5) was unthinkable. The students needed to invest further with a vigorous exercise of agency and a “very strong faith to study” (Saul 2) in order to secure returns on the existing investment.

8.4. Verdict

8.4.1. The participants’ perspective

It is timely, then, to consider the participants’ general verdict on the returns on this investment, to supplement the account of specific goals met in 7.6.2. Had it been financially and personally worthwhile?

More time will need to pass before there is an answer to the first part of that question. As I write this, those with whom I have managed to remain in contact are recently returned to China or in New Zealand seeking the degree-related employment which will allow them access to permanent residence, either to secure a long-term future here, or to return to China with a degree enhanced with work-abroad experience. While these outcomes are still to be determined, though, there was certainly a sense of cheated expectation in the reports of increasing difficulty in finding employment in China, and in changes to New Zealand immigration policy over the period of their study abroad venture which made gaining permanent residence status here more difficult. Notwithstanding Saul’s late-placed protest to the contrary (8.3.2.1.1), this does seem to have been a significant motivation for most of the participants.

It was, though, as has been established, not the only one. The verdicts reported here on other aspects were given throughout the study period (for example, in response to a question at the end of the first semester about whether they felt study abroad was a good idea and the skills that they were learning useful), or immediately on completion. They will no doubt be re-assessed in retrospect.

By the end of the first semester, most of the students were positive, some extremely so (“100% it’s good,” Gao 3), and identified aspects of the experience that had not been available to them before. Understandably, evaluations were under construction at this point and some, especially those I have assigned to Group B, expressed reservations. Judgements made at the end of the period were again predominantly positive. “Absolutely useful,” said Mike (5), and all of them discussed very important personal gains, though most, naturally, had negative comments, too. Reluctant student of information sciences though he was, Gao likened Rutherford to a computer in which the

hardware (the study structure and facilities) was perfect but there were problems with the software, these being lack of assistance towards community integration and a degree structure which made it too costly for students to change their minds (Vignette 8). May decided it was “Middle, a little bit positive. Not the negative,” and recognised that she had achieved her goals (“I can get a good result!”), and that “I enjoy this living, I enjoy studying like that” (5).

It is important to note that these positive verdicts were by no means confined to factors relating to the service offered by the university. All the benefits derived from employment, cross-cultural contact and so on that have been noted already contributed to it: “the whole environment is what you can’t get in China” (Gemma 3).

While increased intercultural competence, including facility with English, was regularly mentioned as an advantageous outcome in these evaluations, negative mentions of the filtering effect of learning through the L2 medium were rare, and even then, were often counterbalanced. Here we can see May at the end of her first semester weighing up and re-assessing factors as she considers whether study abroad is a good idea:

In fact, no. I can say no, because in Chinese you use the first language, it’s easy. But go to overseas is hard. You don’t understand the language. But it’s good thing. You need to understand that, so you need to read that and maybe when I graduate, maybe my English will be heaps improve and I can talk very properly on the other person or accommodation or something like that, so I think go to overseas still a good thing, but is hard thing. (3)

In fact, rather than seeing English as a bar to understanding, May seems to suggest that the extra effort may be a contributor to the better learning in New Zealand that a number identified. Ironically, Gao and Mike both suggested that they understood content *better* in New Zealand than in China, where

basically I just studied for one day, two days, before the exam, so for one paper I can’t understand but I still can pass it ... but you know here at Rutherford I’m doing three papers for this semester, I think I understand quite well. And also I know why should I study this one, which part is really useful and which part is not really useful. (Gao 3)

In response to my question in their final interview as to whether, if a place had been available to them in a good university in China, it would have been better to study there, most identified aspects available only in the New Zealand package. Scott alone, though having found that in the university “for me speaking, right now everything is fine” (6), gave a carefully considered affirmative, citing the ease of understanding material, the

expectation of passing (“You just submit your assignment and attend the exam is all right”), not having to take a part-time job and the resultant better study-life balance, as reasons. In sum, for him, the extra effort was losing its appeal, especially in the light of his realisation that it would take career-related work experience in New Zealand to validate his gains, and his wavering confidence in its availability to a Chinese recent graduate. He also noted the increasing availability of university courses with strong English components at home.

If the hard work involved in studying in English is to count as at least partially positive, it can only do so if the conditions of maturity and self-regulation are in place and this was adamantly reiterated at various points. On the other hand, the value of the experience was undermined if it delayed students’ entry into full adult responsibility too long, and there seemed to be some regrets on this front, since, as we have seen, it was difficult to step off this particular train once the journey had begun.

8.4.2. The researcher’s perspective

Obviously over the three and a half years that I collected these accounts I reflected frequently on what their speakers had gained from the venture and how that balanced with the costs, in particular the monetary costs. At times, the sense that shortfalls in education funding in both China and New Zealand were falling on the shoulders of families for whom this represented an enormous sacrifice was overwhelming. Talk of these costs often percolated to the surface, the rising value of the New Zealand dollar, threatened fee increases, repeat fees for failed courses, Gao’s concern that they were being “milked.”

At other times, the vision of the experience as a second chance at university education which had obviously been very valued and from which they had been otherwise excluded predominated, and Singh and Doherty’s (2004) reminder came to me:

Students seeking the cultural capital of global cultural forms and practices are not victims to be protected, but rather are proactive agents purposefully and advantageously imagining and positioning themselves in global flows, just as teachers and higher education institutions are also engaging in the global exchange of ideas and finance to their advantage. (p. 36)

There are issues of relative power in the comparison, though, which should not be forgotten, and it behoves us to ensure that the deal is made in good faith.

One source of power is information. There seems not to have been a great investment on either the students' or the university's part in ensuring that they arrived with a full understanding of the nature of their undertaking, and the difficulty of rectifying that with pre-departure information has already been signalled. Entry criteria became a de facto measure of preparedness but were set at a level where there was a strong likelihood that students would arrive unable to match the demands of the work or the expectations of the teachers. While this has been a story of success and achievement, they were often gained at the cost of struggle rather than challenge, and of costly failures, forcing most of the students to remain what Gee (2004) calls "colonised" members of the discourses they entered (p. 30), remaining liable to have their sense of membership undermined by puzzlement, disappointing assessment and anxiety about passing, or to avoid that by retreating from desired but more risky positions as creative speakers of the discourse.

This will be discussed further in my final chapter.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

9.1. Revisiting research questions

Four questions framed this enquiry and I would like to begin this final chapter with a brief consideration of each one before moving on to consider the implications that arise.

9.1.1. Research question 1

What are the expectations, motivations and preparations of international students before they come to New Zealand?

In many ways, these students were swept to New Zealand on the crest of a wave. Pre-departure expectations were often vague and ill-informed, as in presumptions about the rapid acquisition of English, but they fed a dream that was about much more than simply getting a university degree.

The university, as ultimately the marketer of the dream, is both beneficiary and victim of its width, because satisfaction does not depend entirely on its own services. Where participants' other experiences gave them a sense of successfully living the adventure of study abroad, taking on, meeting, and deriving personal growth from new challenges, value was enhanced. This seems largely to have been the case with employment, where there was often a cross-fertilisation with their university study. On the other hand, where there were disappointed hopes, as in limited relations with local students or integration with the community, the university was sometimes seen as failing to meet greater responsibilities than it might have assumed itself to have had.

In the event, though, it was clear that it was not simply pre-departure expectations that significantly shaped entry into the university, as by far the majority had previous study experiences in New Zealand, and for most of them, these were in English language centres. The highly scaffolded approach to teaching in these centres was instrumental in easing students through the shock of the new in their host community and helpful in introducing aspects of the task ahead, but did not alert them to the level of demand they would need to meet, or to navigational tools for the conditions of anonymity and self-reliance they would encounter there.

It must be said, however, that these students prepared themselves to the level that the entry criteria required of them.

9.1.2. Research question 2

What do they learn in order to succeed in their studies at the university?

This has been answered in some detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, and I would like here just to look at the central issue that I have identified, of finding a way of being-and-doing a university student that satisfies both the other members of the university community and the personal preferences of the students. It appears that there was often a pattern to be found in this process.

9.1.2.1. Early misalignment

The entry stage was characterised by incidents of bewilderment, a sense of powerlessness, loss of visibility and audibility, and philosophical rejection of the teaching practices encountered. The duration of this period varied considerably, but it was at its most intense in the first semester (5.6). Indications of rejection of the teaching approach emerged in the interviews, and sometimes seemed to serve to protect face for those who felt swamped by demands. For example, Li Ming found the dependence on reading the text book out of date and Saul lamented the absence of easy first steps (5.6.6.2). Other examples were Gao's belief that more detailed explanations of the study materials would have been preferable to self-study (7.2.1.1), and the designation of the approach as too theoretical (5.6.3.1), which may well have been exacerbated by internationals' lack of access to New Zealand examples being used to support understanding. Here, then, is evidence of the sites of struggle Singh and Doherty (2004) predict from Asian students who are "informed consumers in the educational marketplace" (p.18) unlikely to take up unquestioningly the model of education on offer. It was a struggle in which, though, they had limited power to exert their desires at this point, and participation was often marginal.

9.1.2.2. More centralised membership

In the second stage the students showed more confidence that they knew how to go about being a university student, that even though difficulties might remain, they were

at least aware of strategies they could use to solve their problems, and that they understood the purpose of the approach to learning being espoused. At this point they could look back at earlier rejection or confusion and recognise that they had progressed beyond it, not simply in practice but in attitude. From Gemma, for example:

I didn't like the way here, before, in the beginning 'cause I thought I was quite, you know, I was freaking out, because nobody was there helping me, but now I'm used to it and when I look back I actually think this way is better because we are university students. We should be more independent, we should be capable to help ourselves, to support ourselves. (4)

By the end of the first semester, Gao had enhanced his marks by doing self-directed extra reading: "And I enjoyed" (3).

Sometimes the demands of full membership were too tough (e.g. 6.1.3), or the adoption of its most highly sanctioned practices threatened the dominant goal of passing courses (e.g. 5.7.2.4, 6.1.1). However, their discussion of these instances indicated they were seen as counter to an ultimately more desirable position which was personally unattainable, indicating an alignment with the values of the university.

We see a process described by Lave and Wenger (1991) of adopting new practices in negotiation with others, and seeking reifications about them that provide a kind of heuristic for participating in this community of practice. At this point, participants strove for reifications in the university's own image.

9.1.2.3. *Choosing the terms of membership*

The final stage, available to only a few in this study, was, having reached the point where there was a sense of knowing what it was all about and having confidence that one would achieve one's goals, experiencing a choice about what sort of membership to have. This could be a largely compliant effort to match the desires of teachers, or a conscious personal choice to do things somewhat differently: "to accept non-participation as an adventure" (Wenger, 1998, p. 185). This contrasts with the first stage where things were done differently from no sense of choice. The struggle that Singh and Doherty (2004) identified above was by now taking place on less unequal ground.

This was expressed most firmly among the group by Mike, in choosing not always to do what his teachers asked, and Gao, who recognised among his acquaintance students whose grades did not match the advanced level of their understanding because they

didn't meet teachers' requirements, but nevertheless "they can get what they really need." It was clear that he admired this stance:

For me maybe, you know, my destination is to get good marks, but the real goal should be you get what you want, you get what you need. 'A' doesn't mean anything. That's what I feel. [laughs] (5)

9.1.3. Research question 3

What are the processes and critical events that cause them to learn it?

This question was answered in Chapter 7, showing that learning came through formal channels when course processes were working in the zone of proximal development by means of step-by-step learning, and often through informal (and not always reliable) sources when it was not. Most of the students could recount critical moments which opened their eyes to important new understanding. These moments could be triggered by important people, such as teachers who recognised their legitimacy as true beginners (7.2.1.3), by course artefacts (Mike, Vignette 1), and by personal reflection, as when Scott decided to work fully in L2 (6.5.4.3). Another important source was the lessons provided by failure (7.5.1).

Learning was certainly not confined to classrooms, with a rich interaction between understandings drawn from new life experiences, in particular part-time jobs, accommodation and, for some, membership of Christian groups, and the content and processes of the courses they were studying. Course projects that specifically sent students into the community for research drew on this possibility and were valued in spite of their challenge.

9.1.4. Research question 4

What is the nature of the changes they undergo?

It is important to keep in mind that one of the changes they were all undergoing was growing maturity, and that can be supposed to have provided ground that was increasingly fertile for the inevitable broadening of the mind arising from exposure to the new. It also put them, YQ believed, in a situation where they could make judicious choices about what new values they embraced:

Now I am an adult, if now I accept some value that means the value is quite right for me. Not like in childhood because you are always changing your values during your growing up. So some values I learned in here I won't change any more even I go back to China. (2)

However, this certainly did not account for all aspects of change. As Linda said, "If I have to stay at home I can don't think" (1).

The students saw their changes in outlook as profound and long-lasting, taking them to a place where they maintained characteristics and ideas attributed to their identity as Chinese, but in which they would see certain aspects of life with new eyes as a result of their time in New Zealand. The two did not always appear to lie peacefully together, as in the case of Gao's new sense of self and his desire to maintain a Chinese view of family, which carried with it filial obligation, as he himself had acknowledged:

it's easier for the western culture ... You can do what you like. But for me from China I probably need to think about more, especially like from my parents. (5).

The third space is not always a place of ease.

Figure 9.1 attempts to present in diagrammatic (and therefore essentially somewhat reduced) form, the shape of this learning journey.

