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**AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC LITERACIES**

by

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the experiences of a group of university students with African diasporic connections, an under-researched group in UK HE. Building on the traditions of ideological and ethnographic approaches to academic literacies research, the thesis highlights power relations involved in a range of life experiences, social practices and institutional power relations. The study offers a complex reading of the student experience focusing on the negotiation of literacy practices. It presents non-traditional undergraduates as complex individuals with a range of abilities and resources to draw on for knowledge making which are constantly being reshaped by their diasporic identities, power relations within the academy and wider context beyond the university setting. Research findings evoke a reciprocal exchange between disciplinary understandings, knowledge making and poststructural conceptions of identity. More specifically, while the students I worked with were assessed in unfavourable ways, they displayed a range of resources for knowledge making stemming from a complex interchange between cultural and social identification, an applied social science curriculum and the negotiation of high stakes written assignments. The thesis offers an enhanced understanding of undergraduates as knowledge makers, the resources they bring to the academy and how, at times, they are positioned by others as they negotiate what is required of them. In doing so, an alternative image of the multilingual, non-traditional undergraduate and the potential resources they have is provided. The thesis is also concerned with the broader and less distinct phenomena of globalisation, migration and social exclusion and their impact on current understandings of the student experience within contemporary UK HE. As a result, the main contribution to knowledge can be said to centre on understandings of the scope of academic literacies research, what it means to be a non-traditional learner in HE and critical perspectives on the nature of higher education in the contemporary world.

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CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Throughout the thesis, the names of all participants I observed and interviewed have been changed to pseudonyms. The two lecturers observed are referred to as Lecturer 'A' and Lecturer 'B', while all other staff are referred to by a single letter, such as 'C'. The name of the institution has been changed to the pseudonym 'Northcentral University'. Street names and areas of London have also been changed to pseudonyms or generalised to 'East London', for example. The Campus map in chapter three has been sketched to remove any possible identifiable features, such as street names or buildings. A slightly different approach to anonymity has been adopted for the university's campuses, other educational institutions in the UK, specific locations around the world as well as any other personal information. They have been anonymised with the use of 'xxx'. The use of pseudonyms, letters and 'xxx' in the appendices also correspond with the changes made to the thesis manuscript. Consent was sought and gained for the use of anonymised material from all participants. Separate consent for interviews and observation was sought and gained and, as a result, some participants signed two consent forms. Sample consent forms for both lecturers and students have been included in the appendices. Finally, when sending emails to more than one person, I used anonymised distribution lists.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introducing the research project: topic and focus

The thesis focuses on the experiences of a group of non-traditional social science undergraduates from the African diasporic community, the negotiation of academic literacies and the impact of life experiences on university study and students as knowledge-makers. For the purpose of this investigation, the non-traditional student is defined as someone who is based in the UK and is over the age of 21 at the start of their degree course or a member of group or community not traditionally represented in HE (Lillis 1999). All participants who took part in this study match this description. The term is extremely useful in foregrounding under-represented groups of students even though there is potential to view all students within a distinct category as the same, which I wanted to avoid. The research field of academic literacies encompasses constructionist views of reading, writing, learning and knowledge making at university. It has a multidisciplinary background (Lillis and Scott 2007) and many of its research traditions are located within applied linguistics and broader ethnographic traditions.

I adopted an ethnographic approach to qualitative data collection in order to build a ‘thick’ rather than a ‘thin description’ (Geertz 1993, p.7) of student experiences which took into account the context of learning and explored the significance of practice in the sense of everyday language use, institutionally significant embedded social practices, power and implication for identity negotiated in a university campus setting. This research activity occurred through close attention to student and lecturer interaction, the positioning of students as knowledge-makers and other culturally and socially significant matters which occurred prior to and outside the classroom setting. My perspectives on class observation, interviewing and on the student experiences take into account some of the broader social, political and educational influences which continue to affect those involved in the university sector and I argue that wider contextual and structural changes are likely to continue to have a direct influence on diversity in UK Higher Education, the nature of non-traditional students’ enrolments and their impact upon the student body at Universities like Northcentral (pseudonym). I end this section with a brief overview of the project summarised in Table 1.1 overleaf:

Table 1.1 A brief overview of the ethnographic project

Focus	Negotiation of academic literacies Diversity and complexity of student experiences Identity and identification
Research questions	1. How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy? 2. How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?
Number of participants interviewed	11 students
Total number of participants observed	2 lecturers; 50 students
Data sources	Primary: Classroom observation notes Field notes (research diary) Narrative summaries (based on interviews and talk around text) Other: Documentary data (course handbooks, assignment rubrics, assessment criteria) Emails and text messages Seminar texts
Context	A post-1992 urban university (UK)
Disciplinary focus	Applied social sciences, social policy, area studies and politics
Length of data collection	18 months

The thesis builds on a writer-oriented approach to academic literacies (see section 1.7). It explores the complexity of student experiences, identity and identification with a focus on knowledge making. Two lecturers and fifty undergraduates were observed and eleven of those undergraduates were interviewed. Primary data sources were classroom observation notes, fieldnotes and narrative summaries produced for in-depth interview. Other data sources drawn on were course handbooks which included assignment rubrics and assessment criteria as well as email and text messages. The research context was a post-1992 urban university and the disciplinary focus was applied social science. The length of data collection was 18 months in total spanning two academic years.

1.2 Clarifying the focus

I decided I wanted to problematise ‘... the commonly held views about disadvantage, in particular the on-going predominance of an essentialised ‘deficit’ model which focuses on the ‘gaps’ that individual ‘disadvantaged’ students are seen to have’ (Marshall and Case, 2010, p. 492) which I felt had been encompassed by labels such as non-traditional, mature and first generation for some time. To achieve this, I began to think about student writing, sometimes described as a site of struggle, from a critical practices approach to literacy. It is important to avoid a deficit and over-simplistic view of academic communication, students and their abilities which is one reason why I chose to observe students in their degree programmes rather than in writing centre, EAP or other forms of academic support intervention. However, I acknowledge the value of a variety of curriculum spaces which would be equally valid for different researcher motivations and research aims.

During the research and planning stages of this thesis, after completing an initial phase of literature reviewing in the area of academic literacies, my intention was to conduct a study which explored students’ situated academic text production from a number of different angles. My work with students was to be contextualised in the sense that student background and experiences, the university setting and the disciplines being studied were seen as relevant to a writer-oriented approach and, therefore, would be visible. I was keen to build multiple perspectives on how students negotiated academic literacies without adopting a text-oriented approach to analysis (see Fairclough 2001; 2010) and as a result I decided to interview students individually, and observe them as a group in lectures and seminars. I wanted to look at literacy practices, not through adopting a textual approach to written assignments, but through observing and analysing the significance of talk surrounding literacy events in lectures, seminars and interview. I hoped this approach would help me to understand a group of students not only as writers but as people, the context in which I worked and they studied as well as the influences of power and identity as I worked with them for more than one academic year.

What I discovered during ethnographic enquiry was that although academic writing and the process of discovering practices surrounding text production remained significant, there were global, macro-level influences which affected ways in which students were able to, quite literally, access and participate in university life. These influences were various and complex

to untangle, but what they pointed to most strikingly were the powerful experiences which had led to some of the participants to come to live to Britain and the significance of African identification. Secondly, the influence of life experiences on the student experience of university study, the power of certain institutional genres and thinking around how knowledge is created seemed to intensify further. I found that as participants strove to engage in the academic study of topics such as social exclusion and welfare policy, they reported experiencing similar real life challenges of asylum, single-motherhood, eviction and negotiation of HE agencies such as Student Finance. Not surprisingly, how participants responded to life's inevitable challenges was varied which enabled me to develop a thesis around knowledge making and the positioning of knowledge makers as well as a sense of alienation and disengagement relating to institutionally-ascribed identities. Themes emerging from the data moved away from student writing, which was similar to Marshall and Case's (2010) findings, as despite my original plans to focus much more closely on practices surrounding text production, '... data analysis led me to broader aspects of the student experience which might previously have not been considered under the topic of "learning"' (Marshall and Case 2010, p.492) or academic literacy practices.

1.3 The context and setting

1.3.1 Diversity and higher education

Today there is significant movement of people within and across countries and regions of the world. One consequence for higher education is that universities and other social institutions 'become sites with greater linguistic, social and cultural diversity' (Rex and Green 2010, p.573), particularly those located in urban centres such as London. For instance, there are more than 355 home languages in Greater London (Harris, Leung and Rampton, 2002) and around 300 estimated to be spoken in London's schools (Hudson 2010, p. 56). One further aim of this thesis is to help understand and therefore respond better to 'changing and diverse student groups' (Rex and Green 2010, p.573). As long as ago as 1989 Phillips wrote that we must respond to the needs of new students during expansion; that is, those students who are not traditionally represented in HE, suggesting that:

For education to be a valued experience it will have to respond to the needs of older, more assertive students, people from a non-white ethnic background, people with family and work commitments and increasing numbers of women (Phillips 1989, pp. 80-81).

It is necessary to make early reference to both the university setting as well as the broader educational and political context because recruitment and admissions policies from the early

1990s enabled by the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) began to change the make-up of many UK campuses and as a consequence the ways in which students experienced HE (see Harvey, Burrow and Green, 1992).

A detailed exploration of the HE context and discourses surrounding widening participation I argue should not be described merely in terms of participation from under-represented UK postcodes; a relatively narrow range of less advantaged socio-economic groups; data from ethnic monitoring exercises; or the largely quantitative data available from organisations such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2006). In recent years, for a variety of complex reasons, both internal and external to the UK, there has been an increase in diversity among non-traditional students who enrol at university and I suggest what this label might mean can be better understood. The need to respond to an educationally, culturally and linguistically diverse student body remains important today.

1.3.2 Responding to diversity

The field of academic literacies emerged from an ideological, research-based approach towards the development of student writing at university (Lea and Street 1998; 2000; Street 2004) and references the dynamic, constitutive and situated nature of literacy. It sees writing as a social as opposed to a solely text-oriented practice and it is therefore more closely influenced by the culture of the academy and disciplinary-specific practices. It is desirable, therefore, that these kind of academic practices are referred to in the plural form, *literacies*, reflecting the inherently political nature of social practices. In addition to its complexities, some researchers have suggested that there may be tensions with regard to the expectations of HE institutions and the range of cultural backgrounds from which students come (Tomic 2006) and in doing so highlight gap in awareness. Other studies suggest that identities, whether imposed or self-ascribed, play a significant part in the negotiation of academic literacy (Ivanič 1998; Lillis 2001; Preece 2006).

Harris' (2006, p.1) ethnographically-oriented work with London's 'visible minorities' points to an emerging hybrid culture which is linguistically and culturally complex; however, in contrast to this thesis, theorising resulted from field work in London's schools rather than its universities. There have been studies which examine mature students, such as Bowl's (2003) exploration of working class individuals from a range of backgrounds who enter university and Read et al.'s (2003) in-depth exploration of non-traditional students and their

experiences. Ivanič's (1998) work on the discursive construction of identity draws attention to students' varied backgrounds and although highly significant in terms of the influence of identity on text production and discourse practices, focuses on mature, mostly female writers and their texts, the vast majority of whom identify as white. Lea's (1999) research addresses the relationship between knowledge, texts and experience of the non-traditional distance learner. Also, of relevance is Preece's (2006) study of "'newcomer" identity' (p.174) in the academy. In this study it is argued that the process of developing academic literacies is more than the gaining of new competencies and skills in academic language and involves changes to students' sense of their own identity, evoking both resistance and tensions. That said, research of this kind has not tended to focus on mature students with post-colonial backgrounds and instead has tended to focus on the younger, if equally ethnically diverse and linguistically complex, individual (Harris and Thorp, 1999; Preece, 2006).

Lillis's (2001) study of the writing practices of female students described as non-traditional and who identify as working class is particularly relevant to this thesis and for this reason is elaborated upon in chapter two. However, aside from this influential work, I argue that there remains insufficient attention to the experiences of the mature, black learner from within the university setting and that this is indicative of a gap in researchers' and practitioners' awareness and understanding of the complexity of who our students are and some of the ways in which they may interact with the institution and disciplinary content.

1.4 Motivations for project

This section explains my motivation for and interest in the project both professionally and personally as, hopefully, knowing myself will aid the knowing and understanding of others (Pillow 2003). I worked for an English language teaching unit located in a university language centre as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) lecturer for 14 years on a part-time basis. The role involved delivering EAP to students already enrolled on degree programmes within the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences (pseudonym) at Northcentral University much the same as in-session EAP provision at other UK HE institutions, according to organisations such as the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes. However, for a number of years I felt some dissatisfaction with the way which EAP as a methodological tool to develop academic language and literacies with the culturally and linguistically mixed profile of students who attended classes and individual tutorials the unit offered. It seemed to me that EAP, as a branch of ELT, was rather uncritical of its own aims, methods and teaching contexts (see Benesch 2001; Harwood and Hadley

2004; Pennycook 2001). This perceived lack of reflexivity (see section 3.2) amongst some EAP practitioners who were, like me, teaching EAP to what was often, although not exclusively, a post-colonial audience speaking not only a range of first and additional languages but also a range of varieties of English. On this topic, Wallace (2002) refers to a 'domesticity' of EFL/EAP methodologies and pedagogic aims which have the tendency to serve the dominant institutional culture and not the students', that is by teaching 'non-traditional' students how to be 'traditional'. Often I found that the resources students brought to the institution were not considered relevant to the aims of EAP programmes.