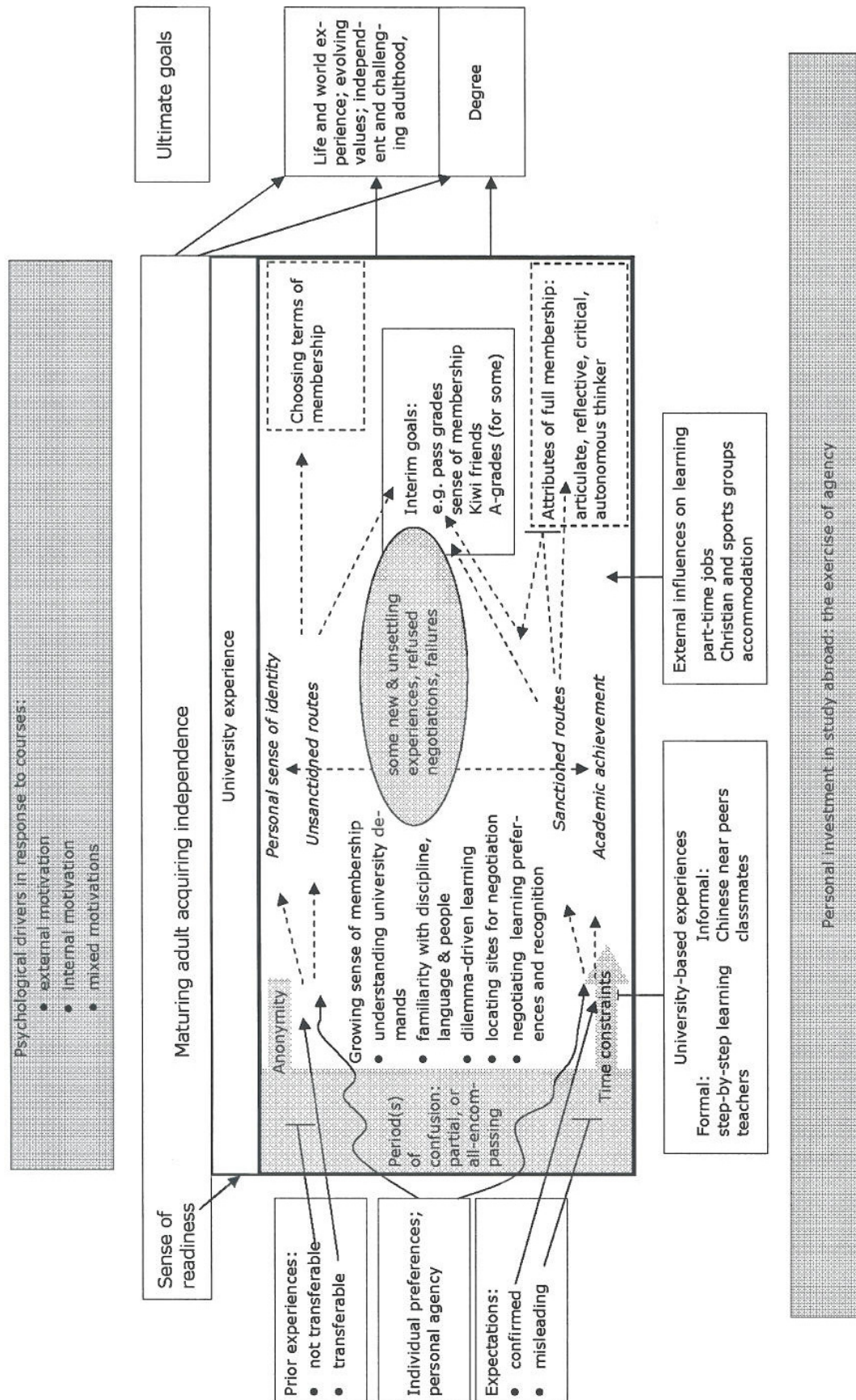
9.2. Implications of the study

9.2.1. Preparations

It is human nature to look for the quickest pathway towards a goal, and meeting the minimal level of entry criteria provides that. It is therefore imperative that entry criteria are appropriate to the task. This does not seem to have been entirely the case here, with students thrown into the turmoil of the first semester without being able to see how they should progress, what they should be doing to learn, or even what it was they were supposed to be learning. As Turner (2004) describes it, in their language centres the students wanted to "train" to reach the appropriate entrance level score or band rather than to engage with the language as an essential, and integral, part of their engaging with their subject of study" (p. 98). This provided a stressful situation for all participants in the community.

There are a number of reasons why the suggested response of raising the IELTS requirement (8.1.4) is not the obvious answer it might appear to be, and they are

Figure 9.1 Chinese international students: the New Zealand university experience



foreshadowed in 3.1.5. Band 6 appears to sit around the threshold level at which there is no significant correlation with success; as Hirsh (2005) indicates, at this stage, students are

often able to draw on other skills to find their way through: they are, after all, much else besides being second language speakers. Moore and Morton's (2005) study has revealed that "it would be most unwise to view test preparation on its own as an adequate form of EAP writing instruction" (p. 64), a point reiterated by May (6.5.5.1). A higher IELTS result will not on its own produce a student with a greater understanding of how to conduct self-directed learning of sophisticated ideas synthesising a range of sources (some of them located independently), and then express them in different genres, often with minimal induction into how those genres operate.

Any student entering classes in a university for the first time faces the need to adopt new practices and recognise new ways of knowing that are being presented. No preparation will have actually taken them into all the discourses that they are about to meet, as the academic literacies approach reminds us. However, preparation that specifically introduces students to some of the general requirements of higher education by scaffolding them towards the independent enactment of some of its more predictable requirements can assist them to enter as false beginners, readier to profit from implicit induction if that is all that is offered to them, and reducing the probability of their making excessive demands on the resources available (such as lecturers' time) or alternatively, as Turner (2004) puts it, of "hiding in the dark" (p. 98) unassisted and failing the course.

It is my belief, then, that the entry criteria for international students whose previous education has been in an academic culture very different from New Zealand's should include a course of specific university preparation.

9.2.1.1. *Implications for language centres*

This inevitably carries implications for language centres. They will always respond to their function as a bridge between students' existing expectations of discourses and those of the target community, and that role was enormously appreciated by the participants in this study. However, for students aiming for higher education, "being safe refuge is not enough" (Leki, 1995, p. 22). It is important to move them further

along the bridge, showing them the landscape on the other side and providing them with experiences, in a slightly sheltered environment but with decreasing support as the task is clearer to them, to draw on later as they navigate on their own.

The participants suggested what some of those experiences might be: providing exposure to real lectures, being more demanding in requiring homework to be done, working in topics that related to university (economics, for example, rather than “fairy tales,” Saul, 4), introducing students to life in the university (study skills and course choices, for example) and insisting on the use of English in class. To this, noting the elements for which the students seemed particularly ill-prepared, I would add exposure to long texts at a level that approaches those they will meet in their first year at university, including book-length texts, and tasks which lead them towards finding the relevant points for themselves. This would include locating library and other resources, evaluating their suitability, locating relevant sections within them, drawing ideas from them and synthesising these with material from other sources, including their own world knowledge and material from related lectures, to produce spoken and written texts, giving them introductions to discourses that will serve them well in the university (see, too, Read & Hirsh, 2004, p. 40). Another important experience is that of actually being required to retain sufficient of the content over a period well beyond the normal week-long unit to do a content-based timed exam requiring written texts beyond short answers. These components would be integrated into a unit of work of value to the students, which engaged them intellectually, for example, a study of New Zealand society that would provide them with a little more access to the worlds their teachers and fellow students draw on in talk.

While it is not the role of this enquiry to develop a curriculum for such a course, it does present findings which could usefully inform the development of such a curriculum, of which I shall mention two here. The first of these is that the conditions that prevail in large first year courses are very different from those at higher levels. It is important for language centre teachers themselves to ensure they are well-informed about the university experience and keep in mind that if their imagined university is one of accessible intellectual exchange, that might not be the first one their students will encounter. The second, and related, point is the value students drew from making personal approaches to teachers to recover a sense of personal presence and useful course-related learning: discussion of the norms of this discourse (8.1.3) would be an invaluable component of their preparatory course.

In view of the impossibility of preparing them for every language-based task to be encountered in their studies, an important aspect of this work would be inculcating a habit of metacognition about discourse, recognising elements such as addressivity and the different kinds of demands that might be made of student writers: “Success can be measured not by whether students adopt particular discourse practices but rather by how productively they can negotiate their way through diverse discourses” (Spack, 2004, pp. 36-37).

One final vital component would be the ability and willingness of the language centres to deliver blood lessons, which means, in effect, that there would be a real possibility of failure for those who demonstrated themselves unready to meet these demands. This would meet Mike’s concerns: “If just do the preparation, I think many people still not really understand, not really got the message, got the meaning of what we are doing” (5). The message had been veiled from him by his language centre’s lax attitude to homework deadlines. It clearly did not get through to DX either, when she paid scant heed to language centre instruction about plagiarism (6.1.2.1).

Of course, many of these elements are already available in English language centres in the form of foundation courses. It was clear from these participants that the existing entry criteria were interpreted to mean that such courses were remedial and it had not occurred to any of them to do one from choice. What I am proposing would recognise the learning experience of students who have completed the existing first language education criterion by requiring a shorter period (for example, a block course over the summer semester).

In many ways, a course designed to expose students to materials well beyond their current level of proficiency is anathema to the TESOL ethos. For example, Nation (2007) declares that by far the majority of the work encountered in any course should provide a minimal linguistic stretch. That approach, though, provides inadequate preparation for the task ahead. Teaching in this bridging zone is inevitably complex: “higher education teachers are expected to commodify versions of Western pedagogy, learning styles, study skills, and academic English for consumption by EAP learners while invoking enabling notions of cultural hybridity and flux, with the added dimensions of being respectful and valuing the cultural diversity students bring with them” (Singh & Doherty, 2004, pp. 18-19). I would, however, suggest that commodification may not be the appropriate approach. It is “by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with

people who have already mastered the Discourse” that Gee (1996, p. 139) tells us discourses are acquired. While that apprenticeship can only be fully available within each discourse itself, I am suggesting here the initial enaction of a protodiscourse, approached by guidance in doing, not “learning about.” For these students, who seemed to show a predilection for learning from experience, this would provide them with important experiences from which to learn. The point would therefore not be to try to increase their vocabulary and so on to the point where such texts became easy to them, but to undertake a collaborative process of discovering how best to use existing proficiency in the most efficient manner, how to adopt learning practices that allow access. In fact, how to harness their agency and to ensure it could be usefully directed from the beginning of their university study.

9.2.1.2. *Implications for New Zealand universities*

Although this study took place in one New Zealand university, discussion with colleagues in others suggests that the situation elsewhere is similar, and I believe these implications should be widely considered. It behoves universities to listen to teachers’ concerns about “quality students,” and to recognise they are encouraging “an intellectual short-cut mentality” through over-reliance on an English proficiency measure that is only minimally related to the language practice demands of university study, which “undervalues the role of language in academic performance” (Turner, 2004, p. 97).

Of course, implementing a new entry requirement for specific university preparation carries important marketing implications. The most frequently expressed reason for choosing to study in New Zealand among the students in my study was its low cost. This is one area where my views are likely to be at variance with those of the participants.

My recommendation has arisen, clearly, from a pedagogical perspective, recognising that from the point of view of both the students and the teachers into whose classrooms they went, their lack of initiation into the demands that faced them were de-stabilising, both of their sense of identity and legitimacy and of the classroom community itself. The *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* (Ministry of Education, 2003) requires that

Where a course requires a level of English oral and written competency, prior learning, and/or any academic prerequisites for students to participate effectively, the signatory must assess the prospective international student and be satisfied on reasonable grounds that these competencies are met before making an offer of place to the student or accepting the student for enrolment. (6.1)

so there is a legal, as well as moral, imperative to give careful consideration to entry requirements. More than half the students in this study failed courses. This is a costly experience for those paying full fees (as Saul pointed out, when reporting his B grade for his second attempt at C101: “I should get B! I paid \$4000! A car money, you know,” 4), and the cost of a preparatory course may well be offset, both in terms of money and self-respect, by higher success in the university.

Another point to consider is the question of the university’s reputation in a market in which this is judged on the ease of entry. Raising the bar may not in the long run be detrimental, since it is on reputations that long-term viability depends.

There are other implications for the university that arise from the study. Even in the existing regime, there is room for careful consideration of the whole experience that precedes students’ first classes, beginning with the provision of information to prospective students. Admittedly, there seems to have been little effort expended by these students and their families in closely investigating the commitment they were entering, and the students, while acknowledging that decisions were often made unwisely, foresaw that it would be difficult to supplant the prevailing myths. However, the savvy players in globalised markets that Singh and Doherty describe (9.1.2.1) are already questioning this investment, and they deserve information in their own language, when it is a very significant one in the market, which does not gloss over the challenge ahead. In the year this study began, the university’s initial publicity made only one mention of the possibility of a different academic culture, noting the surprise an international student felt at the friendly relationships with teachers.

Another implication, and one that will inevitably advantage all first year students, not just internationals, is the importance of ensuring that all first year courses provide tutorials for students, with smaller groupings and a function to consolidate the learning derived from lectures and reading. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) provide ample evidence of the value to cognitive skills of co-operative and constructionist approaches that this would facilitate (e.g., pp. 103-108). How these might be conducted will be discussed further in the next section.

One last consideration for the university is that events, encounters or disappointments in areas which are beyond the reach of university authority as understood in New Zealand can either undermine or strengthen students' positive evaluation of the study abroad venture. While these are not subject to direct intervention, the university has a role in continuing to educate and encourage its domestic students and the wider community to recognise mutual benefit in engaging with international students.

9.2.2. Implications for higher education teachers

Students entering the university, and new disciplines within it, will always be novices and will always need some process of induction. The students in this study accepted primary responsibility for their study (7.2.1.1). While DX suggested hopefully that teachers might hold longer office hours, when they were accessible to student enquiry, and some wished for slower speech, most of them asked simply for understanding of their situation and patience, rather than any specific change in practice.

Patience seems an appropriate response to an understanding of their novice status on two counts, the first being their unfamiliarity with aspects of western academic culture, some of which were in diametric contradiction to norms they had previously been exposed to, such as the encouragement of in-class questions from students and the expression of a critical stance. The other major factor that may underlie their hesitant entry into new discourses is their L2 status. Being an L2 speaker who has attained an IELTS Band 6 result should surely be seen not simply as a deficiency in English, but also as potentially an indication of persistence and hard work which might be tapped, given some encouragement, for further gains. It marks them, too, as resources with access to other ways of knowing and experience of the world that may be of value if shared with local counterparts.

All this might seem somewhat romantic to the pressured academic, juggling multiple demands and fearful that concessions to one section of the class might demean the experience of others, were it not the case that the benefit seems to be general. For example, a process of overtly accompanying students in their first journeys into reading and critiquing in a new discipline by setting up small groups in which they can interrogate the reading has been found to be suitable to both groups (Fishman &

McCarthy, 2004), and to enhance their ability to become independent learners (e.g., Haggis, 2006; Ridley, 2004).

The university contains a multitude of disciplines and most degrees require students to move between them in a way that academics who are masters of one rarely still have to. It is important for teachers to be aware of multiple academic literacies, of the extensive research into academic discourse revealing that what may seem to be self-evident truths about how to present information in one area is anathema in another. Because of this, the task of teaching students how to write “academic English,” be they native or new speakers of English, cannot be left to writing teachers: discipline-specific aspects can only be taught by walkers in the discipline itself. This means, then, becoming to some extent metacognitive about these matters of expression, and one way of doing this is to learn to see the questions that novices ask, or the ways in which their writing seems flawed, as not always indicative of deficiency but potentially of ways in which they have been taught to express themselves differently elsewhere, thus allowing the development of instructions that clearly indicate what is required.

Ideally, opportunities would be found in the first year experience to allow students to take initial small steps and receive feedback on them, for example, by receiving responses to short pieces of writing that are not assessed before launching on to tasks that will contribute to their final grades. If such a process is not workable, then it is important for the initial assessment to be carried out with the awareness that first offerings are likely to be made in understandable, rather than reprehensible, ignorance of some of the parameters. For L2 writers, the journey towards expert performance of new discourses is long and arduous. Spack (1997) pleads for giving ourselves permission “to accept wider varieties of expression and be careful not to insist on conformity to one way of communicating” (p. 53).

It is important that there should be channels of communication open for student enquiry outside class time, in recognition that not all students are ready for public disclosure of their needs as learners. Of course, the communication does not need to be with lecturers, where tutors are available. In fact, it may be with tutors that students are able to engage in the long conversations that will guide them into confident practice. The closer relations with tutors were one of the reasons that participants in my study favoured tutorials as a source of learning and a place to be-and-do a university student.

Tutorials are a potential site of interaction between all groups of students, which has been signalled as an area of disappointment for the participants. It is equally one of the supposed, but often unfulfilled, benefits of internationalisation:

Rhetoric suggests a strong belief shared by both policy makers and educators that merely bringing people from different backgrounds and cultures together in the one location will foster the development of cross-cultural understandings and friendships. However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that this is not the case. (Leask, 2003, p. 380)

This study suggests that interaction was most likely when tutors took action to foster it, by implementing ice-breaking activities such as self-introductions or mingling activities, or by setting up mixed groups for discussion. It can also be supposed that a process of educating tutorial members as to the reason for doing this, overtly encouraging them to see how other groups' world views and different experience could broaden their understanding and provide them with invaluable experience of the intercultural communication which is a norm of the modern world, could give it more weight as being mutually beneficial, rather than as a one-sided concession on the part of local students to assist international classmates. A habit of working in mixed groups under these circumstances would allow students to recognise each others' value and contribution (or, of course, lack of contribution) to the learning process. The findings of this study would support, however, a process of self-selection in the case of assessed group projects. In fact, in two cases, mixed groups were established for such projects as a result of recognition by locals of the contributions the Chinese members could make. For example, a New Zealand student asked to join May's group because he had seen the contribution they had made on-line. But it would also allow for students to act on their reflection that they might work better in mono-ethnic groups as Saul did: the literature does not suggest that mixed groups always work to the advantage of internationals (3.1.2.4.2), and the aspiration to produce autonomous students argues against constant intervention.

Teachers' well intentioned efforts to draw international students into more public participation in large classes are fraught with risk, as we have seen (e.g., 6.3.1). Gemma's teacher, made his invitation to her to report back on group discussion with knowledge that she was a confident speaker of English (6.4.3), and certainly such clues can help reduce the risk involved. By asking students to discuss the question in small groups before inviting a response to the whole class, the teacher has the opportunity to

listen in and identify those whose answer will not lead to the public shaming participants were in such fear of. Under such circumstances, it seems it is a risk worth taking, potentially enhancing the sense of membership.

One specific measure which emerged from this study as offering greater access to learning for novices without excessively increasing the workload of teachers to any great extent was the provision of written handouts providing a lecture outline, though not its full script, ideally available in advance and presented in such a way as to indicate the structure of the lecture. This would indicate how some aspects subordinate to others, perhaps thereby providing guidance in the conundrum of what is important to study. It would also provide key terms in written form, which is for many L2 speakers more reliable than a purely oral introduction.

9.2.3. Implications for support staff

Belated realisation that valuable help was available and should be availed of from many sources of the university was identified by a number of participants in the study. Makepeace (1989) points out that the traditional source of help for Confucian-heritage culture students is likely to be the family, and we might expand that to include other in-group members in a *guan xi* relationship. It may not be their wont to seek assistance from unfamiliar institutions, especially when their communication difficulties lead them to believe they will potentially be victims of belittling judgements, a perception that appeared to persist for these students in spite of evidence that largely contradicted it, since they reported finding the staff friendly and kind on the whole. Measures to expedite students' readiness to consult institutional sources, especially in the pre-enrolment period when important course choices are being made, would be invaluable; as it was, most of these participants made choices on the advice of friends' experience or rather randomly (7.4.2.2).

Personalising initial encounters by providing each student with a member of the international student support staff as an initial point of contact, requiring them to make contact on arrival, might assist, demonstrating contact as a matter initially of obligation, but, with careful treatment, later as a matter of right. Part of the role of that member of staff should be to discuss course choice, including the possibility of taking fewer than a full load of courses in the first semester, and, if necessary, arranging further consultation

with academic staff. Where possible, L1 help should be available, and the legitimacy of requesting it overtly established.

During the orientation period there is an enormous load of information for new arrivals to take in, some of it required under the *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* (Ministry of Education, 2003). It is important to make every effort to ensure that the information is provided in such a way that it really is communicated, by ensuring language at orientation meetings is accessible. Slowing speech, using high frequency vocabulary, providing visual support in the form of handouts, but crucially also projected notes, with clear connections made between the spoken word and the relevant note, so that students keep up, are invaluable ways to enhance the conditions for communication and allow students to feel included.

Establishing an early recognition of the legitimacy and value of seeking help would assist all students, but especially those for whom the first period is characterised by isolation (Gemma and YQ, for example).

9.3. Strengths and limitations of the study

I will conclude this account with reflection on the enquiry itself.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of a study with input from only 24 self-selected students. Since participation resulted from a voluntary decision to commit to one-to-one interviews with a New Zealand stranger, it can be supposed that certain types of students would not be represented. An assumption would be that that would include those who chose to avoid contact in English, though in fact this was a characteristic that Mike admitted to, and I discovered that he came because of encouragement from a third party known to me. There were other aspects of the situation that mark this group out as a particular sub-section as well: the fact that they had chosen to study at a provincial university that lacked some of the distractions that were causing concern elsewhere, such as casinos, and of course the Wideweb arrangement that meant a proportion of them arrived with an IELTS Band below the norm for New Zealand universities. However, as undergraduate students who had not been high achievers in China and who saw New Zealand as offering the chance for personal advance that was now denied them at home, their experience has resonances with that of many others within New Zealand universities over this period, and indeed in other western countries around the world. A close account of their unfolding experience therefore has value beyond the immediate situation.

The implications discussed above might seem to be built upon a very narrow basis, but they arise not simply out of the reports of these students, but from the fact that the literature and the reactions I have received when reporting on this investigation have indicated the existence of these resonances and supported such general conclusions.

Another limitation of the study might be seen in the fact that in terms of these students, the information is based entirely upon their perceptions, triangulated temporally, but not through other sources such as interviews with the teachers they were interpreting or the written artefacts they were producing. It would certainly be valuable to conduct future research that incorporated both those sources, but my interest in this study was in their perceptions, in the experience as they lived and understood it, and the longitudinal approach can be counted as a strength in the unfolding of that project. The iterative process provided not only confirmation of researcher understanding, but a close account of the development of student understanding, seeing the process not in stasis but as a series of steps where student reflection on what was happening led to new insights leading to change which then facilitated further steps. The strengths of longitudinal studies identified by Cohen et al. (2007, see 4.1.1) were certainly borne out, though the weaknesses predicted warrant some examination. There was attrition among the participants, but most of that, in fact, can be attributed to the re-development of the project after the first semester commitment that participants had made concluded. One of the other weaknesses identified is the difficulty of analysing the rich data that is produced: under those conditions, reducing the extended study to a case study of five students made it more manageable.

The longitudinal approach allowed the development of relationships of mutual respect and trust between researcher and researched, and enrichment to the journeys of self-discovery and higher learning that we were all embarked upon. To that extent, there may have been a degree of “measurement effect,” as Cohen et al. (2007) warn, although the later interviews were held at yearly intervals. It certainly seemed a price worth paying in facilitating in-depth self-disclosure, and in providing for the participants some return on their investment in the project.

One particular strength of the research process arose out of concern about the taxing nature of extended interviews in L2. The paper-based artefacts incorporated into each interview, in particular, the graphs of feelings, the big pictures of participants’ journeys and their self-selected photographs, provided invaluable ways to approach the accounts

from different angles, giving students' new ways of seeing and describing their experiences.

9.4. A final word

The thesis paints a picture of students who have managed to use their personal agency and their commitment to the project of their own graduation in overcoming barriers to success in the university in ways that gave expression to their personal preferences as learners through processes of negotiation to find a degree of fit with the university. My invitation to attend graduations of the remaining students enabled me to discover that at least 10 of the 12 who participated in the first semester phase of the longitudinal study succeeded in graduating. This should not surprise us, because in spite of the concerns that teachers expressed about quality, statistics indicate that this group has the highest completion rate of any in New Zealand higher education (Strategy and System Performance, 2006). It was the hope of the participants that this study could counter the view of international students as essentially problematic, or even prey to distracting social difficulties that lead to crime and social ills, and engender greater understanding of their journey. It is my sincere hope that I have succeeded in that aim.

Appendix 1: Key to features of the presentation of information and reflection on terminology

1. Identifying participants' voices

Data from two major sources is quoted in this thesis, interviews with students participating in the retrospective study, and those from the longitudinal study. All names used are pseudonyms. Those in the longitudinal study are identified with given names. The numbers after their names show which interview the data is drawn from (see Appendix 7). Thus (Linda 2) indicates the speaker is a student in the longitudinal study speaking midway through her first semester in her second interview held on 27 April, 2004.

Data from retrospective interviews is indicated by use of initials only, such as (MB). One student who responded to the invitation to volunteer for the longitudinal study proved not to meet the criteria, being a second semester student. The interview with her was continued and she returned for one more interview in her final semester. Her two interviews are thus differentiated with a number, as in (YQ 2).

The names of the university itself and the student recruitment agency referred to are also pseudonyms. Individual courses have been coded with a letter, and a number indicating level (e.g. C101 indicates a first-level course; K301 indicates a third-level course).

2. Expressing students' words

The data has been edited for normal non-fluency, such as brief repetitions, false starts and fillers, to assist fluency of reading. More substantial editing is indicated by three dots (...). Very occasionally where the full context suggests that a malapropism has occurred, the word with the intended meaning has been substituted and is shown in square brackets. These are also used for words inserted to meet semantic and syntactical requirements where quotes are truncated or used within sentences of my text.

3. Some terminology issues

3.1 "Western" education

It is difficult when writing from a geographical position clearly south east of China to identify this experience as one of an encounter between Chinese students and an

example of western education, but, in response to New Zealand's cultural and political affiliations, that was how the discussion was often framed by the students talking about general features of study abroad, for example, rather than New Zealand-specific ones, or about New Zealand features which clearly align with those in other English-speaking inner circle countries. Only once was an indication of questioning its application made:

Also I feel like it's easier for the western culture -- I would say New Zealand is kind of western culture as well -- you can do what you want.
(Gao 5)

I have followed the students' usage in this respect.

3.2 Kiwi friends, Kiwi students

None of the participants in the longitudinal study ever referred to *New Zealand friends*; the local students were *Kiwis*. I have often chosen to echo their terminology, as not to have done so would have seemed like falsifying their interpretation of the experience. The choice of the epithet seems to suggest an intimacy, a sense of being to a degree an insider, to mark them as experienced in New Zealand, which demanded to be honoured by the use of their word.

3.3 First language, second language and Chinese

Some of the students in the study were natives of Beijing, and for them, English was their second language. In most cases, though, it was in fact the third language, as they spoke Cantonese, Shanghainese or another family language as well as the Mandarin in which they had been educated. The participants themselves, however, when they made reference to their language use, referred to themselves as "second language" speakers of English and to their first languages as "Chinese." To follow the same convention here serves the purposes of simplicity, but it is valuable to highlight at this point the language-learning achievements of these young people so often perceived within the university in terms of linguistic inadequacies. First and second languages are generally referred to as L1 and L2 respectively.

4. Acronyms used

APA	American Psychological Association (system of referencing)
BBS	Bachelor of Business Studies
BIS	Bachelor of Information Sciences
CHC	Confucian-heritage culture, an umbrella term to refer to people from a range of East and Southeast Asian countries
DB	Diploma of Business (Chinese)
EAP	English for academic purposes
ELC	English language centre
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
ESP	English for specific purposes
IELTS	International English Language Testing Service
ISANA	Organisation for staff working in pastoral care for international students (not, actually, an acronym)
IT	Information technology
JV	Joint venture
L1	First language
L2	Second language (also applied to additional languages)
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
OHT	Overhead transparency
PTE	Private Tertiary Enterprise
NZ	New Zealand
NZDB	New Zealand Diploma of Business, a pre-degree level qualification
TESOLANZ	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Aotearoa New Zealand, professional body of English language teachers in New Zealand
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language, a US-based test used as an alternative entry criterion to IELTS
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

Appendix 2: MUHEC approvals



Massey University

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
(ETHICS & EQUITY)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 350 5573
F 64 6 350 5622
humanethics@massey.ac.nz
www.massey.ac.nz

4 February 2004

Gillian Skyrme
School of Language Studies
PN231

Dear Gillian

Re: HEC: PN Protocol – 03/137
International students from China and their teachers within a NZ university:
expectation, emerging issues and change

Thank you for your letter dated 20 January 2004 and the amended protocol.

The amendments you have made and explanations you have given now meet the requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North and the ethics of your protocol are approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, a new application must be submitted at that time.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved protocol change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents “This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 03/137. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz”

Yours sincerely


PP

Dr John O'Neill, Acting Chair
Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North

cc Dr Cynthia White
School of Language Studies
PN231

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North (HEC: PN)
Old Main Building, Turitea Fax: 64 6 350 5622 <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~ruheec>

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair Ms Patsy Broad, Ethics Administrator
Telephone: 64 6 350 5249 Telephone: 64 6 350 5573
Email: S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz Email: humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz



Massey University

Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North,
New Zealand
Telephone: 64 6 356 909

9 October 2003

Ms Gillian Skyrme
School of Language Studies
TURITEA CAMPUS

Dear Gillian

Re: HEC: PN Protocol – 03/111
International students from China and their teachers within a NZ university:
expectation, emerging issues and change

Thank you for your letter dated 8 October 2003 and the amended protocol.

The amendments you have made and explanations you have given now meet the requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and the ethics of your protocol are approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, a new application must be submitted at that time.

Any departure from the approved protocol will require the researcher to return this project to the Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North for further consideration and approval.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents "This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 03/111. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz"

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Rumball".