Added to this, when I first joined the unit, terms such as 'native' and 'non-native' were commonly used in institutional publicity and by some colleagues, whereas I felt this dichotomised view of students to be unhelpful, a view echoing Norton's position (1997; 2000). Labels of this kind are common in TESOL and have been problematised by Nero (2005) in the US context, through Holliday's (2006) discussions of native-speakerism, and more recently in Houghton and Rivers' (2013) edited works. Indeed, many of the students I taught would not describe themselves as language learners although they possessed a desire and motivation to develop their academic English whilst at university. Other groups of students I taught could be described as having a literacy gap which was often in addition to speaking English as a second, third or additional language. This last point relates to one area of concern for academic literacies researchers (for example, Ganobcsik-Williams 2006; Jones, Turner and Street, 1999; Lillis 2001) expressed in terms of a gap between student and faculty expectations. These factors began to reveal the complexity of encounters with students and, for me, confirmed that dominant EAP methodologies were not wholly appropriate for my teaching environment.

Additionally, during my later years with the unit, my role moved to a more mainstream position within the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences (pseudonym) and away from providing solely a 'bolt-on' remedial service which offered voluntary academic English to non-native speakers and study skills to 'struggling' students. This view of the unit continued to be held by many lecturers and students alike across the university, but, at the same time, perceptions of literacy as socially situated and discipline specific gained some currency around the university. Framing views of language and literacy in this way has continued to influence my thinking since the late 1990s through reading literature on the New Literacy Studies (explored in 2.8), and in the area of academic literacies, in addition to participating in conferences such as Writing Development in Higher Education and the European Association

for the Teaching of Academic Writing as well as attendance at the more local London Academic Literacy Research Group.

The unit I worked for gained in regard and, critically, financial resourcing for staff slowly improved. One consequence of this shift in perception and funding was that the Writing in the Disciplines (see Johns 1997 for a more extensive discussion) element of my work, which I shall refer to as *embedded* academic writing and English language development due to the way in which the US approach to writing development was applied in the Northcentral context, meant greater opportunity for closer attention to not only the dominant written genres of applied health and social science but also to the students and lecturers from within some of the Faculty's degree programmes. I began to teach a range of writing classes which were embedded within social science programmes, and, at times, I had contact with the same students in the voluntary drop-in sessions as I did when teaching writing embedded within their compulsory courses. As a result, through dialogue with lecturers and students over this situated discipline-specific teaching, I began to notice differences between and across these overlapping communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998). This overlapping contact with students in different professional roles is reflected later on in this chapter where I introduce key participants (Table 1.2).

I team taught a final year course for a Social Policy and Area Studies Programme (pseudonym) for several years. The course content covered areas such as migration, globalisation, and social inclusion which I found interesting, not least because these disciplinary areas seemed to attract people who, as I learned through class discussions and reading and writing with them, had experienced some of the effects of globalisation, civil war and social disadvantage in Britain first hand. This work engendered an on-going relationship with lecturers from the Faculty as well as contact with third year students, some of whom can be described as non-traditional, although, the variation and diversity is masked considerably by this label is huge.

I found that, at times, whilst teaching and advising these students, there were clashes of expectation between the choice of dissertation topic and the requirements and expectations of course leaders and specialist supervisors. As these finalists began to consider dissertation topics they felt were relevant to their degree, some took the opportunity to examine areas which were often situated politically or personally close to their own experiences, or were

culturally salient in some other way. For example: a student of Somali heritage selecting the role of NGOs in Somalian agrarian policy; a student claiming to have access to gang members wishing to conduct interviews with members in order to explore gang culture in Neasden, North London; a woman exploring the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM); and a parent wishing to question the differential educational success rates in boys of West Indian heritage, and so on. There seemed to be a complex interplay between the identities of these students, what they knew and power relations in the academy that had to be negotiated during these literacy events in which I became involved.

Many of the topics chosen developed into highly appropriate dissertation topics but others were rejected for a variety of reasons. For example, on ethical grounds; due to time constraints; because of anecdotal or unstructured field evidence gathered during the year abroad for Area Studies students, or a lack of peer-reviewed literature on a topic chosen such as FGM in East London. This departmental evaluation and sense of rejection for some students usually took place during the preparation of research proposals or after students had submitted their proposals in the November of their final year, when their ideas were assessed as unworkable. There seemed to me, at this late stage in these students' university careers, to be huge clashes of expectation. Lecturers, whether generalists or specialist dissertation supervisors, adopted a professional stance and advised students how to change or improve the shortcomings of their proposals. Similarly, students took feedback and intervention from Programme lecturers and potential supervisors seriously. Yet, what was being deemed unsuccessful or undoable, from a student perspective, was more than an academic project as so often the areas of enquiry selected were of both personal and educational interest, illustrated through the examples of geopolitical and social phenomena listed above. This intrinsically complex literacy event for many students to negotiate, that is to say, talking and writing surrounding proposals for their dissertation study engendered an interest in academic literacies firstly from an institutional perspective in terms of what and whose knowledge was seen as acceptable as well as which discourses (Gee 1987; 2005; 2008) seemed to be valued within applied social sciences at Northcentral University. There seemed to be a struggle over meaning and legitimacy and, as maintained by Cooper and Morrell (2014), what got constructed as knowledge seemed to be viewed through the lens of gatekeepers. As a result, I also became interested in academic literacies from an individual perspective in terms of the ways in which the impact of learning and knowing had on the identities of these adults, some of whom were the more successful students in terms of academic achievement.

To pick up on Holliday's (2007) point that researcher subjectivity must be acknowledged whilst engaging in qualitative research, I will now attempt to reveal more personal and long-standing motivations for the project. Reflecting further, I acknowledge that my own experiences of studying psychology as an undergraduate in the 1980s have in some ways shaped the formulation of this project. The head of department at the time was a social psychologist interested in race and educational attainment, and was heavily influenced by Tajfel and Turner's work on social identity theory and intergroup conflict (for example, Tajfel and Turner 1982). Whilst completing my first degree I read *Caught Between: a review of research into the education of pupils of West Indian origin* by Taylor (1981) which explored the experiences of West Indian children in Britain who, the author argues, were 'caught between' two cultures. This interest in culture, language variety, race and ethnicity was picked up later during my Masters when I wrote assignments entitled: '*How could an understanding of varieties of English be of use to English language teachers?*' and '*Widening access to Higher Education for black people*'. It is perhaps the notion of being 'caught between' that has continued to resonate and therefore remains an influence on my work and research. At the same time, memories of conducting experiments in psychology from within a positivist paradigm, where variables were isolated and measured precisely, did not seem to match up to the socio-cultural and linguistic complexity of my workplace or my own extended social network (Milroy 1987). The alternative methodological paradigms touched on in chapter two are, in part, a response to these feelings of discomfort.

So, in summary, it is because of feelings of dissatisfaction with teaching drop-in EAP and writing in a language support unit in north London; my role of developing student academic literacies embedded within applied social science courses; and my experiences as an undergraduate that I began to conceive of a doctoral topic which would enable the systematic exploration of some of the issues at the interface of widening participation of higher education, students from diasporic communities, academic literacy development and possible changes to the self. I also began to consider the significance of supervisor-supervisee tutorials as well as power relations at play and what this sense of academic rejection might mean for these students' sense of identity. My position is summarised by Rampton (2007) who characterises individuals often engaging in linguistic ethnography research for the first time:

Indeed, as mature students in their late 20s and early 30s (or later), the move from work or family commitments into research is often motivated by interest generated in practical activity than by a fascination with academic theory per se. Indeed, in many cases the shift into linguistics and/or ethnography is an attempt to find a way of adequately rendering quite extensive personal experience and the initial spur

involves not just the kind of ‘contrastive insight’ that Hymes describes (1996: 6) but often quite an intense frustration with institutional processes in which people have found themselves living’ (p.590).

This section has provided an insight into how the focus and purpose of research emerged from my professional role at Northcentral University and how, because of these influences, the research setting is ‘a site of encounter’ (Rampton 2007, p.585). Indeed, this view is supported by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who suggest setting ‘often plays a significant role in shaping the way in which research problems are developed in ethnography’ (p.36) and can actually motivate the research, according to Holliday (2007).

This thesis builds on existing characterisations of the non-traditional student in British universities. The project contributes to a clearer understanding of the relationship between power, identity and the negotiation of literacy practices within a university setting and in doing so helps to illuminate the complex student profile of a post-1992 urban university. More importantly, it identifies some of the challenges facing polycultural (Hewitt 1992) students with residency in the UK who may not always be viewed as ‘equal’, and explores how, as a consequence of life histories, identities change over time and space. Institutions like Northcentral University are necessarily dynamic due to political, migratory and other demographic changes to its local and more distant communities. This context is worthy of further research and an ethnographic exploration of the Northcentral setting can help to shape an understanding of the interface between students and the resources they bring with them, the institution and power relations at work.

1.5 Northcentral University: the research setting

Locating a project within a setting and context is a useful early stage in the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000; Holliday, 2002; Layder 1993) as it aims to provide an environment in which research questions can be systematically and meaningfully addressed. This section introduces the research setting in order that discussions and analyses of social phenomena can be firmly and meaningfully located within it. For the purpose of this section, *setting* ‘... denotes a focus on the intermediate forms of social organisation’ (Layder 1993, p.9) in and around Northcentral University as distinct from the broader social, political and economic *context* of the British HE sector, and is explored in section 3.7.

The university campus is a clearly demarked or ‘bounded’ setting and provided opportunity for a range of relevant and interconnected data to be gathered as I was granted access to the group for a maximum of two and a half years whilst participants undertook their degree study in a range of physical locations on the campus. The setting also comprises a ‘sufficiently small’ (Holliday 2007, p.34) group of undergraduates who share goals and interests in studying social policy, development and politics as well as sharing the desire to graduate successfully. They also have other characteristics in common encapsulated by the term ‘non-traditional’, such as age and place of long-term residence in the UK. Therefore, the setting for data collection can be seen as a ‘cultural’ group, commonplace for ethnographically-oriented research, according to Holliday (2007). Additionally, eleven students became *key* participants which meant that, in addition to being observed by me in their course seminars, they provided additional written consent for interview participation. Data from fieldnotes draws on participants observed and interviewed. I found the classroom experiences of a number of participants as well as the lecturers relevant to the research aims.

After identifying two applied social science classes to observe, I sought participants to interview. The table below summarises key information gathered from exploratory interviews in order to give a sense of who I worked with during the project. My criteria for selection was that they had to be over 21 at the start of their course and classified by the institution as a home rather than an international or EU student. However, what can be seen from Table 1.2 was that students who came forward identified as members of the African diasporic community in some way:

Table 1.2: A Brief Summary of the Key Participants Interviewed

Pseudonym	Age	Year	Country of birth	Pseudonym	Age	Year	Country of birth
1. Mary	35-40	1	Rwanda	7. Kate	20-25	3	England
2. Fred	30-40	1	Kenya	8. Maisha	35-40	3	Kenya
3. James	18	1	Unknown	9. Mona	30-40	3	Tanzania
4. Mustapha	30-40	1	Congo	10. Mr. N	30-40	3	Congo
5. Vera	38	1	Liberia	11. Sade	30-40	3	Nigeria
6. Amina	20-25	3	Somalia				

This was not what I anticipated or sought specifically. However, I was extremely fortunate to be able to interview at length a diverse group of people with rich histories and busy lives. The complex participant profile is discussed in more detail in section 3.9.

1.6 Introducing the research questions

[The ideas that] ... the meanings carried by language are never fixed, always open to question, always contestable, always temporary, is fundamental to poststructuralism and has major implications for our understandings of the person, her or his identity and the possibilities for personal and social change (Burr 1995, p.39).

The quotation from Burr (1995) above highlights the significance of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches for the thesis. I also wanted the quotation to help draw attention to the fact that these theoretical approaches to language and knowledge making influenced my thinking which underpinned the formulation of the two research questions below:

Original research question 1 - How do undergraduate social science students change as they negotiate their relationship with the academy?

Original research question 2 - How do undergraduates reshape themselves through the development of language and discourse practices?

The first research question was formulated with the aim of exploring some of the ways in which a small group of students interacted with fellow university students and lecturers as well as how they negotiated the institutional practices they encountered. At the beginning stages of the research project I assumed that participants would report or display, in some form, change following apprenticeship models of learning and engagement with new cultural practices. These assumptions were based on readings in the area of education, identity and change and were influenced by writers such as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Norton (2000) in particular. A further aim was to provide insight into what transformation might look like over time and across contexts, which relates to the view that meanings are in constant flux and subject to change. This view of change ‘... has major implications for our understandings of the person, her or his identity and the possibilities for personal and social *change* [italics added]’ (Burr 1995, p.39) and was relevant to both initial research questions.