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair
Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North

cc Dr Cynthia White
School of Language Studies
PN 231

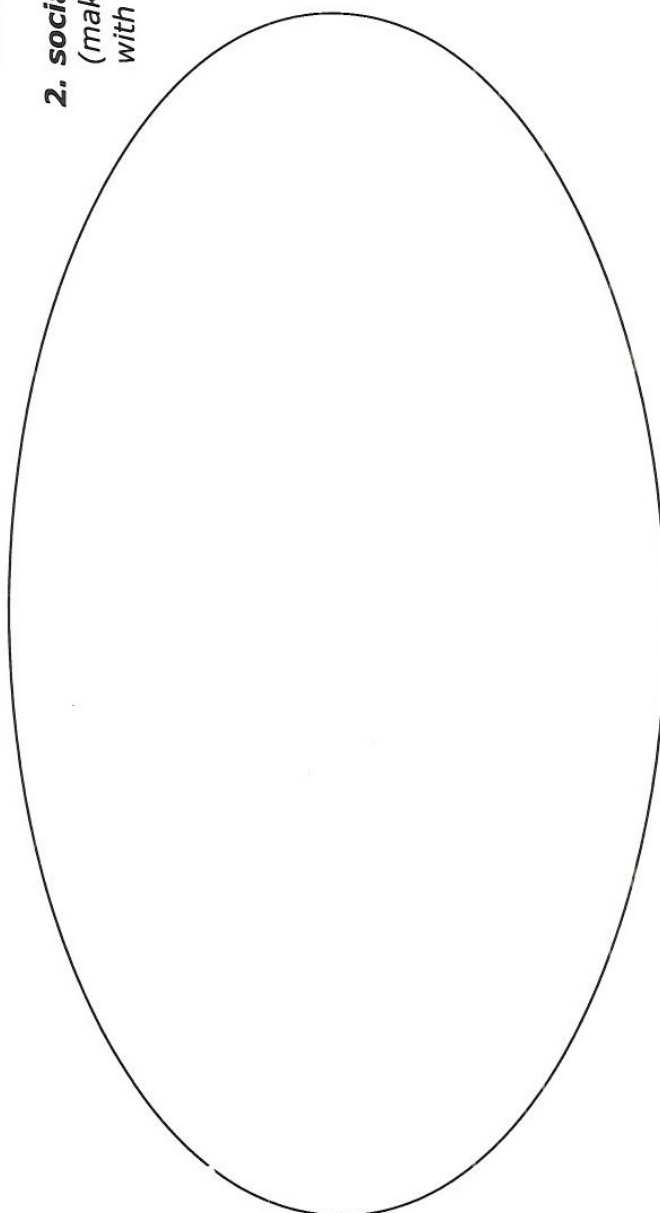
your first four weeks

How much time did you give to:
1. dealing with *everyday living needs*
(finding good food, opening a bank account ...)

2. *social needs*
(making new friends, doing things with them ...)

3. *study needs*
(finding classes, starting course work, going to learning support workshops ...)

4. *any other needs* you remember



Appendix 4: Student information sheets, retrospective study
Gillian Skyrme here. Can you help me?

I'm looking for international students from China to take part in a research project.

Interested?

Please:

1. Read the letter and consent form which tell you more about me and the project.

Still interested?

2. E-mail me at g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz

or:

Telephone me at Massey University (06 350 5799, ext 7754)

or:

Remove this sheet of paper, fill in your details below, fold it in three so my address is on the outside (see the back of this page) and hand it into any office.

3. Sign the consent form and give it to me when we meet.

Your name:

How can I contact you?

.....



Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 350 2271
www.massey.ac.nz

International students from China and their teachers within a NZ University: expectation, emerging issues and change

Information sheet: Interviews

October 2003

Dear Student of XXXXXX

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Gillian Skyrme, and I am a lecturer in Linguistics and Second Language Teaching. I have taught English to international students and migrants for over 20 years in New Zealand and for one year in China. I have taught academic writing to international students at this university.

At the moment, I am carrying out research for a PhD in Second Language Teaching on the experiences of international students and their teachers in the College of Business and the College of Sciences at [Rutherford] University. As a result of this research, I hope that we can help students and teachers understand each other better and work together more easily.

I wish to interview 10 Chinese international students in this class and 10 from another College. I have also held two small group discussions with five members each from other 300 level classes to ensure that a wide range of views is heard. I hope that you will agree to help me with my research by allowing me to interview you about your experience at [Rutherford] University. I would like to ask you questions about the time you have spent studying here, and about how you have found the whole experience (not just the classroom learning). The interview will be about an hour long, at a time when it suits you. It will be recorded on audio tape and transcribed. The information that you provide may be published in my thesis and elsewhere, but I will ensure that it is not possible to identify any of the students involved. Your real name will not be used. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. If you wish, a summary of the findings of the research can be provided to you. I will send this to you when the project is finished if you request it.

You have the right to:

- decline to participate;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time before the interview is held;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- check my transcript of our interview if you wish to;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

You can ask me questions about the research before you agree to take part. You can contact me by e-mail (g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz) or telephone (extension 7754 at Massey). If you do agree, and did not take part in one of the focus groups, please can you sign the form attached to this letter?

I would very much appreciate your participation in this project, and look forward to working with you.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact one of my supervisors, Dr Cynthia White, School of Language Studies, Massey University, extension 7711, or Dr Rom Rudzki, Department of Management, Massey University, extension 2778.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 03/111. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Skyrme



**International students from China and their teachers within a
NZ university: expectation, emerging issues and change**

CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF
FIVE (5) YEARS**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name - printed

I would like to check the transcript of my interview

Yes

I would like to receive a summary of the results of the project
when it is completed.

Yes

Address:

*Please bring this form with you
when you come for the interview.*

Appendix 5: Interview frameworks for students, longitudinal study

Orientation Semi-Structured Interview

- *The information you give will be confidential*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Please tell what you think.*

Framework for participants

A. Information about you

- ❖ Age
- ❖ Sex
- ❖ Planned major
- ❖ Highest previous qualification and previous education experience
- ❖ Time in NZ prior to Rutherford
- ❖ English qualification
- ❖ Date of arrival at Rutherford
- ❖ Family situation (married? children?)

B. First impressions

- ❖ How are you feeling?
- ❖ Tell me about when you arrived at the university for the first time.

C. Preparation and arrival: the starting point

- ❖ Why did you decide to study abroad?
- ❖ How did you prepare?
- ❖ What did you expect it would be like?

D. Expectations

- ❖ Everyday life
- ❖ Spare time
- ❖ Friends
- ❖ English

- ❖ Students, teachers and classes
- ❖ Culture
- ❖ Problems
- ❖ Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

E. *Summing up*

- ❖ What do you think is the main purpose for university study?
- ❖ What do you think the nature of university teaching and learning should be?
- ❖ What advice would you give someone from China who wanted to study abroad?
- ❖ What are the positives and negatives?
- ❖ Any other comments?

F. *Your turn!*

- ❖ Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Semester break: the story so far

Framework for the interview

- *The information you give will be confidential*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Please tell what you think.*
- *Remember, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to*

<i>Your experience so far</i>	<i>Draw a timeline</i>
<i>Adjustment to living at Rutherford</i>	<i>Everyday life Spare time Friends</i>
<i>Classes, teachers and learning</i>	<i>Classes Assignments Teachers and teaching Courses English Study skills Library</i>
<i>Summing up</i>	<i>General opinions Advice to other students Changing attitudes</i>
<i>Any questions?</i>	

The end of the semester

Framework for the interview

- *The information you give will be confidential*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Please tell what you think.*
- *Remember, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to*

The second half	Draw a timeline
Life outside classes	Everyday life Spare time Friends
Classes, teachers and learning	Classes Assignments Teachers and teaching Courses English Study skills Library
Summing up	General opinions Advice to other students Changing attitudes
Any questions?	

Year Two semi-structured interviews:

Overview of your second year

Chart

Look at my diagram and let me know if you think it represents your experience

Current skills as university student

- Study
- English

Do you feel you have learned to be a competent student over your two years (a student who knows what he or she needs to do to be successful, and can do it without too much trouble)?

Goals for your remaining time in New Zealand

The exit interview

Framework for the interview

- *The information you give will be confidential*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Please tell what you think.*
- *Remember, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to*

Highlights	<i>Anything you want to talk about to begin with?</i>
Photos	<i>Talk about each photo Why you took it What it means to you</i>
University study	<i>Looking back Preparation for postgraduate study DIY study Resistance: not doing what the teacher wants English goals Rutherford's system for international students</i>
A third space	<i>A new identity?</i>
Any questions or comments?	

Appendix 6: Student information sheets, longitudinal study

Welcome to [Rutherford]!

We are very happy to have you with us. My name is Gillian I am doing research for my PhD into the experience of Chinese students in their first semester at [Rutherford] University. I am also a university teacher and I have taught in China at Hubei University.

Are you:

❖ *an international student from PR China?*

Yes

☐

❖ *about to start your first semester of study at [Rutherford]?*

Yes

☐

❖ *studying business or science (including computer science)?*

Yes

☐

❖ *studying for a bachelor degree?*

Yes

☐

Did you answer 'Yes' to all of those? Then would you like to be part of

The Study in New Zealand Group?

The Study in New Zealand Group is a group of Chinese international students who will help me with my PhD research project. I hope it will help Chinese students and their teachers understand each other better.

Interested?

If you think you might like to meet with me and talk to me about your experience, read the Information Sheet.

Still interested?

Then:

E-mail me with your contact details at g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz

or:

Telephone me at Massey (06 350 5799, ext 7754)

or:

Remove this sheet of paper, fill in your details below, fold it in three so my address is on the outside (see the back of this page) and hand it into any office.

Your name:

How can I contact you?

Which College will you study with?.....

欢迎你来梅西大学学习！

我们很高兴你来梅西大学学习。我的名字叫Gillian Skyrme (吉莲·史嘉姆)。我是梅西大学的教师。我曾在中国湖北大学执教。我正开始进行一项博士学位研究，内容是中国学生在梅西大学第一学期的经历。

你是：

中华人民共和国来的国际学生吗？ 是_____。

即将在梅西大学开始学习吗？ 是_____。

学习商科或理科(包括电脑)吗？ 是_____。

做学士学位吗？ 是_____。

如果对以上问题，都回答“是”，你愿意成为“在新西兰学习的经历小组”成员吗？

我计划建立一个来自中华人民共和国的国际学生小组，帮助我完成博士论文研究，我希望我的研究能有助于中国学生和他们的老师之间更好地相互了解。

感兴趣吗？

如果你愿意和我会见，谈谈你的经历，请阅读“说明书”。

如果你在阅读“说明书”以后仍然感兴趣，请用以下任一方法与我联系--

发电子邮件 g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz, 或者

打电话 350 5799 分机 7754, 或者

在下面填写你的姓名和联系方法，把本页剪下，一折三，使我的地址(在本页背后)显露出来，交给我的办公室。

你叫什么姓名？ _____

怎样与你联系？ _____

你在哪个学院学习？ _____

Group discussion ☐

Individual interview ☐



**International students from China and their teachers within a
NZ University: expectation, emerging issues and change**

Information sheet:
The Study in New Zealand Team

February 2004

Dear student

My name is Gillian Skyrme and I am doing research for my PhD into the experience of Chinese students in their first semester at [Rutherford] University. I am also a university teacher and I have taught in China at Hubei University.

Why am I doing this study?

I think it is important to find out more about the experience of the students and the teachers, so we can make the best possible experience for everybody.

What am I going to do?

I want to talk to Chinese students who are starting their study at [Rutherford] University this year. They can be students who have just arrived from China, or students who have been studying in New Zealand somewhere else.

For my project I want to:

- meet each member of ***The Study in New Zealand Team*** soon after you arrive to get to know you a little
- talk to students in small groups (about 6 people) or just meet with you individually in a one-to-one interview (your choice)
- hold group discussions and interviews before your classes start, during the study break (April 5 to 16, when you have no classes), and when you have finished your exams
- ask you to tell me about how you are feeling, what you are finding difficult and what is going well as you settle in to being a [Rutherford] student
- let you talk in Chinese if you prefer at any time, and then have the Chinese translated into English.
- group discussions will be about 1½ hours long; interviews about an hour
- if too many people volunteer, I will make a random selection and tell you whether you have been selected or not

Will anyone else know what you told me?

I will tape the interviews and then transcribe them (write them out), but you can turn off the tape recorder any time you want to. Some of the information that you tell me might be in my PhD thesis. However, I will not use your name and I will make sure that nobody can identify the students involved. The tapes and

transcriptions will be kept confidential. If you want, I can give you a summary of the information when the project is finished.

What rights do you have?

You are a volunteer in this research, so you have the right to:

- decide not to join (there will be no problems for you if you decide not to take part);
- change your mind and decide not to come any time before the discussion is held;
- ask me any questions about the study at any time you are involved in it;
- talk to me knowing that I will not use your name unless you give me permission;
- decide not to answer a question I ask you if you don't want to;
- ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview or discussion;
- check and make changes to my transcript of our interview if you want to;
- be given a summary of the project findings when it is finished.

Any questions?

You can ask me questions about the research before you agree to take part. You can contact me by e-mail (g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz) or telephone (extension 7754 at Massey).

Or you can ask one of my supervisors, Dr Cynthia White, School of Language Studies, Massey University, extension 7711 (C.J.White@massey.ac.nz), or Dr Rom Rudzki, Department of Management, Massey University, extension 2778 (R.E.Rudzki@massey.ac.nz).

What should you do next?

See the instructions on the cover sheet which tell you how to make contact with me. I will then contact you to find out how I can meet you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 03/137. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this project, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for reading all of this. I really look forward to meeting you soon.
Best wishes

Gillian Skyrme



新西兰大学来自中国的国际学生及其教师:
期望、出现的问题和改变

说明书

在新西兰学习的经历小组

2004年2月

亲爱的 同学

我叫Gillian Skyrme (吉莲·史嘉姆)。我是梅西大学的教师。我曾在中国湖北大学执教。我正开始进行一项博士学位研究, 内容是中国学生在 大学第一学期的经历。

为什么做这项研究?

我认为, 更多地了解中国学生及其教师的经历, 是至关重要的, 这样可以使教学双方都获得最佳效果。

将做哪些事?

我想和今年在 大学学习中国学生交谈; 这些学生或者刚抵达新西兰, 或者以前曾在新西兰其他学校学习过。

我希望在这个研究项目中做下面这些事:

- * 在新西兰学习的经历组成员抵校后立即会见他们, 以便有所了解;
- * 和他们分小组(每组的六人)交谈, 或者个别面对面交谈(你可以作出选择);
- * 在开学前、期中停课期间(4月5日--16日)以及考试结束后, 举行小组讨论;
- * 我将请你告诉我你在 大学学习的感受怎么样, 有哪些困难, 哪些方面进行得比较好。
- * 在任何时候访谈者如愿意, 都可用中文交谈, 然后译成英文。
- * 每次小组讨论约一个半小时, 每次访谈约一个小时。
- * 如果自愿参加者人数太多, 我将作任意性选择, 并将选择结果告诉你。

会有其他人知悉你告诉我的信息吗?

我将在访谈时录音, 然后整理成文。但是你可以在任何时刻关掉录音机。本研



究结束后，我将写一篇博士论文，其中会含有你提供的信息。但是，我不会使用你的姓名，并保证没有任何人会知道你是谁。录音带和访谈记录将保密，不让他人知悉。如果你想要，我可以在此项研究结束后，给你一份本次研究的信息简要总结。

你有哪些权利？

你是自愿参与本研究的，因此你有以下权利：

- * 决定不参与(如你决定不参与，也没问题)，
- * 在小组讨论前，改变主意而不参与，
- * 在任何时候询问我关于本项研究的任何问题，
- * 确保不使用你的姓名--除非征得你的同意，
- * 如果不愿意回答某一问题，可以不回答，
- * 在讨论或访谈过程中任何时候，要我关掉录音机，
- * 检查访谈记录，并根据你的意愿，做任何更改，
- * 研究结束后，获取研究结果简要总结。

有什么问题吗？

你在参加本研究以前可以询问我问题。请发电子邮件 g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz，或者打梅西大学 7754 分机。

也可以问我的导师Cynthia White 博士(School of Language Studies, 电话分机7711, 电子邮件C.J.White@massey.ac.nz) 或 Rom Rudzki 博士(Department of management, 电话分机2778, 电子邮件R.E.Rudzki@massey.ac.nz)


下一步该做什么？

请按照封面上的指示和我联系，然后我会跟你联络，商量会见方法。

本项研究已经得到梅西大学科研伦理委员会的审核批准(PN Protocol 03/137)。如在研究进行中有何疑问，请与梅西大学科研伦理委员会主席 Sylvia V Rumball 教授联系(电话06 350 5249，电子邮件humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz)。

感谢你花时间阅读这份材料。我确实期待着不久和你见面。

问好！


Gillian Skyrme (吉莲·史嘉姆)



**International students from China and their teachers within a
NZ university: expectation, emerging issues and change**

The Study in New Zealand Group

CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF
FIVE (5) YEARS**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

I would like to check the transcript of my interview

Yes

I would like to receive a summary of the results of the project
when it is finished.

Yes

Address:

Appendix 7: Schedule of interviews

2003

October

3 KP (pilot)
15 MB (retro)
20 LH (retro)

November

14 CN (retro)

15 Thomas & Louise, 2
16 Mike, 2
Connor, 2
GZ (retro)

Semester Break ends

19 DX (retro)
21 Gemma, 2
27 Linda, 2
JN (retro)
29 TY (retro)

2004

February

17 Li Ming, 1
18 Gao, 1
23 Semester One begins
25 Gemma, 1
27 May, 1
YQ, 1
Thomas & Louise, 1
Sky, 1

March

1 Saul, 1
2 Linda, 1
3 Scott, 1
Mike, 1
5 Connor, 1
9 Ben
10 KT
13 Andy

April

1 Saul, 2
Semester Break begins
5 Gao, 2
7 May, 2
Sky, 2
8 Li Ming, 2
14 Scott, 2

June

2 June, 3
Saul, 3
3 Gao, 3
15 Linda, 3 (inaudible recording)
Semester One ends

July

1 Connor, 3
Semester Two begins
13 Gemma, 3
16 Mike, 3
20 Sky, 3
21 Scott, 3
27 Li Ming, 3

August

6 Thomas & Louise, 3

October

27 FW (retro)
29 Saul, 4

November

1 Gao, 4
Semester Two ends
Semester Three begins

December

9 May, 4
17 Mike, 4

2005**February
Year Two, Semester One
begins**

25 Gemma, 4

March

8 Scott, 4

**July
Year Two, Semester
Two begins**

26 YQ, 2

October

17 May, 5
19 Gao, 5

November

9 Saul, 5
**Year Two, Semester
Two ends**
May graduates

2006**January**

13 Scott, 5

February

16 Mike, 5

Year Two, Semester Three ends
Mike graduates

July

Year Three, Semester One ends
Gao graduates

September

7 Gao, 6

November

9 Scott, 6
18 Saul, 6
Scott graduates

2007**February**

Saul graduates

Appendix 8: Paper-based instruments, longitudinal study

Here are some ways that students can study outside of class:

	C	R
learning information to recite it		
reading information many times in order to memorise it		
reading information many times in order to understand it		
reading the textbook carefully		
reading the textbook, and also other books about the course		
thinking hard about the topic and writing down your own ideas		
discussing ideas with your friends and developing new ideas together		
copying ideas from books that you found useful and well expressed		
writing assignments with your friends		
copying assignments written by friends or successful students from previous years		
using the internet to get more information		
using the internet to download parts of your assignments		
noticing information about your courses wherever you are (e.g. in the newspaper, or on TV)?		
asking tutors or lecturers for help		
using WebCT and participating in discussion on it		
finding books in the library		
using electronic search tools in the library to find material		
any others ideas that you have used?		

*Put a tick in the column head 'C' if these were ways of studying that **you used in China.***

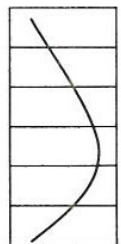
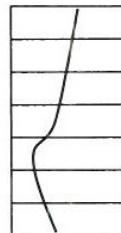
*Put a tick in the column head 'R' if these were ways of studying that **you have used at Rutherford.***

Name: _____



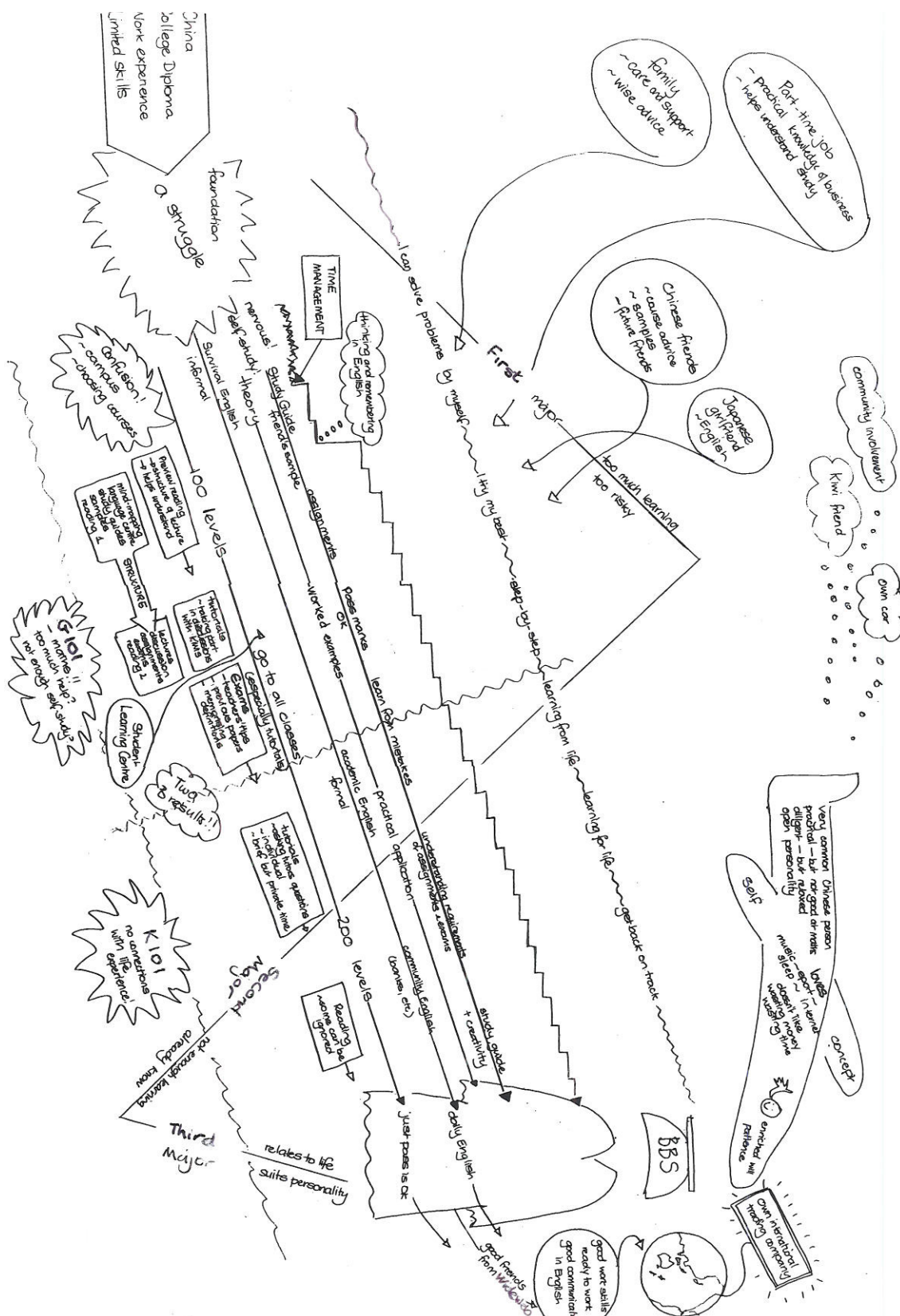
Week Seven	Week Eight	Week Nine	Week Ten	Week Eleven	Week Twelve

Can you draw a line on the graph to show your feelings over the last 6 weeks?