During the process of research, however, I gathered little persuasive evidence to indicate that change, reshaping or repositioning occurred as a result of: *direct* engagement with texts in the physical setting alone; my interviewing and extended conversations with participants; or as a result of my entering the culture and looking. Instead the thesis developed a focus on knowledge making and the negotiation of academic literacies as reflected in the title. As a consequence of distance between my original research question and evidence of change as a

consequence of the negotiation of academic literacies, the first research question was revised as follows:

Revised research question 1 - How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

The revisions made better reflect the shift away from change towards negotiation.

The second original research question was concerned with ways in which participants develop an awareness of academic language and discourse practices. Through my extensive readings I became interested in how both power and discourse practices shape equality, access and participation in institutions and according to Rex and Green (2010) influence academic and social knowledge construction. The social dimension to identity was relevant as Ivanič (2000, p.16), for instance, refers to people participating in discourse practices in order to 'affiliate themselves with others who engage in the same practices'. The question was also formulated with an intention to explore ways in which participants changed as they developed an awareness of academic discourse practices. In other words, I was interested in how language and discourse, plus other contextual factors, potentially shaped access to and participation in the university and how varied and complex practices influenced text production and knowledge making.

On reflection, and with the benefit of learning from the research process, I now contend that reference to *academic literacy* practices rather than *language* and *discourse* practices in the second question reflects the methodological shift away from critical discourse perspectives while still allowing scope for the development of a critical and context sensitive approach to academic literacy. This shift in emphasis is reflected in the revised research question below:

Revised research question 2 – How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

The foregrounding of power and identity, rather than language use, also reflects the way in which the research strategy developed over time.

Both revised research questions reflect a desire to explore situated academic literacy practices. They reflect a desire to understand participants' identities and unearth salient issues and events which emerge through the ethnographic research process itself. The revisions also signal a move beyond text. The longitudinal element remained important while the significance of negotiation, power and identity increased during the ethnographic research process. To recap briefly, the initial research questions reflected a desire to explore situated literacy practices at the same time as reflecting my motivation to understand participant

identities and unearth salient issues. A change in focus emerged during the ethnographic research process necessitating revisions to both research questions. I argue the two revised research questions, reproduced below, which foreground the workings of power and identity in the negotiation of academic *literacy* practices, reflect more accurately what the thesis has to offer in terms of understandings of how dominant conventions and practices support and constrain knowledge making:

Revised research question 1: How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

Revised research question 2: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

1.7 Prioritising a writer-oriented approach to research

Lillis introduces a ‘text-writer continuum’ (2008, p.359) which helpfully differentiates between a text-oriented approach and a writer-oriented approach to academic literacies research. At one end of the cline a text-oriented approach sees text as a natural unit of analysis as elaborated by Ivanič (2004) and Hyland (2002). There have been warnings that writer-oriented approaches which avoid sufficiently detailed analysis of text can be limiting (Lillis and Scott 2007) as writer experiences are foregrounded at the expense of text which, it is argued, is crucial. However, from the outset I wanted to make the writer and the writer’s identity the primary, but not exclusive, focus of the project. To clarify, my main research interest was not to understand how undergraduate writers represented themselves in their own texts following Ivanič’s (1998) text-oriented analysis of writer identity or Hunston and Thompson’s (2000) discourse approach, for instance. To achieve this I adopted a broad and interdisciplinary approach which foregrounded participants’ experiences and negotiation of academic literacies. In this regard the analytic emphasis is on the eleven participants as writers and knowers rather than a formal textual analysis of the texts and tasks they talked about.

As a result, the approach to academic literacies research I developed provided scope and opportunity for an exploration of institutional expectations, cultural practices and the undergraduates’ prior educational experiences and cultural affiliations. To put this another way, I had an interest in institutional practices, implicit power structures and dominant discourses, on the one hand, and their effect on individual identity and knowledge making on the other hand. Both the context and setting of this research project are educational, and,

rather than an explicit prioritising of context-neutral academic writing and research practices or the academic socialisation of students as newcomers, this thesis is concerned with an exploration of the non-traditional undergraduate from the perspectives of the group of undergraduates identified (see Table 1.2 and Table 3.5). The individual occupies a central place in an exploration of the negotiation of academic literacies and the positioning of knowledge makers more specifically.

My research priorities build on a growing body of academic literacies research described as ethnographic as well as qualitative research working within an anti-essentialist framework. I also locate the thesis close to research in higher education which seeks to understand the student experience as well as the nature of higher education in the contemporary world. Related to the latter point, the thesis is concerned with the broader and less distinct phenomena of globalisation and migration and their impact on understandings of who we are.

1.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presents the study context as a university sector influenced significantly by the UK's policy of widening access, participation and transformation of the HE sector for under-represented groups. I revealed how my motivations for the project stem from longstanding personal and professional interests in writers, their writing and their identities which have been formed by my own experiences as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, and as a lecturer at Northcentral. The chapter introduces my orientation towards non-traditional students which helps to justify the research strategy adopted by identifying a gap in awareness of a particular profile of non-traditional students in UK HE. It also identifies the focus of the project as an ethnographic study of non-traditional undergraduates from the African diaspora who reported being affiliated to the region in some way. After a brief discussion of the setting, I introduced the participants (Table 1.2). The negotiation of academic literacies is one component of the thesis which remains important, yet it does not emerge as the sole focal point. I found that, for many participants, there were significant factors relating to life before Northcentral as well as critical life events during their time at Northcentral which impacted on text production and knowledge making profoundly.

CHAPTER TWO: FRAMING THE SOCIAL WORLD AND CONTEXTUALISING THE PROJECT

‘Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world’ (Crotty 1998, p.66).

2.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I wrote that this thesis moves beyond academic literacies, or socially-situated approaches to reading and writing at university, towards factors affecting academic text production and the student experience of undergraduate study. It is this range of factors that influence the structure and organisation of the literature review as I introduce not only theoretical orientations towards and cultural diversity and difference, but also conceptualisations of literacy as critical social practice, identity theory and studies on the student experiences of HE. I argue for the significance of the workings of power on institutionally ascribed identity as well as poststructural leanings towards diasporic identities I describe as hybrid and dynamic. These influences on my thinking helped me to approach my research with the group of participants and their relationship with knowledge making and text production from an anti-essentialist position. The aim here is not to present an exhaustive review of theories and approaches to social reality, but instead to present the major conceptual influences on the thesis.

The next section is concerned with ‘theoretical interpretations of the world’ (Berger and Luckmann (1996, p.27). I explore how my interpretations have shaped the research process as, in Canagarajah’s (2002, p.18) words: ‘... it is important therefore to be frank about the position one holds on social and educational matters’ because as little as possible should be taken for granted. An in-depth understanding of reality requires investigation into how a particular version of reality is constructed, as according to Berger and Luckmann (1966, pp.123-4) ‘... all social phenomena are constructions produced historically through human activity’.

2.2 The social construction of reality

There is a view that there cannot be a single position on the nature of reality (Burr 1995; Crotty 1998; Holliday 2011) as well as the view that social researchers cannot be neutral. For Lyotard (1979), these perspectives have implications for the status of knowledge which ‘...is altered as society enters what is known as the post-modern age’ (Lyotard 1979, p.3). Truth is demoted to current understandings of the world, based on the available evidence and

resources we possess. This view, which problematises uncritical acceptance of truths and current understandings, is helpful when we consider the impact of changes to social life in Britain which have occurred due to phenomena such as globalisation and migration. Perspectives which help us to remain critical of how we know what we know and how our particular perspectives, our world views, inevitably influence how we evaluate the practices of others.

Postmodernism is multidisciplinary in nature and is one way of thinking about the world which is helpful for examining and problematising the often taken-for-granted in the modern world. It is concerned with a search for uncertainty and instabilities surrounding the basis of knowledge (Jamieson 1984) as well as on-going critique and questioning of what and how knowledge is constructed (Rogers 2011), broken down and reconstructed. From this perspective, the view that some meanings are more valid than others can be challenged, particularly, as it is argued 'not all voices [can] make the same (or equal) contributions' (Cooper and Morrell, 2014, p.5) to knowledge. I suggest thinking of this kind has value for understanding the impact of changes to HE policy, shifting student populations, and the complexity of the social landscape within which these two phenomena coincide. Also relevant to changing student populations is Harris and Brampton's (2003) suggestion that postmodern paradigms are important for an understanding of the debates about language, ethnicity and race because they highlight tensions in the way different people experience the world. Ethnicity, race and the contentious issue of what to call people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is picked up in the later section on the significance of the diaspora.

Although postmodernism provides a helpful perspective on the complex and rapidly changing world, it does not offer clear perspectives on language specifically. Social constructionism is a broad theoretical and multidisciplinary perspective concerned with meaning making, or knowledge construction. Constructionism is an epistemological stance which offers a critique of positivism, sees the world not as being 'out there' or indeed being located within the individual, but as being constructed (Coupland and Jaworski 2009; Crotty 1998) as individuals 'engage with the world they are interpreting' (Crotty 1998, p.43). For constructionism, debates over whether we can be either wholly objective or partially subjective in our interpretation of social reality are less relevant than its construction. Both social constructionism and postmodernism offer alternative research positions to positivism (Burr 1995; Hall 1997) and the scientific method (Cohen et al. 2000). Postmodernism in particular is a useful framework for thinking about global contexts and their influence on

local practices as well as the reverse, while constructionism offers additional perspectives on knowledge. Indeed, much academic literacies research emphasises that definitions of people, culture and literacy should not be treated as uncontested, static entities with clear cut boundaries, and instead should be problematised. Interpretations of social reality are picked up in chapter three when I touch on researcher identity (section 3.3), the importance of reflexivity for the project (section 3.4.1), data collection (section 3.6) and data interpretation and knowledge making (section 3.10).

2.3 Contextualising the project: the significance of global and local dimensions

Context here refers to the wider dimensions to social structures that influence social activity (Layder 1993) include knowledge-making and its interpretation, and therefore, cannot be said to be peripheral to researching 'small cultures' (Holliday 1999; 2010). An understanding of context as an interaction between the local and global, people and their identities and power relations was significant for the participants in this study who remained linked to 'distant localities' (Giddens 1990, p.64). According to Giddens (1990, p.64), these 'distant localities' are linked 'in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring [or having occurred] many miles away and vice versa.' One consequence of globalisation is that the global and the local are linked and attention to this complex relationship with the local helps to explain the 'postmodern condition' (Lyotard, 1979) of instability and complexity.

Context also refers to the interrelationship between the individual and the group (Layder 1993), the local setting and larger contextual, macro-concerns. These macro-concerns refer to political, socio-cultural and historical dimensions and their influences on the institutional setting which, when considered together, form a significant dimension to the thesis. It is, therefore, appropriate that discussions surrounding students, their backgrounds and experiences occur with regard to HE as dynamic, international and intercultural (Jones, Turner and Street 1999) but also a globalised environment. I also acknowledge that changes in the number and diversity of the students on Northcentral campus reflect these simultaneous local and global dimensions to university life reflecting the complex influences on HE expansion.

Global dimensions to the social world are important as contemporary social relations between people and across borders are becoming ever more complex. One term which appears useful in reflecting the contextual influences is globalisation. With origins in the

seventeenth century with the colonisation of the India and the Americas, it refers to ‘... patterns of movement across national borders that produce increasingly diverse populations within them’ which is true for the UK and London in particular (Block and Cameron, 2002 p.7). Block and Cameron (2002, p.10) argue that ‘globalization implies a shift towards a “post-modern” condition’. They see globalisation as the interaction between worldwide social relations involving a movement between ‘...the global and the local as opposed to the dominance of the former over the latter.’ (Block and Cameron 2002, p.3). Controversies over globalisation also pose useful questions in relation to what extent globalisation changes the way in which issues of language and power are debated (Giddens 1990) as unequal power relations are often realised through social difference and language use. Therefore, it seems that globalisation and migration have consequences for both language users and power relations. This understanding of globalisation as movement of people across spaces both physical and imagined remains closely linked to a critical postmodern approach which questions taken for granted ways of seeing the world. In Blommaert’s (2010) words:

The movement of people across space is therefore never a move across empty spaces. ... and they are filled with norms expectations, conceptions of what counts as proper and normal (Blommaert 2010, p.6).

2.3.1 Responding to the needs of a diverse range of students

In order to contextualise the project further, I now move from global to the more local concerns of UK HE touched on in chapter one. Contemporary social and political relations in Britain are influenced by significant movement of people across borders. In turn the diversity of university campuses is influenced by globalisation and migration in complex ways, but has also been altered significantly by UK government HE policy since, for example, the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) and the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2011) paper, Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System. As a consequence of the move from an elite to mass higher education system (Björk, Bräuer, Rienecker, Jörgensen, 2003; Scott and Coate, 2003; Scott 1995; Scott, 2001) and subsequent HEFCE widening participation policy, there has also been a rapid and steady growth in the diversity of students’ educational, social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Department for Education and Skills 2003; Lillis 2006; Williams 2006; Tomic 2006). ‘As a result, many students with a variety of complex, creative and constantly changing literacies enter Higher Education’ (Mangelsdorf 2010, p.114).

One significant area of exploration needed is how the sector can best respond to the needs of new or non-traditional students. Yet, despite calls for greater responsiveness in order to meet

the needs of a diverse student population, much literature on the diversification and transformation of HE refers less to the individual student than it does to the student body in terms of the sector as a whole. For example, although Silver and Silver (1997) orient discussions towards groups of students as ‘real people’ (p.2), with reference to gender, age and social background, the publication appears less concerned with shedding light on individual student identity and background. It would appear that, although institutions are accurately described as diverse (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2011), less attention has been paid to the individual student with the non-traditional student body often conveyed in monolithic terms. I suggest that there is scope to expand and extend current thinking. A further concern is that an essentialist view of the ‘mature adult returner’ or ‘non-traditional’ student emerges. In addition, the use of binary labels such as black/white, ethnic majority/minority native/ non-native, home/international are less helpful when categorising and classifying people due to the consequence of migration and mobility towards ‘global cities’ (Harris and Rampton, 2003, p.3) like London. I argue that essential and superficial labels can and do restrict the discursive resources available for depicting who our students are constructively.

Anti-essentialist orientations of postmodernism and ethnography are helpful when questioning claims to overarching truths about the social world, such as what it means to be ‘black’, ‘white’ or a ‘non-native’ speaker of English. I prioritise anti-realist, anti-essentialist stances, expanded in chapter three, by considering the complexity of cultural, educational, and individual differences I observed and documented, rather than an approach which could potentially overlook student identities and individual perspectives. Gee wrote that ‘There are different ways to be an African, American or Latino of a certain kind ... there are kinds within kinds’ (Gee 2011, p.37). This notion of different ‘kinds of people within and across cultural groups in many ways reflects the complexity and diversity of the students from the African diaspora I worked with.

2.4 Orientations towards culture, diversity and difference

The context of the thesis is one of globalisation, migration and on-going change in UK HE due to policies of widening participation and access, leading to increased institutional student and staff diversity. Debate about globalisation and its on-going impact ‘... is particularly salient to social theories which examine questions of cultural identity – what it means to be a particular nationality, ethnic group, religious tradition or sexual preference’ (Harris and Rampton 2003, p.4). This section attempts to link postmodern ideas surrounding the

significance of changing context to understandings of culture and what it means for this ethnographic study of non-traditional university students.

2.4.1 What is culture?

I turn to a discussion of what culture is and how it relates to this thesis as for me articulating a sensitive understanding and awareness of diversity and difference is important. The term 'culture' is also contentious and contested which is why I begin by examining more established definitions and views of culture that have been proposed. According to Sowden (2007), the term has to be treated carefully as the same term is used differently by different people, supporting Hall who wrote that: 'Culture is one of the most difficult concepts in the human and social sciences and there are many different ways of defining it' (Hall, 1997, p.2). There is support for this view by those who describe culture as 'a fuzzy concept' (Spencer-Oatey 2001) and those who suggest differences in its usage can be misleading.

Clearly relevant to this ethnographic project, McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005, p.5) refer to culture as 'knowledge that is learned and shared and that people use to generate behaviour and interpret experience'. I find this definition helpful if we accept that language use plays an important part in behaviour and experiences which make up social practices and which can be interpreted and constructed differently. It is necessary, however, to remain critical. More traditional anthropological views of people from different cultures can evoke definitions which include race, whole regions and nations which are too blunt to be of use to the complexity and interaction between local and global contexts outlined earlier. For a more critical perspective, Atkinson (1999, p.626), refers to the view of culture which sees people as geographically and nationally distinct 'as relatively unchanging and homogeneous' and as a 'received view'. Atkinson (1999) argues this view needs to be problematised due to its role in masking unequal power relations.

We can still detect this view of people from cultures and distinct places in Hofstede's (1980; 1984) widely influential descriptions of national cultural attributes and how these national cultural labels are sometimes applied less critically by some from the field of intercultural communication and management (see Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Hofstede 1980). Indeed, for this reason, Norton (2000) prefers to avoid definitions of cultural identity framed by a sense of a shared group or language because of the tendency for this to become fixed and the potential for it to become essentialist. This is an important point and Norton

concedes the term can and ought to be understood in a more flexible way which is what I hope I have achieved. For instance, the literature on HE diversification refers to BMEs, 'minority' students and 'black' student but with the exception of 'black' these were not terms my participants chose to use to describe themselves. The ethnic identity markers I use reflect participant usage rather than my own.

Many theorists and researchers now see culture as far from homogeneous. Instead it is seen as something negotiated, and contested and constitutive (Atkinson 1999; Block and Cameron 2002; Hall 1990; 1997; Holliday 1999; LeCompte 2002) which I find helpful. Indeed, I made strenuous attempts to avoid an uncritical view of national, ethnic and regional labels such as 'black', 'Africa' and 'African', all terms introduced by participants. I tend to agree that descriptions of national cultures or 'big' cultures are problematic; nor did I find them to be especially useful as a starting point for investigating the complexity of what was happening in an educational setting which attempts to take into account the interaction between local and global contexts. Indeed, 'Terms such as identity, hybridity, essentialism, power, difference, agency discourse, resistance, contestation have been used to describe and call into question more traditional views of culture.' (Atkinson 1999, p.627). The majority of these terms will be explored throughout the chapter with reference to this ethnographic study in order to provide an anti-essentialist framework (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) helpful for examining students' relationship with their lecturers, the institutions and beyond.

One criticism of this non-standard postmodern view of culture is that if all social groups are seen as 'small cultures' (Holliday 1999) or 'microcultures' (McCurdy et al. 2005, p.15) and differences are understood only as 'cultural', then we may unwittingly overlook significant historical, political and differentials. However, what a more relativist approach to culture has to offer is an alternative to seeing the worlds in terms of binaries which I argue is helpful when seeking to unearth the complexity of individual identities which make up a group. At the same time insider perspectives, or emic accounts, remain significant. The view of culture I adopt is heterogeneous and does not intentionally seek to reduce differences in the sense that migration and globalisation lead to a new single globalised 'culture'. Instead it offers alternative and new explanations for linguistic and cultural diversity as well as other differences which I find helpful. In Gilroy's (2002) analysis of race and culture in the UK, he argues: 'Culture is not a fixed and impermeable feature of social relations. Its forms change and develop, combine and are dispersed in historical processes' (2002, p.294).

I also wanted to challenge earlier anthropological studies which enforced the view that ‘...the “West” is civilised, advanced, “modern” and that the Others are primitive, traditional, “pre-modern”’ (Harris and Rampton, 2003, p.2), drawing on modernist framing momentarily. To achieve this, I argue, words like ‘African’, ‘Africa’ and ‘black’, need to be foregrounded rather than ignored precisely *because* they are contentious and difficult to deal with. A professional incident illustrating this point occurred some time ago when a colleague commented that they had completed a tutorial with a small group of ‘Somali’ students who had problems with writing because they come from an oral culture. My point, supported by professional experience and findings from this thesis, is to acknowledge rather than ignore the fact that a particular group has some kind of cultural tie and affiliation with Somalia as one step towards understanding what this might mean, if anything, for academic literacy development. At the same time this would seem to be problematic for students judged as coming from an ‘oral culture’, as despite in some cases being born or schooled in Britain, the institution I worked for may treat you in less favourable ways. This uncritical view of culture has consequences and can also result in reference to university culture and students cultural background as homogeneous and unchanging. What is more, if culture is seen solely as differences between national or ethnic groups, it becomes easier to talk about the language and literacy problems of a particular group of students as being influenced by ‘their’ oral culture (Ong 2013). This view echoes the Great Divide theory (Goody 1987; Ong 1988) of literacy exposed by Brice Heath (1983), Street (1984) and by the New Literacy Studies (Gee 2008; Brice Heath and Street 2008 Street 1984; 2005). These ‘Great Divide’ theories of literacies ‘posit a fundamental cognitive gap between literate and non-literate individuals’ (Thesen and van Pletzen 2006, p.11) and their cultures which I find problematic. Early theories of this kind refer to differences between oral and written literacy practices which had a tendency to characterise whole societies and communities less favourably than ‘the West’. Some of the early proponents of a more contextually and culturally sensitive approach to literacy were in opposition to the binary position that some people had literacy or were literate while others lacked literacy of any form (Gee 2008; Brice Heath 1983; Brice Heath and Street 2008 Street 1984; 2005).

Street (1984) also challenged the ethnocentrism of a decontextualised view of literacy. Too often ways in which differences are described can exclude Others. According to Brandt and Clinton (2002), while the more familiar and contemporary HE labels of native/non-native, traditional/non-traditional, home/international have replaced earlier less favourable ways of

characterising cultural difference such as primitive/civilized, and even home/school, they suggest such dichotomous labelling continues to influence the ways in which literacy is thought about and talked about (Brandt and Clinton, 2002) affecting many students' experiences of schools and HE.

2.4.2 Shared experiences at a particular moment in time

Culture is now more readily seen as a process, or set of practices, not a set of things or artefacts. What it does and says is more important. It is far from static. Put simply, culture is about shared meanings which are '...constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part (Hall 1997, p.3). In more recent years, there has been a move beyond 'the four Fs approach: [of] Food, Fashion, Festivals and Folklore' (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin 2004, p.50) which can trivialise and essentialise the complexity of cultures and the way in which they intersect. We all participate in several cultures at any one time. I use the term cultural group and at times simply the group encompassing notions of the smallness as well as the complexity of cultures (Holliday, 1999; 2004; 2010) or microcultures (McCurdy et al., 2005) which often exist within other cultures concurrently.

Data from the field support my position that many of the participants identified as a cultural group most definitely not because of biology, physical characteristics or inheritance alone, but as they shared experiences as well as meanings which existed within a larger complex culture or society such as a university. A sense of what people share or do in common becomes significant only as processes and practices are interpreted. That is not to say that all individuals within a group are the same or that one group is exactly the same as any other. That said, one of the participants, Fred, confirmed that from his perspective the participants I observed felt like a group at the time of interview:

The proportion of mature to non-mature students is fine and he does not feel any different from the younger ones – they all get on well. In fact, he feels he has blended in well with the class. He describes himself as a sociable person: he loves his classmates and they are a group.

(Fred, narrative summary, 13/01/2009)

We have seen that there are a number of perspectives on culture and I suggest a view which sees culture as having shared experiences and meanings but also one which sees culture as hybrid, dynamic and 'deterritorialised' (Blommaert 2010) emerges as the most relevant to an

exploration of the relationship between diasporic identities and the practices of the group of students observed. So far, this chapter has contextualised the project in terms of globalisation and migration and my anti-essentialist orientation towards culture, diversity and difference. The next section attempts to bring ideas of power, literacies and knowledge making closer together because I found they relate significantly to the workings of complex institutions and poststructural views of language and literacy.

2.5 Deficit discourses: one response to diversity and difference in HE

This next section continues the discussions surrounding different kinds of group or cultures, this time locating them within the university. One such position is referred to as a deficit position or approach towards people who are in some way different to us which ‘stresses the inadequacies of subordinate (out) groups and the importance of their being socialised into dominant (in) group norms’ (Harris and Rampton 2003, p.7). This perspective on diversity and difference relates to the project in two major ways. The first I have already referred to as the oral-literate divide, theorised by Ong (1988; 2013) and others (Goody 1987, for example), which I suggest highlights differences rather than similarities of the complexity found across all cultural practices and in doing so characterises groups of people who are different in unfavourable ways.

The second focus of the deficit position emphasises the inadequacy of others and can be seen in debates on literacy in the UK. From this perspective, those without the right kind of language, literacy or communication skills are seen as being at fault in the sense that literacy is an individual rather than an institutional concern. Literacy from this perspective is defined as reading and writing skills and is set apart conceptually from learning or the intellectual activity of an institution such as critical knowledge making, wrongly in my view. Debates about literacy and writing in UK universities remain dominant and are sometimes described in these terms, ignoring other potential resources students may possess. In fact, Brice Heath’s (1983) classic ethnographic study of reading and writing in three socially and ethnically diverse US communities was one of the first major studies to provide evidence for the diversity of literacy. It challenged the deficit position and existence of the strong oral-literate divide assumed by earlier theorists as she found a variety of home literacy practices with which students were familiar and that could be brought into the classroom. This is relevant to university students whose understanding and awareness of literacy and educational practices may be partially located elsewhere in the world as well as being conducted in languages other than English or a variety of English. I suggest the varied

literacy and knowledge making practices and traditions of students are largely unknown as they enter the university. Thus, while postmodernism questions what can be known or understood, according to Keita (2014), I suggest alternative ways of knowing can be ignored in practice, which is of special importance among those enrolled onto degree courses without traditional standard qualifications. Thus, there may be great variety in terms of students' alignment to the dominant discourses within the academy and beyond.