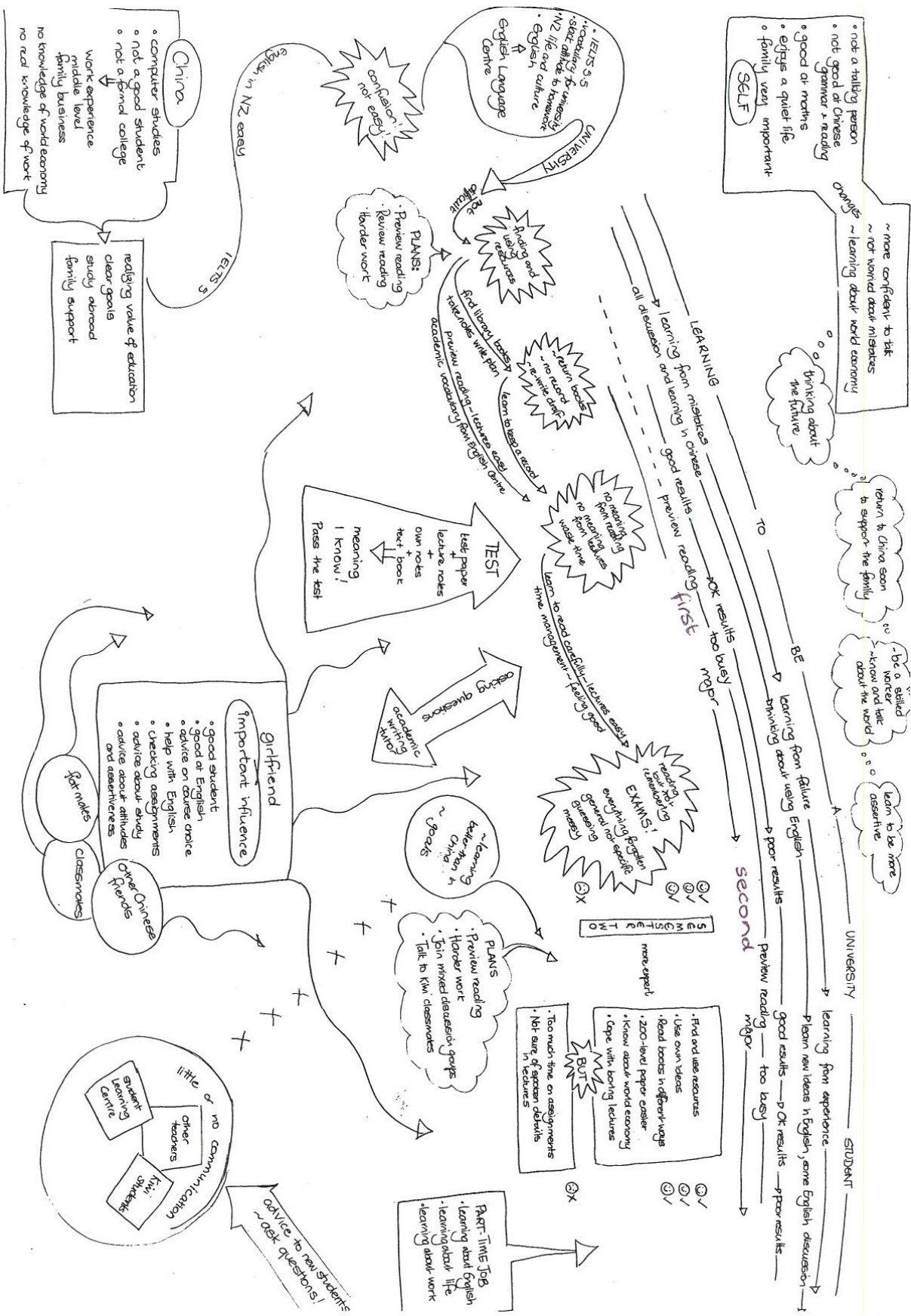


Name: _____

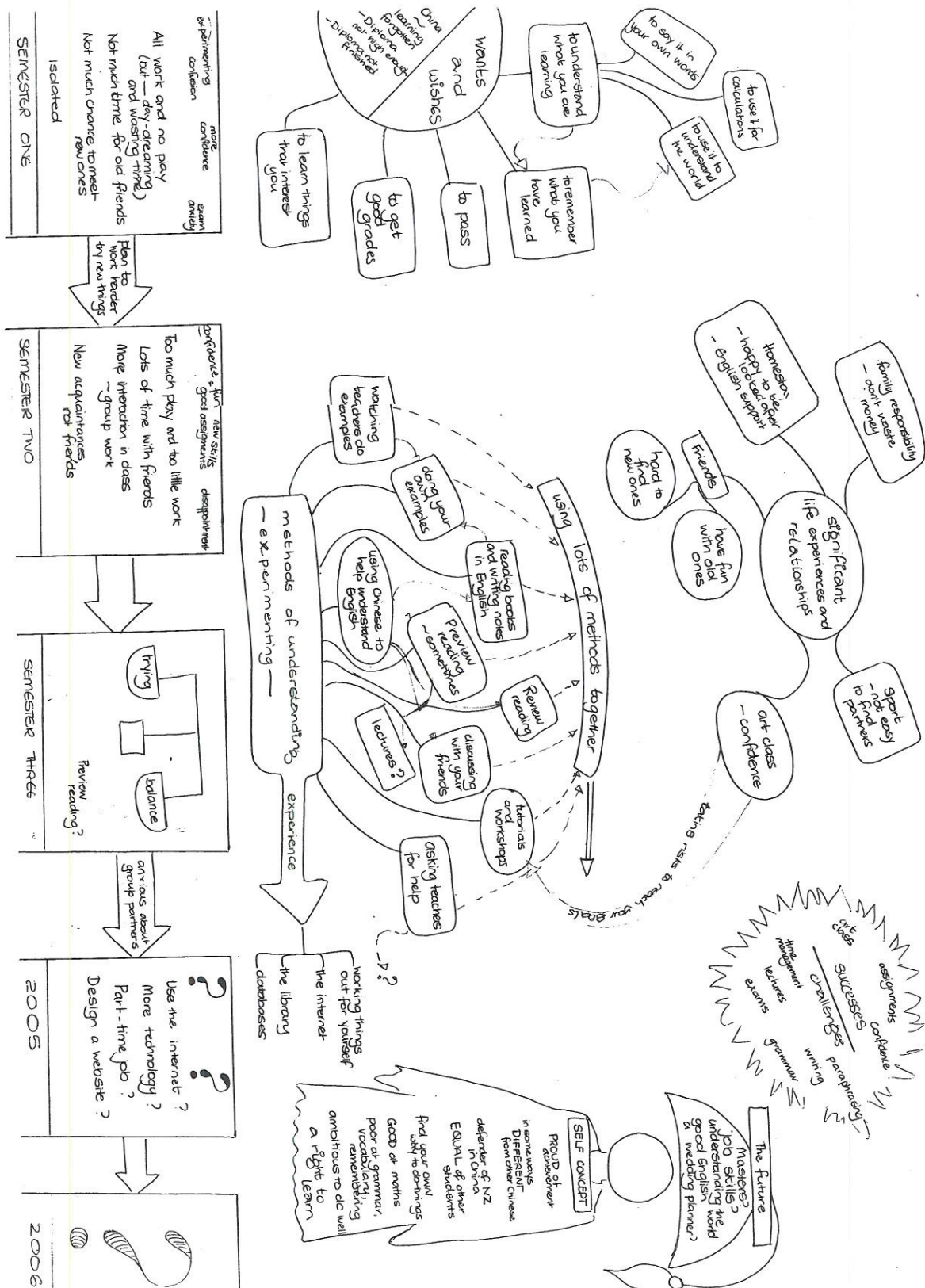
301



Mike:

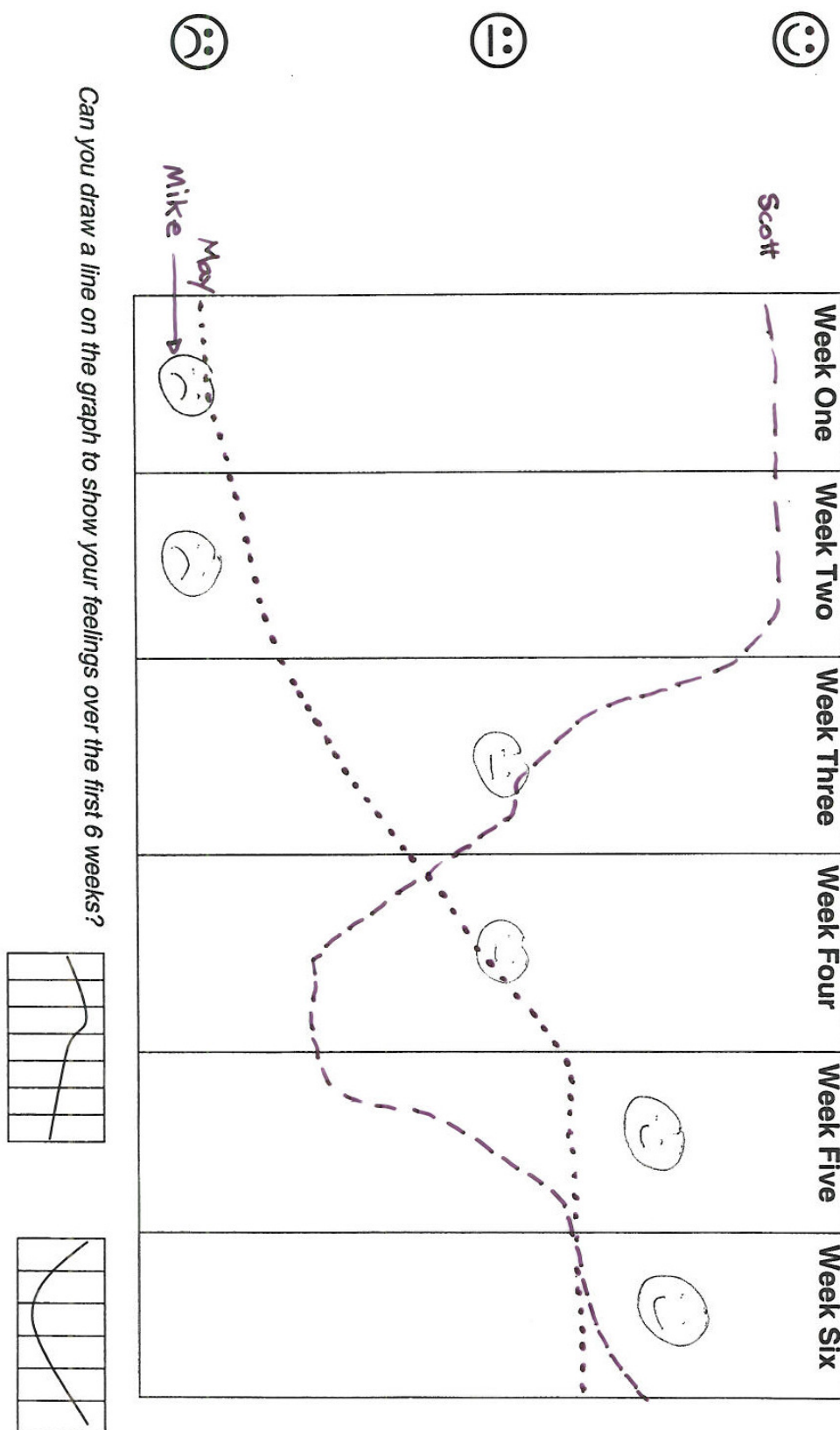


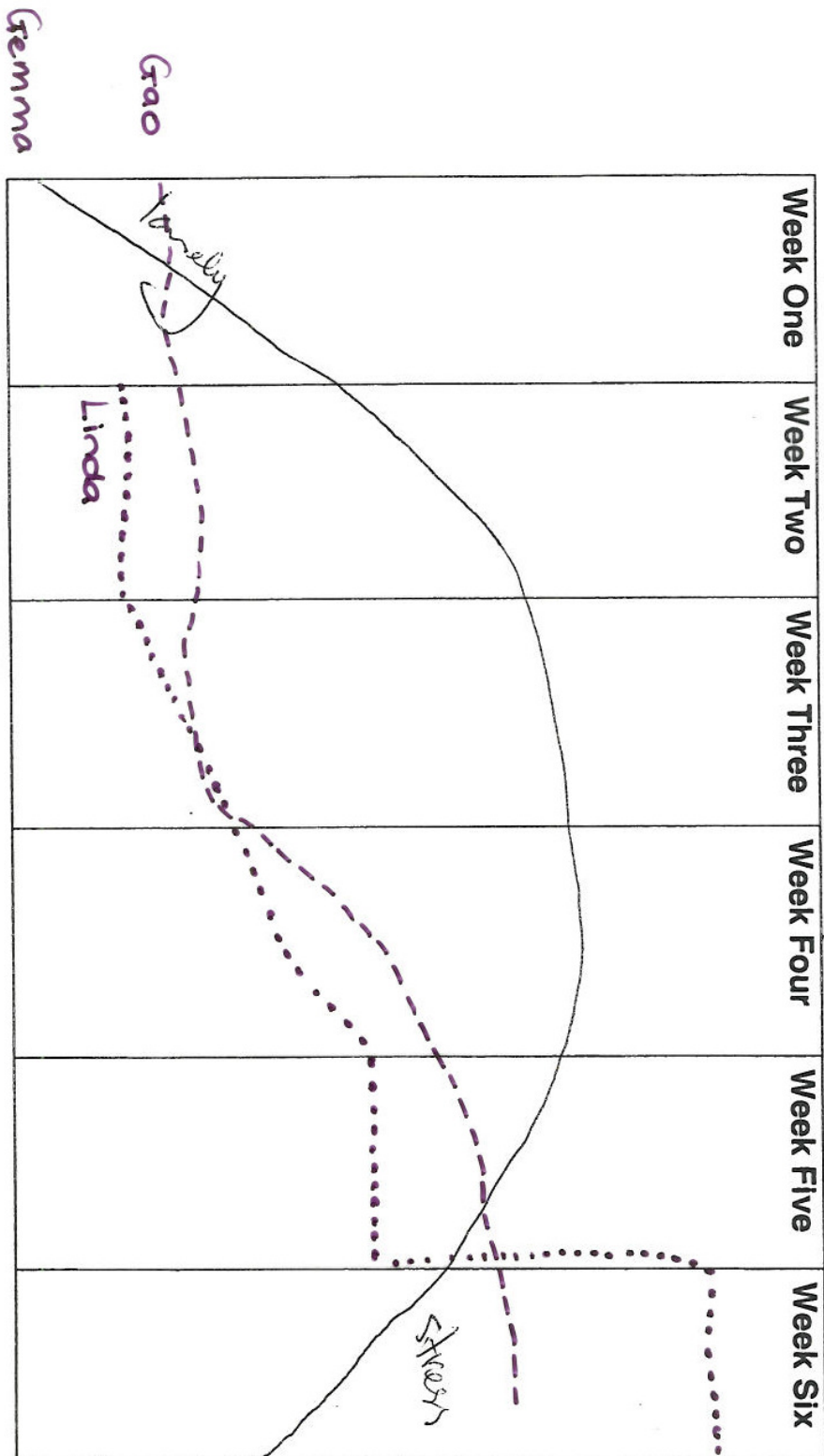
May:



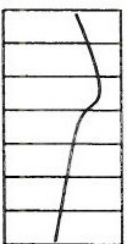
Appendix 10: Completed graphs

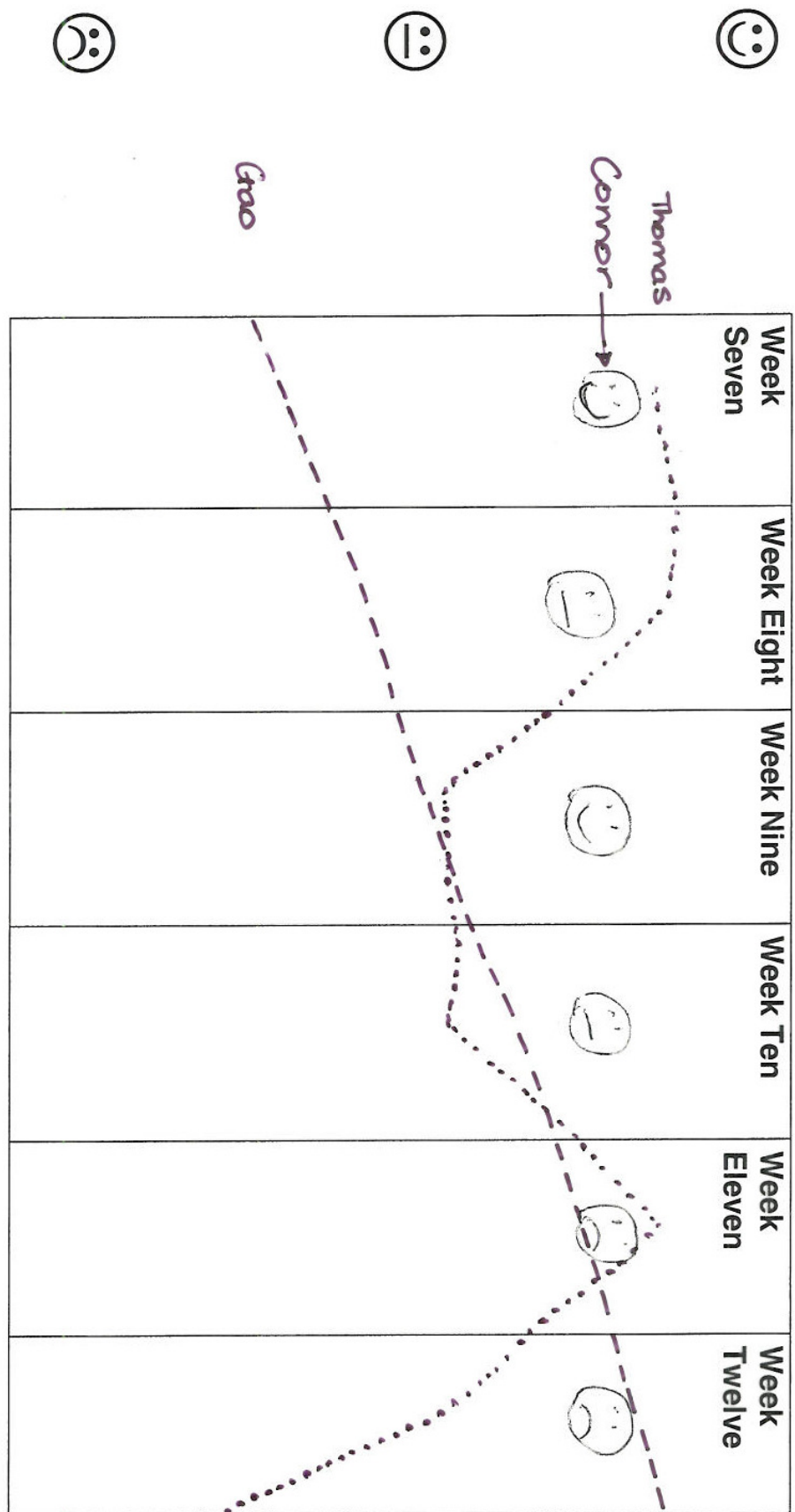
Sample graphs have been traced from the originals using a different format for each participant. The faces and the annotations are photocopied from the original.