Philosophically, this position which often defines non-traditional students, including those from BME backgrounds, in terms of what they lack rather than what they have draws on centre-periphery discourses where the West is superior to the Other and whose problems are their own (Harris and Rampton 2003). Césaire (1972), writing about the West's colonial practices, commented on what he saw was colonisers' sense of superiority and belief that 'the Africans, the Indians, the Asians, cannot possess civilisation or a culture equal to that of the imperialists, or the latter have no purpose, no justification for the exploitation and domination of the rest of the world' (Kelly 2000, p.9). We are now in a postcolonial and I argue postmodern world characterised by globalisation; yet the 'non-traditional', 'non-native' must still learn to be more like those already established in the centre. This deficit view of the workings of discourse is modernist in the sense that there are language and cultural practices common to all and for the good of all. It also adopts an interventionist strategy to learning and correcting 'incorrect English' as 'the Other should learn to be more like us' (Harris and Rampton, 2003, p.9). The view that responsibility lies with the Other rather than receiving institutions has support from influential researchers such as Wallace (2002) who argues for a 'literate English' to be learnt globally which is presumably not unlike the standard forms used by those already in Kachru's (1982) inner circle who dominate academic discourse. We can also see this view represented in Lea and Street's (1998) illuminating model of the nature of academic writing interventions often adopted by universities where newcomers are socialised and are offered corrective skills intervention. The socialisation approach to academic writing development also relates to how students who may be expert users of English, but also users of colonial varieties of English such as one of my participants using Sierra Leonean Creole, may get constructed as 'remedial' or problematic in some other form.

One problem with this binary view of good-bad language or good-bad writing is that a variety of 'problems' within an educational setting are sometimes misdiagnosed as language problems when I found issues affecting the practice of writing to be more complex. This deficit position tends to view literacy practices as neutral and objective and one further

consequence of this perspective is that there has been a focus on what is referred to as "strong text" conceptions of literacy characteristics' (Meacham 2000, p.181) which rarely acknowledge a reliance on culture or diversity in terms of sociolinguistic, historical or political context. Meacham (2000) continues:

This 21st-century silence regarding cultural diversity is particularly odd given the growing diversity of school populations, particularly in urban centers where non-White students already constitute a numerical majority (Meacham 2000, p.182).

This was the case in the classes I observed. From this perspective, diversity is often seen in terms of a deficit as acknowledging cultural diversity seems to mean, according to Meacham (2000), a threat to standards of literacy. It follows that, from this perspective, it becomes easier to label problems as individual and personal.

One reaction to increased heterogeneity in UK HE has been claims of falling academic standards, or what has been referred to as the deficit model of students and their abilities (for example, Ganobcsik-Williams 2006; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis and Scott 2008) where students are viewed in terms of their lacks as opposed to being viewed in terms of the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991) they may bring to an institution. Articles in the media have been numerous over the years and one example is from the Telegraph (Lightfoot, March 2007) which exemplifies deficit discourses which allege 'illiterate' students are passed to maintain acceptable retention levels. Criticism of university student writing by politicians, the popular press, employers as well as those critical voices from within HE, 'is all too familiar' (Pardoe 2000, p.125). I see this practice as another way of positioning students in unfavourable ways. An alternative to the deficit was a 'gap' framed in terms of 'faculty expectations and students interpretations of what is involved in student writing and in terms of institutional rather than an individual approach' (Street 2004, pp.13-14) but in my view the metaphor is not always successful in not stigmatising the non-traditional newcomer. This skills 'gap' is often presented euphemistically as something which students new to universities lack and need to acquire: gaps therefore become lacks. The complexity of background and life histories is often seen as irrelevant for this deficit view of what knowledge students bring to the academy as they are positioned as lacking 'essential skills.' I argue this phenomenon remains prevalent in the UK HE sector today.

There have been calls for institutions to be hospitable to diversity and this approach is known as the difference model or position (Rampton and Harris 2003). Philosophically, from this

position it makes no sense to say that one language, variety or style and so on is preferable as they are adapted to the needs of particular settings and cultures at the most local level. Again, this view goes some way to explain the significance in values and expectations students need to negotiate across disciplinary boundaries and programme areas. However, it does not attempt to theorise power as from this position we are all different, even though some seem to have less equal access to participation and engagement than others. This difference, or separate but equal position on language and cultural diversity, resonates with some of the criticisms targeted at the New Literacy Studies (NLS) which in brief critique the approaches to literacy which ignores how power influences the practices of reading and writing at a local level. The NLS are discussed in more detail later on in section 2.8.

Celebrations of institutional diversity alone can be less successful in revealing the complexity of students' experiences with regard to their diasporic identities or indeed the power relations at play. This view relates undergraduates negotiating literacy practices to 'liberal pluralism' (Harris and Rampton 2003, p.10), or what Bhabba (1990) terms the liberalist relativist perspective, yet it fails to acknowledge the capital and social good associated with learning to manipulate academic discourse. Bhabba (1990) is particularly critical of this position which he sees as encouraging 'cultural diversity' as he argues difference cannot be accommodated as readily. He finds theorising on diversity and difference problematic and one reason for this is that by accommodating diversity, while containing difference or non-standard norms, 'racism and other inequalities still exist' (1990, p.208) as power relations are ignored.

While cultural diversity is more ethical than the deficit position, it fails to acknowledge or deal with issues of power and resistance to authority, or how to accommodate difference without 'a corresponding containment of it' (Bhabba 1990, p.208) such as remedial intervention sometimes located within support units which can stigmatise students institutionally, if unintentionally. Culturally-diverse students are welcomed to university but institutional structures do not always successfully support participation and engagement as much as they do recruitment and access. Indeed, Canagarajah (2002) writes that we should not assume that 'globalisation leads us to a homogeneous world' where difference doesn't matter any more: "Issues of power and difference have simply become more subtle ..." (Canagarajah 2002, p. 11).

2.6 Perspectives on power and discourse

So far, we have seen how deficit educational discourses position students in unfavourable ways and how views of the Other as problematic influence the experience of HE in socially and culturally diverse contexts. One view of discourse that is cited is that it is modernist in the sense that its structural elements are emphasised and discourse can therefore be described as a neutral stretch of text (see Paltridge 2012; van Leeuwen 2010). However, discourse and debates about literacy are always about more than language. For Pennycook (2001), a view of language where social relations are constructed rather than merely reflecting society, needs to draw on poststructuralist thinking about power and language. My view is that discourse, or anything else, cannot be value free which is why alternative views which construct discourse as contingent on context and power relations become significant.

Originating from Foucault's theorising, one view of discourse is that it circulates and produces meanings. There is, therefore, a close relationship between discourse, knowledge and power. A special focus on power in complex social institutions such as universities can be traced to Foucault (1980) and this concept of knowledge and power is relevant to students new to university as they attempt to negotiate what is required and expected of them. What this means for language and literacy is that certain cultural groups are empowered by their control over acceptable forms of academic literacies and standard forms and uses of English. Discourse relates to power, it helps to construct socially appropriate topics and it defines an acceptable and coherent way to talk, write or behave, in classrooms and seminars for example. Thus, '... by definition, it "rules out," limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves' (Hall 1997, p.44).

Gee (2008) provides a hypothetical example of a white middle class male academic who manipulates standard discourse and is empowered by it. At the same time the same discourse may be less empowering for women, according to Gee (2008). I suggest the same discourses can be less empowering for those individuals from more diverse social backgrounds and ethnicities. Despite local contextual differences, 'dominant discourses in society can be said to be used and to be more accessible to dominant groups' (Gee 2008, p.53). Discourses, then, have the potential to be deployed ideologically; that is, in the service of power and in the interests of relatively powerful groups in society at any given time. This description of power is relevant to the project as, although I argue there is potential for power to shift from

faculty to student at critical moments, middle class men still tend to dominate higher education institutions in both numbers and status (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014).

We have seen in the previous section how the view of discourse as meanings circulating through power is relevant to institutional talk and its effects on identities and how language use, or discourse, helps ‘an understanding of how discourses serve to determine the way in which people see the world’ (Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan and Street 2001, p.78).

Discursive approaches are of particular interest as they examine not only how language produces or constructs meaning, but also how the knowledge a particular discourse produces and perpetuates relates to power.

The view of discourse I have adopted is not purely a ‘linguistic’ one and is usually thought of as ways of thinking and producing meaning (Burr 1995; Foucault 1980; Gee 2008; Weedon 1997). Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language (Fairclough 2001; Gee 2008; Hall 1982) and represents more than text. It is linked to power and is helpful when conceptualising how people work together in institutions and how discourse determines the way people see the world (Roberts et al. 2001). Second, much academic literacies research is concerned with power relations within the academy (see Jones et al.’s (1999) volume, for example). Also, Hermerschmidt (1999) refers to the effects of an institutional hegemony and students’ experience of discomfort. Indeed, negotiation between institutional practices, disciplinary boundaries and students’ individual cultural histories and identities are themes running through academic literacies literature and is also highly relevant to an exploration of multicultural and multilingual undergraduates. Where there is power there is also potential for resistance which is relevant for an exploration of the possibilities for social and personal change.

This review of power and discourse in this section has resonance for the research questions which interrogate how students experience the university and the potential for reconceptualising their own experiences: where discourses are concerned there ‘... is always more than language at stake (Gee 2011, p.37). A consequence of discourse as constituting the social practices that are embedded within them is that some discourses and people can be marginalised by more powerful groups and individuals. A further example of these powerful discourses at work at the time of data collection was the practice of individual students being labelled as having ‘literacy problems’ and deficit identities. At the same time, the receiving institution and recruitment practices were not problematised in the same way and thus ‘deficit

identities' emerged as part of a discourse of widening participation. In my role as writing instructor it was commonplace to be contacted by lecturers from the Applied Social Science Faculty because students' writing was 'just awful' (per. comm), a theme picked up in the data analysis chapters four and five. A further consequence of these deficit discourses students may encounter is that factors relating to participation are constructed by the more powerful academy reflected in the autonomous, decontextualized views of identity. This is an example of how, according to Gee (1987, p.53), discourses are ultimately related to the distribution of power and how power is related to the necessarily hierarchical institutional structures.

Discourse is situated language use (Lillis 2008; Roberts et al., 2001) and is used in two senses in this thesis. The first sense relates to how meanings and identities are constructed through and by discourses and is influenced by the workings of power. This next section looks at both discourse and practices in order to relate them to the ethnographic focus of the thesis.

2.6.1 Perspectives on Discourse: discourse as language plus practice

The second way in which discourse is used in this thesis is to refer to 'situated language use' (Roberts et al., 2001). Practices include the goings-on between people in the course of their everyday lives which characterise social lives as well as the ideologies which underpin them (Roberts et al. 2001; Rogers 2011); in other words, what people do and how what people do is interpreted by themselves and by others. Practices become important for how we view the world (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Burr 1995) and 'The use of the term 'practices' extends this idea to refer to regularly occurring ways of doing things with texts' (Street 1995, p.21). Practices also include societal discourses discussed in the previous section, what Gee (2000; 2005; 2008) refers to as capital "D" Discourses to refer to 'language plus other "stuff,"' (Gee 2005, p.26). Rather than dwell on these technical differences, I refer to discourse (lower case). It should be clear from the immediate context of my writing whether I am referring to a stretch of text or texts, which are communicative events and their interpretations, or the broader ideological dimensions of power influencing students and their identities. What I am particularly concerned with is how everyday situated language use influences wider societal discourses and vice versa.

A social practices stance towards language is not one of code alone, but knowledge making and multiple interpretation. This view of social practice has relevance for an ethnographic

study but also for a view of literacy which is both contextually bound and one which is seen as constructing as well as reporting knowledge. These perspectives become especially relevant to this thesis in the data chapters as participants report their experiences of engaging in university study. These discussions of literacy as social practice are relevant to the two research questions as they underscore the way in which literacy is seen as contingent on other social practices, or everyday activities. Roberts et al. (2001) confirm:

To experience practices from an ethnographic perspective, a researcher needs to interact with others in some form such as sitting in a lecture, chatting in a corridor and talking informally about the meanings and values attached to that concept by participants (Roberts et al. 2001, p.81).

I also took note of every day repeated practices in lectures and seminars and interviews as I was interested in understanding how students experienced some of the dominant discourses as they negotiated the requirements of their course. What I did in terms of entering the field, watching and listening is expanded in section 3.6, with reference to data collection strategies.

We can see that, from this perspective, thinking around discourse as language plus practice or what people do is significant for a view of literacy as constructed by readers and writers as well as being situated within specific individuals, disciplines and institutions, some of which are more powerful than others. The concern here is more linguistic in the sense that language use and interaction can be observed and analysed while the previous Foucauldian, poststructural tradition sees discourse as the production of meanings. One analytic priority relevant to this thesis is what discourse tells us about different types of relationships, knowledge and assumptions about the social world which may dominate the university setting.

Therefore, discourse is social as well as linguistic. I argue that discourse is the production of knowledge, also referred to as meaning making, which is not too far afield from notions of *practice* and the production of knowledge linked to the everyday activities of groups of people and their hierarchical relationships. Discourse moves away from discourse as stretches of text in the modernist sense towards activity ‘... involving the production and interpretation of text ... a piece of social practice’ (Fairclough 2010, p.94). What this means is that discourse, whether written or spoken, is shaped by social practices and vice versa. It therefore follows that there are consequences for individuals who do things with texts. This interpretive process is shaped by the social world, and its varying contexts, and in turn shapes

the nature of discourse. These perspectives on discourse can therefore be seen to frame the complexity of social practices and hence the reference to academic literacy *practices* for the second research question.