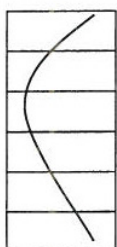
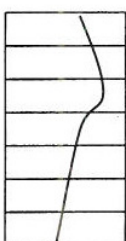


Can you draw a line on the graph to show your feelings over the first 6 weeks?





Can you draw a line on the graph to show your feelings over the last 6 weeks?



Appendix 11: Forced and strategic limiting

Interview Two: Mid-Semester One

Forced limiting	
Non- curricular aspects	
Sport and other leisure activities	<p>I think one thing is I can't do any sport, on the studying time. (May)</p> <p>No, I haven't got enough time for read the newspaper. (Scott)</p> <p>I think I also need some social activity like club or swimming or outdoor activities, but actually I don't have time to do that. (Linda)</p>
Socialising	and before I go to Rutherford I always will go to the coffee shop with my friend, to talking, to do something, just something like that, but now, no, I haven't the time. (May)
Making new friendships	<p>Yeah, there are some quite lovely friends, but, you know, we are quite busy, [not] like friend when we was young, play together. ... so I think we maybe we need more communication but we don't have time. (Linda)</p> <p>Because every time you just rush to the lecture and also take note and 'Byebye!' That's enough. And must rush to another building. (Saul)</p>
Curricular aspects	
Practical exercises to support concept-learning	<p>I suppose do more practice is better than just study concepts, and also I think practice is more helpful for the understanding. I suppose. Can you do it on your own? Time. (Gao)</p> <p>I read the book, and they have some example. I try to do a little bit, not much because I can't have enough time. (May)</p>
Preview and review reading for lectures	<p>I felt I should do some reading and then listen to the teachers ... I know it is really important but I really don't have time. ... I don't have time to do the pre-reading. (Gao)</p> <p>Sometimes I feel hard to keep on doing. Because if you don't have time, enough time to read through all the lecture notes before you get to the lecture. (Sky)</p> <p>Just listen the lecture and note the important things down and after the lecture go back to flat and just review the lesson and look through the textbook. But maybe you haven't managed to do that now? Yeah, because too many thing I have to read. (Li Ming)</p>
Preview working for workshop	Sometime I have no enough time to preview therefore after our workshop and I still have some questions I don't understand, so I'll sometime I just to leave the answer away. (Saul)
Reading the textbook at all	I find that just to focus on the handouts, and the handbook and notes, that's enough. You have no enough time to read the ... such a thick ... (Saul)
Implementing advised study skills	Like the English, is it English learning centre, they told me some study method, but I suppose that is really helpful, but I can't try to do it or practise it because no have time. (Gao)
Attending study skills seminars	I just twice, just twice because of the time! (Gao)
Having assignment check	some friends tell me Student Learning Centre is very helpful, but last three assignment I don't have enough time to ask them to help me to check some grammar mistakes, because I do that assignment so late. (Connor)
Forced limiting not based on student time allotment constraints	
Note-taking in lectures	Go to a lecture. I just listen. Listen the teacher to explain and to what he said, yeah, because if I write the lecture notes and I listen at one time, I think I can't do that, I can't follow. ... Yeah, just listen and after the lecture I will follow my friends and to copy the lecture notes. (GZ)
Reflecting in lectures because of need to write	So we don't have enough time thinking and understanding. (Connor)
Material provided late	But sometimes a course, the lecture notes just like the Monday morning you just can find them in the Monday morning before you went to the lecture. You don't have time. (Sky)
Strategic limiting	
Extra-curricular activities	
Clubs	Not yet. But later on maybe next year I will to try one club be a member. Not the first year ... quite tough for me, so I have to pass the first year. At least got all the paper pass. And then go to think another thing. (Scott)
Part-time job	this is my first year so I didn't find some part-time job, yeah. ...I think pass the paper is more important for us, so I didn't find other job. So this year I think study is my life. (Louise)

Curricular activities	
Writing down key ideas	I just write the main idea is OK, I didn't need to copy all of the books. (May)
Just focusing on concepts in textbook	I think this is concept. The concept. Read textbook carefully. Some parts they explain the concepts I will read it carefully, but another example ... I just read a part. (Mike)
Miscalculations	
Missing out revising important content for test	Because the 60 that one have includes 10 marks for the NZ background, I didn't read that book, I thinking no, nothing will be over there, so I didn't read that book, I lost 10 mark. And the other one 10 mark for the express the word for the book, and I remember all the books the name, but at the end they didn't do that one, they just do the other one. (May)

Interview Three: End of Semester One

Forced limiting	
Non- curricular aspects	
Joining a church group to meet Kiwis	I tried to, but after that I don't have time to go to there. I try to, yeah. Li Ming
Curricular aspects	
Assignment check	Because I have a lot of grammar mistake, so if I do it lately I don't have time for go to the Learning Centre for check it. Connor
Reading textbook adequately	Every time when I taken the exam and after the exam I find that, oh, read the textbook is quite important, but every time I didn't read the textbook because I didn't have time. Time is still my enemy. Never have enough time. Li Ming, so you just waste the time to do the assignment and haven't got time to read the book. May
Preview reading	Because I can't read the book first and go to the course. I haven't time. Maybe just now I just finish the C101's book, yeah, but she will finish last week, so it's different. May
Wider reading	I should have read a lot of books when I'm doing my assignments, but I didn't have time. Gemma
Reading cases to explicate principles	I haven't enough time. I just read some principle but I haven't read the case for explain the principle. Maybe the meaning is not very clearly, so I think that's a problem for answer some question in the exam. Connor
Using own words rather than downloading	You know, my essay is copied so many the information from the internet, so my tutor told me he just a pass. ... You know, I don't have enough time to finish the essay. Thomas
Forced limiting not based on student time allotment constraints	
Thinking in exams	Because we don't have enough time for thinking. Connor
Strategic limiting	
Curricular aspects	
Restricting textbook reading	We don't have time to read the textbook, but we will read some of them, yeah, if we need. Sky I try to read the lecture notes and combine for the textbook and see what's that talking about and the lecture notes is the same. If not the same, ... so I don't think you need to read the book or something. May
Giving less attention to non-major test	That one is more important so I pay more attention to do that assignment is hard, so I just study the C101 the Test 2 on that day, so I fail it. Is terrible thing. May
Predicting exam topics	I went through whole lecture notes and related back to the textbook and then if they both have this point... I guess it's a major point ... That's why I actually only wrote 75% of questions in the exam. That's all I can do. ... I didn't have enough time to go through all of the stuff that she give us. Gemma 'cause each chapter is not all the important points, so from the lecture notes you can point it out what's the important things. JN
Being guided for exam study by teacher's tips	generally speaking I concentrate on the tips the lecturer give us. Scott
Not revising all topics	But I think I did well, because I just prepared five of them but I just got one in the exam, (laugh) just one. CN
Limiting scope but learning thoroughly	No, but I did make sure that the thing that I studied I'll remember it in the exam. Yeah, so make sure I'll pass first. Gemma

Beyond the first semester

Forced limiting	
Non- curricular aspects	
Reading non-study books	Now I try, I bought some books, I try to read every day. I think this is a good habit, but it only last one or two days, and later, oh, assignment, oh, and course begin and I read other book. Mike 4
Maintaining Kiwi friendships	I didn't spend too much time with them since complete our course, and then we been apart a long time. Time. I don't have time to spend with them too much so we can't keep a close friendship. (Scott 6)
Establishing community links	I didn't keep going. I only went there for several times. Yeah, I didn't. I think the same reason – time. (Scott 6)
Curricular aspects	
Wider reading	No time. Only textbook. I can't finish my main jobs, so I can't do that extra. I feel so sorry about that. I think I can learning more widely, I want but I just can't. DX
Reading textbook during semester	I just do the assignment, didn't read the textbook so the final exam is two weeks' later. May 5
Reading all chapters in the textbook	Select some chapter is useful to read is OK. For example, if four paper all got maybe the book ... it's impossible to read it in one semester. Scott 4
Reading beyond the immediate focus for assignments	I hate to find the book because I don't know which part is important, which one I need to read. If I read whole book I haven't the time to finish the assignment. May 4
Preview and review, reading except for assignment requirements	'cause don't really have enough time to do the preview and also to do the review, don't really have time. Basically just do the assignments. Keep going, yeah. So bit worse. Gao,4 First half before the first test or first assignment I read the textbook before the lecture, but later I'm read for the test or assignment. Mike 4
Reading for exam preparation	he said I should focus on textbook, and I think, 'Oh, that's horrible,' because I have no time to ... every textbook is like this, big one and thick one. Saul 4
Putting in enough time to get good grades	For those papers that I didn't get really high marks, that only because that I didn't spend that much time on it. Gemma 4 Just no time to give me to find that how to make perfect. May 5 I don't think I do it very well, but I just hand if because I still have the two paper, final exam need to prepare. Saul 5
Understanding rather than memorising	so what I have to do is keep practising, keep practising and do all the past years' exam paper, so I can pass it.... actually my class mates find this quite dumb, because they think you must understand the whole theory rather than remember the answer, but I think, oh, this is very short cut, it's just strict way and I don't know why this blah blah blah formula but I know how, you know, the whole process.... Otherwise I need to do a lot of reading and understanding, you know. No time to do that. Saul 5
Learning minor points for the exam	for the exam I only try to remember all the important thing at once. I don't have the free time to remember the maybe less important thing so much. Scott 5
Providing help to another student	actually I want to help her but I just no time. May 4
Strategic limiting	
Curricular activities	
Assignment preparation time	before that is about three days finish one assignment. But now one day I can finish. Like yesterday, [laugh] yeah, I get up earlier and finish at about half past seven at night time I finish four thousand seven hundred words. I can't believe. I just to think I need to quickly to finish that one. May 5
Selecting key parts of textbook to read	I have to read the Study Guide first. Actually you don't need to read the whole textbook sometime. You just selective. Select some chapter is useful to read is OK. Scott 4

Appendix 12: Talking to teachers one to one

Previous experience		
Location	Characteristics	Representative quotes
China	After class Different relationship	May 1: After the course I will go to their office to ask Saul 1: You are my teacher, you like my father, and I show my respect.
New Zealand English language centre	Interactive Friendly Unrestricted topics	Gao 1: Maybe more interaction ... It is just my experience when I was studying at English Language Centre Saul 1: more relax and comfortable to talk with teacher and we just like friend Saul 1: such as my clothes is not very warm, and I can talk with you
NZDB	Very available for help	Saul 1: you can have heaps of way to get help from the lecturer.
University context		
Location characteristics	Experience characteristics	Representative quotes
Tutorial Student/teacher space Reduced public/private	Time/value ratio insufficient – rejected Private questions enabled	Andy 1: and it will take me for about one hours, I can't go earlier [leave the tutorial before the end] Scott 4: because those time is all for me, nobody interrupts, just ask the question
Laboratory Student/teacher space Private	Examples mediate language Tutors sometimes absent	May 1: if they do that for me I will easy to understand. If they just talk to me I don't understand because the language is the big problem. Gao 3: but mostly there's no tutors in the computer lab. We just do all the stuff for ourselves. ... I hope someone can help me.
EAP class (small) Student/teacher space Reduced public	Public questions enabled Private talk enabled Personal recognition	Mike 2: I have. Saul 3: I have a chat with my lecturer ... this make me feel comfortable Mike 2: So she knows me. She often asks me to answer her questions
Lecture Student/teacher space Public	Cultural injunctions Face-threatening: English Face-threatening: foolish question Wasting others' time Taken up, 300-level	Connor 1: we think the bad manner, when the teachers talk very important Saul 1: the lecturer didn't understand what you are talking about ... It make you quite shameful LC: I'm afraid if I point it out and everyone else understands ... I'll make myself a fool. Connor 1: you spend other classmates' time YQ 2: I very like to talk in the discuss in the lecture
Post lecture Student/teacher space Reduced public	Timetable rush, teachers no time Timetable rush, students no time Potential for shame Peripheral listening Taken up	KT: at first I tended to ask lecturers at the time, you know, after they finish lecture, but they were rushing off to somewhere else Scott 4: maybe too many student around that lecturer or maybe you have to catch up another lecture CN: My English is poor and the Kiwis will maybe laugh at me Sky 3: No, but I will listen. ... After the class. Gao 2: But I ask a lot of questions after the lecture.
WebCT Student/teacher space Public but invisible	Written medium difficult Medium not respected Potential for shame Taken up	Gao 3: I think one of the reasons is my writing is not good enough. May 5: I found the people they ask the question it's just stupid. Sky 2: but they will have the name. [postings include student's name] GZ: I can through the internet and contact with the tutor, ask them some question and he will reply.
Office hours Teacher space with restricted student claims Private	Potential for shame Preferred: face-to-face More accessible at higher levels	CN: I don't want the professor to know my poor English Gao 3: I prefer face-to-face communication Saul 5: as I concerned as the 300 level papers' and 200-level papers' lecturers are more friendly, and more easy to talk.
Ambient encounters Private (open)	Less demanding encounter Indirect approach	Scott 5: just meet them on the street or meet them in the campus or somewhere, I have talk Scott 5: sometime I will start the topic with some general stuff, but I will mention about study
Talking to teachers: seeking help during office hours		
Developing use: understanding discourse norms for teacher interaction		
Stage in process	Understanding of norms	Representative quotes
Consciously investigating norms	Recognising its advantage over isolation Hoping to adopt observed possibilities Considering appropriate questions	YQ 2: the first semester I was isolated, by myself. I didn't go to the teachers' office ... but after one semester I found it was not a good Sky 2: sometimes I want to, yeah, just stand there and listen May 1: I think, what's stupid? I don't understand and I can't find in the dictionary. That's a good question, not a stupid,
Recognising continuing peripherality	Mysterious rebuffals Response not understood	Saul 5: I don't know if it's kind of grumpy or if it's kind of secret Saul 5: maybe that is my language problem, some tutor is explain very clear, but some of them still make me confused.