2.6.2 Summing up discourse

In this thesis, I refer to discourse in two ways reflecting two traditions. First, discourse is seen as producing meaning and is closely tied up with the workings or circulating of power. In this sense discourse informs a critical approach which sees the ideological dimension to language as significant. Second, discourse is also theorised as language use. In other words, discourses are ‘...the lived experiences - the actual social practices which make up individuals part of a group’ (Roberts et al. 2001, pp.79-80).

The two traditions are linked because what people say and do is often influenced by and influences broader societal discourses. Discourse can be a text, an exchange or interaction between individuals, but at the same time is recognised as representing power dynamics between different speakers (Hall, 1997). The overlap is further indicated through the mutually constitutive nature of societal discourse and more local socially situated practices. These ways of thinking about discourse are particularly useful as they support critical approaches to literacy as reading and writing as well the context specific and questioning stance touched on in relation to postmodern approaches to the social world. This dual view of discourse is important as it links the local with more global concerns affecting students and their academic literacy development.

These perspectives on discourse have been applied to the thesis. First, through the discussion of deficit discourses associated with widening participation and the positioning of the Other through societal and media discourse. Second, discourse as practice is picked up in section 2.8 which develops the view of literacy as more than a decontextualised skills and as critical social practice. I have also shown that there has been a postmodern shift in thinking and researching the social world which has influenced how we think about language, discourse and power in the poststructural Foucauldian sense:

Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted instantiations of particular identities (or “types of people”) by a specific group.... (Gee 2008, p.3)

As we can see from Gee's words, discourses embedded with power have inevitable influence on institutionally ascribed identities which is one reason why I focus on identity next. In poststructuralist terms, one way in which identity is constructed through and by discourse and work termed poststructuralist and postmodern supports the significance of the social turn yet remains centred around the workings of discourse (Fairclough 1993; 2001; Foucault 1980).

2.7 Poststructural views of identity

'Theories about identity are always embedded in a more general interpretations of reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.195).

Following Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theorising on the complexity and construction of reality introduced at the start of this chapter, I take the view that identity is inevitably shaped by societal relations and social processes. Identity, therefore, emerges as a phenomenon useful for exploring what goes on at the intersection between the individual and society (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Layder 1993). It can be useful to think of identity as being concerned with questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'How am I perceived by others?' (Kamwangamalu, 1992) as differences between how we see ourselves and how we are perceived by others can be significant and often with significant consequences.

There are many identity related terms which reflect the context-sensitive ways in which people recognise, act and respond to each other. What the majority of terms have in common (for example, agency, selfhood, personhood, subject position) is the view that identity is a product of the social as well as the individual self. Rather than use the terms interchangeably, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) advocate, I have chosen to use identity as an overarching term using alternatives only where necessary to fulfil my communicative purpose. An example of this is where I draw on agency to refer to self-determination as identity is said to be 'determined by the social structure' (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.194) or diaspora to reflect a sense of the way in which identities move between one culture and another (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), metaphorically or otherwise.

According to Gee (2005, p.34), 'Some authors reserve the term "identity" for a sense of self that is relatively continuous and "fixed" over time.' However, it must be emphasised that there is no intention to signal identity as fixed, static or 'pre-discursive' (Benwell and Stokoe

2006; Butler 1990) through the use of the term. Omoniyi and White (2006, p.2), outlining poststructural approaches to identity, confirm that it 'is not fixed'; it 'is constructed within established contexts and may vary from one context to another'. What is important for the thesis is that, rather than becoming laden with the specific nuances of different terminology, the avoidance of attaching essentialist connotations to individual participants and their experience is prioritised: 'Identity avoids the essentialist connotations of personality' (Burr 1995, p.30) and is therefore a more comfortable adoption for the anti-essentialist orientations of the thesis.

In a globalised, interconnected and rapidly changing world, the notion of a unified and stable, core identity is hard to maintain. Many researchers have come to see identity as a continual state of flux, according to the social and cultural contexts they inhabit (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Blommaert 2010; Cameron and Block, 2002; Gee 2000; Omoniyi and White 2006). Gee expands this notion of identity to mean a sense of 'who we are "' in a given context, which is what he means by 'identity' and from this perspective, it can be seen as dynamic, a view which is common to poststructural understandings of the social world. 'In this sense, all people have multiple identities connected not to static "internal states" but to their different contexts and situations, or 'performances' in society (Gee 2000b, p.99). I refer to conflict or tensions between how we see ourselves and how others see us as a consequence of identities ascribed by others.

2.7.1 Ascribed identity

Gee (2000) adds that: 'The "kind of person" one is recognized as "being," at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable' (Gee 2000, p.99) and therefore identities ascribed to us may differ from our own sense of who we are causing discomfort. Several studies in HE focusing on diverse student populations have found that ascribed identity can result in emotional discomfort (Hermerschmidt 1999; Rosen 1990; Thorp and Harris 1999). In other words, people are ascribed identities through discourses. What is significant is that we have more than one way in which we are recognised by others at different times and across different spaces, as opposed to identity *types* which are stable and fixed, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966). I use the term identity as shorthand for socially situated identity which is relevant to how people think and behave, what people do in complex settings.

One consequence of the increased social, linguistic and cultural diversity in mainstream HE is that students are often ascribed various identities (non-native speaker, newcomer, non-traditional) in ways which hide their own affiliations and identifications, linguistic or otherwise. An important element of my research is concerned with not only how individuals position themselves but also the mechanisms through which they are positioned by others (Omoniyi and White, 2006) which I discuss in relation to ascribed identity rather than structure and agency debates, reflecting my poststructuralist leanings.

Institutions and the talk within them are intrinsically bound up with power, and are often seen to serve the interests of powerful groups (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) such as academics, the media, and those more likely to be in greater control of deficit discourses introduced earlier. The following example illustrates the potential impact of discriminatory discourses, how people can be marginalised by more powerful groups and consequences for institutionally ascribed identities. When I joined Northcentral in the late 1990s, it was practice in the Faculty with which I was most closely affiliated for the person responsible for recruitment onto courses devised for L2 learners to allocate students according to visible ethnic markers, such as family name. Anecdotally, the reason behind this was that if they were 'African' they were more likely to need generic study skills rather than language while the 'European' exchange students needed the reverse. This discriminatory practice may have suited some students whatever their name, origin or language background, but equally it may not have been the right decision made on behalf of all the undergraduates choosing an elective course with a language component within the Faculty. A potential consequence of these discriminatory practices are reflected in Matsuda's words (2010, p.93):

The policy of containment and the continuing dominance of the myth of linguistic homogeneity have serious implications not only for international second language writers, but also for native speakers of unprivileged varieties of English.

Like Matsuda, it seems to me that these sites of containment such as language and study skills courses are 'ethnic as well as linguistic' (Matsuda 2010, p.87) and that institutional gatekeeping practices and subsequent ascribed identities have significant consequences for how students are perceived and treated, sometimes even before they enter the university. Bhabba (1990) is also critical of the practice of containment as he argues that there is less scope to break down barriers to inequality. The example above illustrates how everyday recruitment practices which often include the evaluation of reading, writing and thinking are

embedded within social practices of power and authority (Paltridge 2012). This brief example also relates to Lyotard's (1979) suggestion that an understanding of what power does is relevant to knowledge making precisely because, like language, it is at the forefront of questions over who decides what knowledge is relevant and for whom. There is therefore some anecdotal evidence to support the view that powerful institutions, with already established ways of knowing and doing, label and position individuals as more or less culpable for their own circumstances underscored by deficit discourses of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Gee (2011) suggests that politics can be thought of as referring to 'any situation where the distribution of social goods is at stake' (Gee 2011, p.31) which is why anything worth having is bound up with the 'workings of power' (Foucault et al., 2008). How politics and power relates to this project, more specifically, is that I was concerned with understanding how a group of undergraduates deal with an uneven distribution of resources such as access to lecturers' expertise, acceptable academic discourses and in some cases standard forms of English.

Also relating to the availability of resources is Hermerschmidt's (1999) research study which found that one informant describing himself as a native speaker of English and therefore arguably less of an outsider than his fellow participants acknowledged some discomfort during seminar situations that seemed to revolve around issues of the right to speak (Norton, 2000) and Bourdieu's notion of the 'legitimate speaker' (Bourdieu 1991, p.68). Hermerschmidt (1999, p.13) concluded that 'It appears that institutional hegemony works beyond even the favoured subgroups of male, white English students'. These findings are also significant as many of the negotiations and interactions students undertake with academic staff are verbal. Hermerschmidt (1999) researched multicultural students, with an international student label and, like Nero (2005), was interested in how students constructing identity and concluded that the institutional expectations and practices encountered shaped participants' identity.

For Butler (1990; 1997), poststructuralism is seen to be set aside from issues of social context and political aims which I consider essential for in-depth understanding of identity. It is true that I have presented a relatively neat, singular view of poststructuralist approaches to identity and I acknowledge Butler's point that it is far from unified or monolithic. That said,

one difficulty I found with role and performative accounts, as theorised by Butler (1990; 1997) is that it was not always clear from data whether someone was doing masculinity as opposed to doing class, sexuality, femininity, ethnicity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, pp.159-160) which I found diminished this conceptual framework as an analytical resource for this thesis. Barton and Padmore's (2008) study found: '...refer to themselves as parents, relatives, workers, neighbours, friends - each role making differing literacy demands upon them (Barton and Padmore, 2008, p.213). Roles often describe repeated and routine positions (Lillis 2013) and even though they are not singular or static they are sometimes presented as such. Therefore identity, and not role, is picked up as a central concept for the thesis and conceptualisations of identity as hybrid and shifting seem to have more to offer the research questions.

This view of identity as hybrid and shifting is useful as it brings together postmodern framing of the social world and the complex cultures within it by drawing on diaspora in relation to diasporic identities of the participants at Northcentral. This next section links thinking on identity with the section on globalisation, migration and culture, diversity and difference presented earlier in the chapter. I locate it here, after a discussion of identity, as it pulls together a number of different strands of the literature review already presented such as culture, diversity and identity in a complex global environment. It also applies thinking about the Other to concepts ideas from within this anti-essentialist framework.

2.7.2 Diaspora: what is it and why it is relevant?

Hall (1990) uses the term diaspora metaphorically rather than literally, arguing that:

The diaspora experience ... is defined, not by essence or purity, but a concept of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, differences; by *hybridity* [italics original] (Hall 1990, p.235).

This section is concerned with interconnections between diasporic communities in the UK and the processes of globalisation; and Cameron and Block (2002) suggest the concept of diaspora is relevant to postmodern ways of examining complex phenomena in Britain. According to Zeleza (2009), the term diaspora did not surface until the 1950s when it became associated with mass migration and, in many instances, the term 'diaspora' is used in a fuzzy and uncritical way to refer to all manner of movements and migrations between countries and even within countries (Zeleza 2009). Perhaps this is why King and Benson (2010), suggest the term can be ambiguous as it does not clarify how language and ethnicity intersect or

whether minority is determined by power, status or size. However, if we accept that there is inevitably some ambiguity due to the complexity of these dimensions then diaspora emerges as a useful way of thinking about complex identities which make up the postmodern condition (Block and Cameron 2002; Lyotard 1979). According to Zeleza (2009) it refers simultaneously to ‘...a process, a condition, a space, and a discourse: the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade; ...’ (p.32). Zeleza continues that diaspora involves a sense of culture, and I add identification with more than one culture, which is often characterised by marginalisation and a sense of belonging to a nation or place that is different to others referred to as the ‘majority’, traditional or mainstream.

Earlier in this chapter, I stressed that globalisation and diaspora became significant phenomena for this thesis because in my view thinking around diasporic identities recognise the importance of the histories of groups of people, what Lavia and Moore (2010, p.3) refer to as their ‘historical circumstances’. I apply the concept diaspora to this project because it resonates with the identities, histories and participant experiences. Diaspora also challenges the ‘implied essential connection between place and identity’ (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.212) and the idea foregrounds ‘unsettling’ assumptions people may have about other cultures (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). We all come from a particular time and place and have specific histories. To put it in slightly different terms, the focus of this thesis is a small group of students with ‘transnational diaspora connections’ (Harris and Rampton, 2003, p.3) linking the consequence of globalisation, migration and conflict, such as civil war in some instances, which I argue have academic resources, or capital, to be utilised. The use of the term ‘African diaspora’ helps to mark further the complex relationship between communities, histories place and identity (Okpewho and Nzegwu 2009; Zeleza 2009), and the ways in which individuals with diasporic connections can be positioned unfavourably.

Hall’s (1990) quote above relates to the manner in which the thesis developed as the key participants interviewed identified with communities and life in London as well as their life histories before they came to Britain which influenced their sense of who they were. The notion of identity work taking place at the intersection between the individual and the group, and in amongst the to-ing and fro-ing of the local, global and back again is encompassed in ideas of hybrid and diasporic identities. I focus on African diaspora specifically at this point as the term relates to the identities of the group with whom I worked. While it is true that participants were both ‘African’ and ‘undergraduates’ at the same time, the latter reflects an etic rather than emic approach to themes emerging from the data. For instance,

‘undergraduate applied social science student’, the original title of this thesis, reflects how I saw the group at the start of my time in the field, but this label did not reflect how the majority of participants saw, or reported seeing, themselves.

2.7.3 Summing up identity

I began this section by presenting the view that identity can be thought of as a sense of who we are and how others see us in relation to groups of people we identify with in some way. The additional use of identification alongside identity is to signal the process of identifying with particular groups of people (Hall 1990; Lillis 2013; Omoniyi 2006) in response to the social identity question: *who you are in relation to others with whom you identify?* (Kamwangamalu, 1992). The view I adopted sees our own personal or individual identity as multiple, dynamic and contested as we adapt to different practices and perspectives in different contexts. The term is not intended to refer to something fixed, essential or even pre-discursive (Butler 1990) such as being essentially African’ to give an example relevant to this project. It is worth reiterating that ‘African’ as an identity category has and does inference different things at different critical moments. The various poststructural approaches to research and thinking about identity which contribute to an understanding of who we are share a focus on the role of discourse, knowledge making as important for identity work. A second orientation which brings together the various approaches to identity with constructionist and poststructuralist leanings is the rejection of the essentialist position that identity categories are fixed properties over time; as well as the rejection of the view that our identity is not influenced by the social processes and practices we engage in. In summary, who we are and how we are seen by others is not fixed and varies from one context to another. Poststructuralist approaches to identity see it as a salient factor in all communicative context as it helps to construct and inform social relationship in order that more than one identity may be articulated in a given context (Omoniyi and White 2006) or time. It therefore follows that a focus on diaspora, hybridity, the complexity of identity and identification is relevant to this contextually sensitive ethnographic exploration.

2.8 Framing academic literacies as critical social practice

Earlier in this chapter, I began to problematise ‘traditional’, de-contextualised approaches to literacy with reference to the oral-literate divide and deficit discourses of falling standards and widening participation. I now build on the concept of social practices, or the everyday activity characterising people’s social lives, introduced earlier through an exploration of literacy in context. This is because several studies in this field influenced the direction and

nature of this thesis in terms of research aims and ethnographic framing of research in educational settings. Street's (1995) highly influential work advocated what became an influential approach which sees literacy as a *critical* social practice and which aims to 'make explicit from the outset both the assumptions and the power relations on which these models of literacy are based' (Street 1995, p.141).

The view of literacy as the ability to read and write is less neutral than it appears because it situates values around literacy in the individual person, rather than in society or as stemming from interaction between the two. It also obscures literacy's relationship with power and identity (Gee 2008; Hull and Hernandez 2010). One consequence of this view of literacy is that it privileges certain types of literacy available to certain types of people (Gee 2008). The constitutive rather than the transparent nature of language is foregrounded in academic literacies research (Lillis and Turner 2001; Turner 1999; Turner 2004). These critical approaches to literacy share an orientation towards understanding literacy as a social practice which means the emphasis is necessarily on socially situated approaches to reading and writing (Gee 1996; Jones, Turner and Street 1999; Lea 1999; Lillis 2001; Street 1984; Street 1993; Street 1999; Thesen and van Pletzen 2006). Literacy is embedded within social practices (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000; Street 1984; 1995; Gee 1998; 1996; 2008a). I found that a more local and contextual but also critical approach towards the negotiation of literacies forced me to remain more wary of grand generalisations echoing the critical stance taken up by postmodern views of the social world. What I refer to as a critical social practices approach to literacy, is ideological in the sense that it is 'a socially accepted association' (Gee 1987, p.51) or culturally-specific way of using language for knowledge making and for identity and social identification purposes.

Lillis (2013) adds that an ideological position of this kind includes 'issues of power, identity, participation and access are central to writing practices and as such need to be taken account of in exploring what writing is and *does*' [italics added] (Lillis, 2013, p.13). This is interesting as themes of power, participation and identity emerge more than once due to their relevance to the experiences of participants. Thus, engagement with literacy is concerned with both the adoption and resistance of social practices.

The HE sector in the UK has seen a growth in the field of academic literacies research as one response to changing student populations which has attempted to counter the discourse of

student deficiencies and falling standards (Ganobcsik-Williams 2006; Lea and Stierer 2000; Orr and Blythman 2003). Awareness-raising in this area has taken place through educational research and debates surrounding widening participation which have largely, but not exclusively, focussed on issues of language and literacy within the academy and its inherent disciplinarity as much as it has on individual writers and their errors. From this perspective, successful literacy is seen as context dependent and contingent which has led to the now widely used pluralisation, literacies (Street 1984; 1995). In this section, I adopt the term *literacies* as shorthand for a social practices approach to reading, writing and knowledge making which involves identity work, language use and the workings of discourse. The plural usage stems from poststructuralist notions of shifting identities as well as thinking around contextually-based knowledge making. There are multiple versions rather than a single correct model of appropriate or effective reading and writing practices. Practices, therefore, vary according to local context and their relationship with socio-political and historic context. In sum, I adopt this plural usage to reflect earlier poststructuralist traditions but also to signal the contested nature of reading, writing and knowing.

Literacy is not only about how to read and write but also how to apply these skills for particular purposes in particular contexts such as university courses. I find Lillis' (2008) explanation of practice helpful in explicating the relevance of context and its consequences for reading and writing:

The notion of practice is used as a way of linking specific instances of language use with what individuals, as socially situated actors, do, both at the level of "contexts of situation" and at the level of "contexts of culture" (Malinowski, 1923). First practice signals that specific instances of language use – spoken and written texts - do not exist in isolation but are bound up with what people do – *practices* (Lillis, 2008, p.374).

According to Street (2004, p.12), it is the non-linguistic that becomes significant in literacy practices, what Canagarajah (2002, p.8) refers to as 'text-external factors'. Importantly, for Collins and Blot (2003, p.3) 'the label "literacy" is and can be extended to areas that have no or little connection to text' which is why I see it as applicable to the negotiation of academic literacies as from this perspective, '... literacy is not an ideologically autonomous process or activity, rather, it is a process that is always situated in contexts involving power relationships' (White and Lowenthal, 2011, p.292) just as all parts of social life involve power relations. Practice, with its emphasis on the local and everyday, is also a term central to ethnographic research. What I take as significant is that what people say and write cannot

be separated from the things they do, either as individuals or as members of the groups with which they identify.

2.8.1 Countering criticisms of a social practices approach

There have been criticisms levelled at the NLS which focus on the local everyday practice as it is said to ignore power differentials which infiltrate all aspects of social life including texts (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Collins Blot 2003; Pennycook 2001). There is, however, some evidence to suggest that such criticisms are not fully justified as, for example, literacy has been ‘described as inextricably linked with histories of power and authority in language and beyond’ by Blommaert (2010, p.137) further countering criticisms of NLS as ignoring power. To counter these criticisms, I cite Gee (2000; 2008) who argues that social practices are inherently political and concerned with the workings of power and discourse. Street (1995) also argued that this situated constitutive view of reading and writing is necessarily ‘embedded in power relations’ (Street 1995, p.133). Indeed, Street (1995) commented that “literacy practices are aspects not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures” (p.161). I see power as particularly relevant as it helps to explain how the individual is positioned in relation to ascribed identities (Gee 2000) which emerge as significant for the participants I observed as they navigate the institution and its tacit practices realised through language use.

A further related criticism is that research that falls under the NLS umbrella has tended to focus on local every day practice at the expense of the global influences on what we do and who we are. Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue that: ‘... the new paradigm maintains its own, tacit great divide – one that assumes separations between the local and the global, agency and social structure, and literacy and its technology’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p.338). Wallace (2002, p.101) is also critical of the privileging of local practices claiming: ‘Just as local or indigenous languages are privileged over English in critiques of linguistic imperialism so local and vernacular literacies are favoured in much of the current work in literacies’ (p.101). As long as the criticisms of self-interest in the local at the expense of the global are heeded, this approach to situated reading, writing and knowledge making provides scope for productive interpretations of the research setting by foregrounding language, discourse power and identity.

2.8.2 Summing up literacy as critical social practice

Summing up, according to Street (1995) the body of research referred to as the NLS is concerned with the political nature of the transmission of a set of dominant or accepted practices from one group to another. Literacy from a critical social practices orientation sees appropriate and effective literacy as socially contested and socially constructed. However, I see both contextualised and decontextualised approaches as value-laden in the sense that interests of different groups of people are being served. Literacy is political: it has the potential to construct, contest and maintain inequality but also to contribute to change and as such this view resonates with Foucauldian theorising on power which see it as possessing productive qualities as well as oppressive power. Its plural usage indexes the dynamic, constitutive and contextually sensitive and political nature of literacy. In contrast, I stress that more traditional, decontextualised views of literacy are problematic as they do not recognise ways in which correct English, or the ability to read and write, are influenced by issues of power and identity (Gee 2000; 2008; Hill and Hernandez 2010).

Academic literacies emerged from fieldwork and publications occupying an ideological position now referred to as the NLS (for example, Barton and Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000; Street 1984; 1993; 1995). The research field developed a poststructural view of literacy as ‘constitutive and contested’ as advocated by Street (2004, p.15) and remains a contested field partly due to its multi-disciplinary approach (Hall and Hernandez, 2010). From this perspective, as previously outlined literacy is seen in broader terms as a social practice concerned with reading, writing and knowledge making rather than a set of individual cognitive skills to be learnt and assimilated (Gee 1996; 2000a; 2008; Jones, Turner and Street 1999; Lea 1999; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 1999; Lillis 2003; Street; Street, 1984; 1993; 1999; 2001 2004; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). It is therefore less surprising that the academy is somewhat ‘unsettled’ (Lavia and Moore, 2010) or disturbed by the process of globalisation, migration and widening access as well as by the subsequent increased diversity of students with the variety of life experiences, literacy practices and knowledge they bring with them.

2.9 Foregrounding the writer in academic literacies research

This next section continues the discussion of literacy from within an academic context through close attention to a number of research studies which foreground the writer and issues of identity. If we consider the ideological and contextualised views of literacy discussed earlier, then identity reemerges as more relevant as we begin to question ‘who we are, how and why we use language, how we evaluate ours and others’ use of language’ (Lillis 2013, p.124). Indeed, one aim of academic literacies theorising stemmed from a desire to understand better some of the social processes at work within universities (Jones et al. 1999) and how they relate to the ascribed and self-ascribed identities of students. As a result, research attention has fallen not only upon second language speaking international students but also upon those students resident and often born in the UK, irrespective of language background.

A useful place to start is the seminal paper by Lea and Street (1998) which conceptualises three approaches to the development of student writing at university through a hierarchical model of interventions. This difference in approach between practices, on the one hand, and individual deficits, on the other, is highlighted in Lea and Street’s (1998) paper which applied the ideological perspectives of the New Literacy Studies to a university context, in doing so privileging a contextually-sensitive approach over narrower, traditional approaches to language and literacy development. What the paper achieved was to raise awareness of the complex and situated nature of writing and knowledge construction. This is important as academic culture and academic writing are closely associated with a legitimate elitism which necessarily excludes. From this perspective what others may bring to the institution in terms of prior knowledge and qualifications are not always of value causing tension for ‘non-traditional’ enrolments and recruitment, students or their text production.

A review of publications on academic writing in the UK which adopts an academic literacies perspective (for example, Ganobscik-Williams 2000; Jones et al. 1999; Lea 2000; Lea and Stierer 2000; Lillis 2001) illustrates that there seems to be a growing body of literature concerned with, not only dominant genres of academic writing and student writing produced at university, but what tensions the construction of texts may bring for students and their identities. That is to say, there is concern that there may be tensions ‘between the ideology of

the institution and the range of cultural backgrounds from which our students come' (Tomic 2006, p.64). The next section reviews studies relevant to an increasing observation of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in higher education as this helped to make sense of observation in the field and themes emerging from data.

As outlined in the introductory chapter, Lillis (2008) puts ethnographically-oriented research on academic writing on a continuum, with text-based research at one end which lends itself to more textual etic analyses; and research on the writer, practices and contexts, at the other, which attempts to foreground insider perspectives. This thesis is located more closely to ethnographic research on student writers' and their identities, and hence my reference to it as sharing some features with writer-oriented rather than text-oriented approaches to academic literacies research. An examination of relevant empirical literature suggests a trend towards publications which are concerned with not only institutional discourse practices, but also attention to 'issues of voice, identity, and power relations...' (Orr and Blythman 2003, p.175) which I attempt to draw out through the ethnographic methods and the research questions formulated. Indeed the methods I employed privilege practice over text (Lillis and Scott 2008). While I do not wish to underplay the significance or relevance of text-oriented approaches to academic literacy, I do wish to foreground students' identities and, at the same time, acknowledge the importance of studies exploring the experiences of 'black', and 'non-traditional' students as well as and 'minority' students in the US explored later.