Developing interim norms	Accompanying others Resisting resistance Personal recognition of 300-level student elicits invitation	CN: we asked questions at the same time, and we discussed with the professor. May 3: she always tell me, 'You can ask on the web.' I say, 'No, I don't know how I can ask very properly what I want to ask.' Scott 5: he don't care, just say, 'It's OK. If you got problem, just come and see me, any time anywhere. If I meet you we have a talk'.
Achieving 'competent' norms	Restricting use and using other resources Preserving for important questions Recognising need for prior personal input Recognising time restrictions Recognising norms of partial responses Recognising need for follow-up personal input Claiming right to understand Overcoming issues of face Feeling comfortable Receiving invitations at 300-level	May 4: So I try to do more on the internet to find the information, to find the solution, how to do it, and go to the library to find the books GZ: Not many times, just some very important question or some problems I will go to the lecture, yeah, face-to-face Saul 4: Every time you need to do is prepare something and then ask the question. May 3: I say, 'OK, just a quick word, how to answer this question?' MB: They don't give you the answer, they tell you how you would get the answer, by reading and studying this book May 5: So I will get back to library and read the book, and when you read the book you will say, 'Oh, that's what the teacher say just before.' May 2: I need to ask them, 'I'm sorry I still can't understand, please talking again.' KT: you don't care about people say is that a silly question Saul 4: if I have any question and I don't worry about that May 5: and he want me to talk with him and I go his office
Fossilising in over-reliance	Restriction of personal input Unrestricted use of strategy	Saul 4: if you really want to understand maybe you can understand, but I still prefer you can take this assignment if you want to the lecturer Saul 5: so every time I just do the draft ... just to give to the lecturer and say, 'Oh, this is my draft, please help'.
Experimenting with self-sufficiency	Early use of teacher help scaffolds to later attempts to use independent strategies	Gao 5: I want to sort of test myself to see what can I do by myself rather than getting some help from my teachers

Types of help sought:

Domain	Example	Representative quotes
Content	Terminology Worked examples Unspecified content	May 1: I can't find in the dictionary. I said, 'I must need to ask.' May 2: If I don't understand I will go to the tutor hour to ask them how to do it GZ: just some very important question or some problems
Learning process	Guidance for assignments Connecting course materials and assignment topics Checking drafts Understanding feedback Information about coming test Guidance for exam preparation	Linda 2: when we have got some problems like assignment, something I can't understand properly, I will go and ask them at their office hour MB: and go to see lecturers if I have problems and ask them which book I should read for this assignment Saul 5: just to give to the lecturer and say, 'Oh, this is my draft, please help'. Saul 4: I still prefer you can take this assignment if you want, to the lecturer to face-to-face to talk and to understand Saul 2: when I ask the lecturer to give us the preview ... they say, "Oh no, no, no, you shouldn't do this, it is not very useful, it is the kind of cheating." Saul 3: I asked the lecturer, the lecturer said, "You just keep to copy, copy again, again, again, you know, just to let all the knowledge to stuck to your brain."
Administrative matters	Disputing results Re-sitting failed courses	Gemma 3: we got that sorted out and she say, she actually change my mark FW: I can feel her heart because I go to see her when I fail
Focus on interaction	Topic less important than interaction	YQ 2: talk lots about my study and if I have some question I will ask

Time issues

Domain:	Constraint:	Representative quotes
Timetabling issues:	Office hours not appropriate	Saul 4: the office hour is not fit for our timetable, it's a clash.
Teacher time availability issues	Office hours are restricted Students need time to solve difficulties Course teacher not available Adjusting to availability	GZ: I think the most important thing is to set his office time long. May 2: one time I asked her for half hour, just one question Gao 2: another time I went to see my tutor but she didn't have time so she told me to see another tutor May 3: every time I go to the office I ask them, 'Do you have the time?'
Student time management issues	Student time should not be wasted Many draws on student time Indirect answers less desirable than direct	May 2: if they tell me I don't understand, I waste my time, I must need use more time to get them to tell me what happened Scott 2: I want to get that home or maybe do something else is important, so I haven't been to one lecturer's room to get help right now Saul 5: I finally find the time to ask a question it's better to answer me in the straight way

Personal value:		
Nature:	Domain:	Representative quotes
New understanding	Of learning practices Of university requirements Of course content	Saul 4: I know what I should do, because I tried to ask question face-to-face to the lecturer Gemma 3: at least I understand how things works in the university May 2: every time I want to ask them and I want to make sure understand.
Demonstrating legitimate membership of university community of practice	Student right to ask Student's investment in asking deserves response Not feeling inappropriate	May 1: I said, 'I must need to ask. If I don't understand what can I do?' Saul 5: I think it is very hard for the international student to ask some question and if they ask some question it means they want to study CN: all the tutors are happy. I am really happy about that. ... I think it is the best experience in New Zealand. You know, it's not the same in China.
Higher grade	Disputing assigned marks Honing assignment skills	Gemma 3: I talked to her ... she actually change my mark, like a little Saul 4: I really tried to make a big progress about my assignment, A- or A and I asked them how can I do
Personal recognition	Allows dialogue with teacher Allows identification of assignments being marked Student recognition of teacher	Gemma: always good to get lecturer's attention YQ 2: I really want teachers to relate my image and my work together and give me a reasonable mark FW: The attitude is different from the lecture course. When the lecture she need to be strong. ... when you go to see her she try to help you.
Preferred medium	Preferred to Chinese peers Preferred to learning centre Preferred to WebCT Preferred to self-study Preferable to personally chosen practice	May 2: I think ask the tutor will be better than ask the friend Gemma 4: to get help from the lecturers is more helpful than the learning centre Gao: I prefer face-to-face communication. I think one of the reasons is my writing is not good enough Saul, 4: if you ask the lecturer or ask the tutor ... it is much more helpful than just you sit by yourself to study or to read the book, and make me so happy. Mike 4: if have any questions ask teacher or friends. Don't do it yourself, because I'm do it myself so not good
Teacher response		
Nature:	Manner:	Representative quotes
Approach accepted	Welcoming Helpful answers Not from the heart Restricted answer supplied Indirect Unhelpful, explanation unclear Unhelpful advice	Gemma 4: I found that most of the lecturers they're quite happy to, you know, reply you and, you know, you ask questions, they're really happy. YQ 2: sometimes teachers give you helpful suggestions and advice on your study Saul 5: Oh, no they're <u>helpful</u> , but its not very – I don't know, it's kind of cold, or kind of superficial. May 4: they just to say I just can tell you this, and otherwise you find by yourself. LC2: They don't give you the answer, they tell you how you would get the answer, by reading and studying this book Gao 2: she couldn't answer me really well, so I suppose she is not really good at this subject Saul 3: the lecturer said, 'You just keep to copy, copy again, again, again, you know, just to let all the knowledge to stuck to your brain.'
Approach rejected	Aggressive Dismissive	Saul 3: some lecturer is quite aggressive, I'm quite afraid of DJ: His attitude is bad, I think, he tells students that 'Don't ask me some silly questions in my working time'
Mysterious	Variable attitudes Unexplained rejection of specific questions	Gao 4: Some of the teachers are my quite good friends, but some of them, no, they look very strict. Saul 2: they say, 'Oh no, no, no, you shouldn't do this, it is not very useful, it is the kind of cheating.' So, actually I have no idea about that. Connor, 3: But some teacher just didn't answer your question. It's just like the gamble sometimes

Level of Satisfaction		
Nature:	Manner:	Representative quotes
Personal value not realised	Goal not achieved: response Goal not achieved: grade Students' investment in asking not responded to	Connor 3: But some teacher just didn't answer your question. Saul 4: I talked to the lecturer several times ... But I just got B. Saul 5: So how come you say, 'Oh, sorry, I cannot tell you.' That's kind of, you know, that's kind, very cold.
Personal value realised	Course details explained Goal achieved Repeated requests for help accepted Serial requests for help achieve satisfaction Personal recognition achieved	Saul 3: I have a chat with my lecturer about ... I talk about all the detail and all the, you know, think, ah, this make me feel comfortable Saul 5: I did several time the draft again, again, again, and so it should be improved my mark May 3: I think I go face-to-face and you can solve me every problem, and at that time if I have problem I can ask ... it's easy for me Saul 4: I ask the same question again, again, again ... maybe you and him are the same department and ask you but you didn't explain very well, so ask him Gemma 3: I was glad that he, you know, remembered me
Personal value re-evaluated	Future rather than immediate gratification	Saul 4: if you didn't can give me more mark and just can point out where I should focus on in the future ... I think it is worth to do this
Related events		
Type:	Description:	Representative quotes
Strategy cluster	Part of a multiple approach to understanding Used with class participation promotes visibility	May 5: before I ask I will read the book. ... And then I ask them, and then I can combine the information and my idea. YQ 2: I very like to talk in the discuss in the lecture, ...usually the phenomenon is teachers know me but teachers do not know who I am
Consequences	In-class opportunities to report back on discussion Motivation to increase effort and grades Friendly relationship with teachers	Gemma 2: I've been talking to him like several times after class ... so perhaps he thinks that I can do it Gemma 3: after I talked to him I just sort of got the motivation to do the second part ... and I did pretty well on the second half I think. Saul 5: when I ask the lecturer is quite nice and they are there in that office so I can ask, and also that's kind of very good way to build relationship
Barriers to use		
Type:	Manner:	Representative quotes
Language barrier: being understood or revealing inadequacies	Teacher unable to understand Revealing poor English Inadequate understanding of course restricts questions Inadequate understanding of course may be revealed	Sky 2: I'm afraid the tutor can't understand CN: I'm nervous, because I don't want the professor to know my poor English MB: I don't understand it to start with, how would I come out with any questions. CN: because I don't want the professor to know ... I know nothing about it.
Lack of engagement with discipline	Discrete point response not what is needed	DX: But my problem was too widely. Actually it was what the way to concentrate on business study, so no lecturer can help me.
Other opportunities adequate	Course resources Other resources	Sky 1: Also I can enter in WebCT. Sky 2: Maybe I try to ask a Kiwi friend in our church.

Appendix 13: May's choices around L1 and L2

Using L1	
Elaborating understanding of reading	
Dictionary definitions	just a short sentence, and sometimes if I don't know how to explain for English I just write down Chinese (1) and I try to find the dictionary what the Chinese talking about. When you read the Chinese we will know a little bit information and then you just combine for the English, you will know, oh, that is come from that part and doing what (4)
Absorbing and framing sense	I need to translation for Chinese and free on my mind and then read again, read again and then go to the exam, so it's different. (3)
Link with prior concepts	And just like the basic, we all know that one, but just don't know how to translate for English. We just try to remember that word, what's that meaning for Chinese (4)
Unlocking existing knowledge	
Maths	Just like they say in fraction economy I know what's that Chinese and I say, 'Oh, it's like that,' so I didn't need to remember what's that word I will know how to write that on the sentence (3)
Thinking about content	
Getting help from peers	if you ask your friend it's good as well because if they speak Chinese it's easy to understand. (5) I haven't asked English people. (5)
Understanding software applications	I use the internet to find the solution, how to do it. Some English I can't understand so I try to find the Chinese one. (5)
Remembering	
Retention of content	If I just read the English I say, 'Oh, what's that meaning? I don't know,' so I still need to try to use the Chinese to understand that and try to remember that (2) If you use English it's quite hard to remember, so I translate for one short word for Chinese. Just one short word. So when I write down that theories, I just suddenly can change my English. ... Key point. I just use the Chinese for the key point (5)
Limitations of L1	
Translating back: fear	But I thinking maybe I have a little wrong, I know if I understand and go to the test, maybe I don't understand how to write that English word. (1)
Translating back: event	In fact, that words [in test questions], I understand the Chinese, but I don't know how to explain for English, so I just lost it, so just like that (2)
Words not in the dictionary	And some words just like that ISW, I said, 'What's that?' I don't know and I can't find on the study guide and that course haven't a textbook. I can't find in the dictionary. (1)
L1/L2 terms not exact cognates	But one trouble things is I find the dictionary and I learn in the Chinese is different, the translation is different. (3)
Not accepted by Chinese tutor	I say, oh, I forgot how to say, and I say I can say Chinese. Yeah, and she just looks not unhappy, just look unhappy and I say, no, don't want to ask her any more (4)
Strategies to avoid problems	
L2 revision immediately before tests	the last time you go to the exam or final, you maybe just remember the Chinese one, you can't remember the English one but you need to, before the exam you need to read all what you translation for Chinese, that one, how to spell it for English. (4)

Using L2	
Difficulties of using L2	
Listening to lectures	I still not sure some course, I still not sure the tutor what she talking about. (3)
Writing notes and listening to lectures	If one time you talking one time you write the note, we just can get do one, we can't do both them. If my English is very, very, very good, like the first language, yeah, that is all right, but now most of the Chinese people they are not. (2)
Taking part in tutorial discussions	At the first week three, I think, have the first tutorial. I just very quiet and sit down, I'm shy, I don't know how to do it, something like that. ... Yes, so I didn't talk any more, but the second time I think, no, I must need to study ... I need to talk to them and something, so I try to make better. (2)
Reading textbooks	And if I [was] sure the English, I [wouldn't] need to use the dictionary, I didn't need to guess, I will easy to read the book. Not now I read one page maybe I use one hour, two page maybe two hour, or something like that (3)
Writing notes on the textbooks	English. I just to say, 'Oh, I can do the English, I don't want to write on Chinese, I write all the thing is English,' but I just try to remember use the Chinese word (4)
Writing assignments	Still the grammars is not well. Always I write the wrong ... I write like that but the structure is like Chinese. (4)
Written answers in tests	Always I do the maths is right, but I write the sentence is wrong, or mistake I get the mark, just lose that mark, I just to say I don't know how to write. (3)
Timed writing in exams	So on the final exam, nobody help me to check but I need to write down 300 words or 800 words per question ... – and I need to write down really quick. ... So that one I think, when the lecturer read the first time they have no idea what talking about. (5)
Strategies for using L2	
Face-to-face preferred to online communication	because when the teacher talk and I can see their face, if they see me I still not very clear they say, 'Are you understand?' I say, 'Uh, hang on a minute. Let me to think for a minute and I answer you.' (5)
Affordances for using L2	
Homestay	but now is whole family, is two kids and two adults, so they will talk to me different things and I need to communication and more things happen. (5) just my homestay she read newspaper every day, and she found that is helpful for me, she will give that to me. (2)
Success	
Understanding in real time	This I think is very successful course, because just that course I understand on the class time, I understand all of the class time (2)
Using L1 and L2	
Full understanding needs understanding in both	Because now I just understand the English. If you want me to explain for Chinese I say, no, I don't know what they talking about. I want to both them can got it, so I need to buy some Chinese book can read together. And English that time, and I can and Chinese that time. (2) Maybe I find I bought one Chinese one and read together to look, so I can know English and I can know Chinese, I can both them to improve. I will buy heaps of books. Happy. (3)
Value of studying translation paper	I know now I read the English thing, I know what they talking about, but if I go to the Chinese company the boss want me, did you believe dictionary, I said, 'I know what they talking but I don't know how to write down' (3)

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