Studies concerned with non-traditional students in UK HE are numerous. Yet, despite the number of research studies which highlight challenges faced by non-traditional students, there is surprisingly little detailed reference to the linguistic, social and cultural background of those students participating in and contributing towards research in academic literacies. Indeed, Scott's claim that 'the writer as a social-individual [is]...largely absent from the literature about student writing' (1999, p.172) is supported by Lea (1999) who is critical of work adopting an academic socialisation approach to student writing that 'appears to take little account of the way in which, for students, issues of personhood and identity are embedded in both language use and literacy practices' (p.103). Similarly, Hermerschmidt (1999) suggests there is a need to place more emphasis on student background, implying that at the time of publication this has not taken place sufficiently. These ideas fed into the thesis as I developed an interest in undergraduate experiences more broadly as well as an interest in their negotiation of literacy practices within the academy rather than what I acknowledge are highly influential and worthwhile text-oriented approaches developed by Ivanič (1998) to

give one example. I found the shift towards practices and a foregrounding of identity necessary to acknowledge the challenges for the individual attempting to negotiate the varied practices in a large and complex institution. It is for this reason that I restrict the review of academic literacies studies to a selection of those which tackle issues of writer identity, power and ethnic and cultural diversity discussed next.

Building on the traditions of the NLS, Thesen and van Pletzen's (2006, p.2) work is a useful place to start as they were concerned with the challenges imposed on the South African HE sector from a complex and globalised world. They claim the NLS has its origins in the 'Anglophone' traditions which they acknowledge 'dominate the global politics of academic knowledge in the field of academic literacies studies.' (p.2). This point is of interest as they suggest there are valid reasons for examining reflexively the resources available to explain in what ways our '... personal histories, our social, political, racial, ethnic and national backgrounds shape our understandings and impact our academic and intellectual pursuits' (Thesen and van Pletzen 2006, p.xi). However, despite some political similarities, a point of departure from the focus of this study is the analytic focus on students and their engagement with texts (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006) as well as obvious differences such as the post-colonial 'Town context. Yet, there are similarities as the university, like Northcentral, was 'pulled' in two directions at once: 'towards a global community while at the same time retaining its strong groundings in local realities.' (p.9). In short, for them, there was a 'local context of inequality and struggle' (Thesen and van Pletzen 2006, p.6) which influenced the student experience of engagement with texts.

A text-oriented study by Paxton (2006), which drew on Fairclough's (2001) framework for an analysis of student writing and wider social processes, illustrates how the analysis of student writing provides insights into ways in which students build on prior discourses to acquire new discourses' (Paxton, 2006, p.84). Although methodologically different to the ethnographic approach I introduce in the methodology chapter three, the study was concerned with some of the difficulties diverse students encounter trying to gain linguistic and epistemological access to the new discourses of the University' (p.85). Paxton (2006) ended positively claiming research of this kind '...can assist in changing dominant discourses in response to student needs. (p.85) which to me seems relatively optimistic given the challenges of different contexts, hidden practices and epistemologies my participants reported which were similar to Canagarajah's (1997) earlier work with Tamil and 'minority' students in the US.

Van Pletzen (2006) researched reading with black university students who in her words were ‘... were all ‘black’ students who spoke English as an additional language, but who struck me as fluent and articulate speakers of English’ (van Pletzen 2006, p.112). This characterisation resonates with the participants who took part in this study. In terms of study aims, there is also some overlap with van Pletzen who considered ‘...to what extent students prior knowledge helps, hinders or partially limits their reading performance in the new curriculum’ (van Pletzen 2006, p.116). Although they expressed some satisfaction with their reading practices they reported, the university students in this study lacked the power to contest reading that conflicted with their sense of identity and sense of discomfort in relation to the academic tasks. This sense of powerlessness and lack of voice resonates with findings from other studies (Hermerschmidt 1999; Nero 2005; Norton 2000; Thesen 2006).

Thesen’s (2006) research on lectures is relevant to this study for two reasons. She argues that: ‘Lectures are in many ways at the centre of academic practice, yet they have received surprisingly little attention in the New Literacies Studies tradition of academic literacy research’ (Thesen 2006, p.151). She explored interaction in lectures between lecturer and students with a wide range of language and educational histories (Thesen 2006). It was found that individuals with visible ethnic markers were referred to as ‘different cultures’ emphasising divergence from what was considered mainstream. As we acknowledge people as different from us, it seems that we acknowledge that they remain outsiders, what Bhabba (1990) suggests is a shortcoming of the difference orientation towards linguistic and ethnic diversity. Thesen (2006) concluded that there is a distance, which I refer to as a site of struggle or tension, which causes some student to struggle to express themselves manifesting in silence. Thesen (2006) also found a sense of alienation that many students experience as they struggled to express themselves. These findings have similarities with this project as I was also interested in what took place in lectures and seminars and because the participants had complex linguistic, educational and cultural histories (see appendix four).

Finally, Lea’s (1999) work with distance learners defined as non-traditional draws on experiences from two different students to look at two different approaches adopted. The reformulation approach, replicating disciplinary knowledge, and the challenge approach, displaying resistance to existing knowledge. Both approaches were limiting Lea (1999) argues as she discovered they were ‘... are only elements of complex literary practices,

concerning issues of both epistemology and personal identity, which students need to engage in order to merge together their own experiences from broader social and cultural contexts with the university's requirements for assessment' (Lea 1999, p.123). That said, Lea's (1999) study of adult distance learners and their literacy practices was less concerned with a close examination of their backgrounds as there is no reference to multiculturalism or multilingualism and it can be assumed that this dimension to the distance learners' experience fell outside the scope of the research. Although a text-oriented approach focussing on the distance learner, findings are relevant as this thesis relates to students grappling with issues of knowledge construction and identity explored earlier in this chapter.

So far, I have reviewed a small number of relevant studies focussing on the experiences of non-traditional students. Even though the approaches to research are different to this thesis, they draw on academic writing as situated practice as well as highlight effectively the significance of identity, difference, diversity of background and how these factors intersect and influence academic success and knowledge making. At this point it is worth noting that we are seeing a broadening out from specifically text-oriented approaches to academic literacies research to work engaging in issues relating to participation and engagement, alienation and resistance to the student experience, all equally important elements of practice which influence the texts ultimately produced by students.

2.9.1 Two studies influencing the project

There are two UK-based studies which have been particularly influential which I deal with in turn in this section in order to explain how they informed the framing of the research questions and methodological approaches where this occurred. The first is Lillis' (2001) project on the experiences of 'ten "non-traditional" students' as they engage in academic writing during their first year of undergraduate study in the UK' (Lillis 2001, p.4). Here it is argued that dominant academic literacy practices contribute 'towards discontinuity for ... learners from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds' (p.131). The study acknowledges a 'distance' (p.130) between tutors and students understandings, echoed by Thesen's (2006) findings. Lillis explored how marginalisation and exclusion from the conventions of academic writing occurs, and how this influenced how students were able to participate in HE.

The backgrounds of participants differ as not all of my participants were schooled in the UK, nor did the majority identify as working class. There are, however, similarities such as age, engagement in employment and other familial responsibilities while studying full-time. In part influenced by Lillis (2001), I began to form the view that in order to understand what was going on in the institution and how practices shaped some of the experiences with which I was familiar professionally, it was essential to gain a deep understanding of the participants' identities. Although a valuable approach to language use in an academic context, my work is methodologically different in terms of the centrality of 'talk around text' developed by Lillis (2001; 2008). Talk around text was not the sole or even main methodological tool of data collection (see Figure 3.1) and I also observed participants in a classroom setting. I was also never a formal assessor. On reflection, my professional role as someone with writing instructor status and the lack of timely text production influenced how the talk around text interview often unfolded, also discussed in 3.7 in relation to the data collection strategy which this example helps to illustrate:

She has a notebook for this purpose but is reluctant to show her work publicly/to VO and is happier to talk about the process at this time.

(Mary, narrative summary, 20/01/2009)

The open-ended nature of this ethnographic study was also a factor in the lack of text presented for analysis and I reflect on reasons for this reticence in the chapter six, and later in 7.3.3, in more detail. This was not problematic in itself as I chose to adopt a relatively low amount of control over the process as my aim was not to replicate the methods of large-scale sociolinguistic studies (for example, Labov, 1966), but instead to draw on smaller-scale more in-depth, open-ended, inductive observational research methods (Coupland and Jaworski, 2009, Miles et al., 2013).

The second major empirical influence is Harris and Thorp's (1999) ethnographic study of a London university which looked at some of the effects of cultural expectations on learning from a student rather than an institutional perspective as well as from the perspective of what effective EAP support might look like. I drew on some of the more practical steps adopted such as how to make contact with potential informants as well as a number of methodological ones which I explain in detail in chapter three. They found that cultural background was highly significant and more complex than essential labels such as 'overseas student' which they suggested was problematic for their informants' ethnic identity. Other relevant themes were the role of EAP institutional provision and interaction between staff and students, the

latter becoming a significant theme for this thesis. They concluded that there were ‘multi-faceted complexities involved in the learning contexts for their students’ (Harris and Thorp 1999, p.17) and significantly: ‘[students] perceived themselves on the periphery, as outsiders at particular moments’ (1999, p.8).

2.10 Black Students in Higher Education

Earlier I suggested that although attention has been drawn to, for instance, country of origin and first language, discussions of student background have sometimes occurred with scant reference to the complex diasporic identities of ‘home’ students, their educational backgrounds and learning requirements as these factors were outside the scope of the research. Equally significant is the small amount of research which recognises the multicultural nature of British non-traditional students with perhaps a few exceptions such as Bowls’ (2003) exploration of working class individuals from a range of backgrounds who aspired to enter HE. It is for this reason that I now draw on studies in HE which sought to explore the nature of student experiences. Moving away from academic literacies research on writers and the texts they produce, there is a body of research which is concerned with diversity and difference which also informs what is referred to as the student experience of HE concerned with the experience at institutional level primarily.

Some earlier educational research on the student experience such as the work of Gibbs (Gibbs 1992; Gibbs and Coffey 2004) appears to take little account of ‘the role of language in constructing academic knowledge’ (Lea 1999, p.103). That said, the aim of the final section of the literature review is to broaden out the discussions in order to highlight the experiences of ‘black’ students in higher education. I retain a focus on my research aims as I define the university experience as including the nature of non-traditional students’ interaction with faculty, implications for their academic experiences, changing identities and background. Here the focus is different to previous sections of the literature review in its specific focus on traditionally under-represented students rather than literacy practices. It is particularly relevant because, although ethnic categories remain contentious (D’Costa 2014; Gilroy 2002; Hall 1990; Harris and Thorp 1999; LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985), the participants I worked with made reference to their own ethnic background as ‘black’ and at certain moments in terms of ‘African’ identification. At this point I quote Zeleza (2009):

The idea of “Africa” is an exceedingly complex one, with multiple genealogy and meanings ... (Zeleza 2009, p.33).

With this complexity in mind I now explain what is meant by 'black' with reference to the diasporic identities of students I worked with.

Ethnic markers remain contentious and therefore, following Thesen and van Pletzen (2006), I use scare quotes throughout as I review a select number of studies which reflect some of the experiences of 'black' students in HE. Sutcliffe (1986) uses black to mean 'culturally black', to refer to culture *and* identity. That is, an identity rooted in the Caribbean and Africa, but also one that continues to evolve and to absorb additional influences and one that is subject to the changes and influences of global migration in Britain. The view that to be 'black' is to 'share a common bond of blackness that is more than skin deep.' (Sutcliffe 1986, p.5) is a contentious one yet resonates with Gee's (2000b, p.99) definition of identity as 'being recognized as a certain "kind of person" in a given context.'

Nombo (2006) was interested in the diversity of experience of being 'Black' and 'African' for students in the South African HE context and looked at the experiences of successful "black" students (Nombo, 2006). He confirmed that 'being "black" and "African" was not a homogeneous experience' (p.181) arguing that black students are all too often perceived as a homogeneous group in HE (Nombo 2006). I found diaspora emerged as a useful concept to draw on in a desire to avoid fixed or essential analyses of black students' experiences. While acknowledging there are common experiences shared by some but never all, diaspora provides additional scope for an understanding of the diversity of experience of HE. There appear to be few studies which focus on black students in the UK exclusively. I seek to unpack the diversity of experience of students who identify as black and, at the same time, I am mindful of the possibility that the actual phrase, 'black students' experience', suggests a degree of homogeneity which does not necessarily exist.

Rosen (1990) conducted a study in a London university not dissimilar from Northcentral. It also seemed that some of the challenges for non-traditional students were similar as Rosen (1990) reported that while not all students were black, many had shared experience of coping with significant and unexpected adjustments to their lives as mature students. Rosen (1990) conducted interviews rather than observation and found that whereas the majority of black students reported racism, few white students mentioned it. Again, there are similarities with this thesis as race and racism were issues raised by the interviewees and not the researcher. There is also reference to the emotional discomfort associated with studying such as 'shaking

and sweating in interviews' (Rosen 1990, p.189). However, it is worth noting the extent to which the context of HE has changed as informants reported racial isolation on courses. In contrast, at Northcentral on some programmes including the one I observed, the mixed profile of students was so diverse that students identifying as white were a minority although this observation alone does not diminish the powerful experiences of racism.

2.10.1 The effect of the unequal power relations: (dis) engagement and alienation

We have seen that from within studies in academic literacies that a distance between the students and the requirements of the academy has been reported. The gap or distance which emerged as significant for Hermes Schmidt's (1999) study and more recently for Thesen's research (2006), bridges the gap between academic literacies research studies in HE focusing on the student experience and a sense of alienation reported. In the HE research literature, a number of publications highlight the relevance of alienation as one way of understanding the student experience in traditional, face-to-face higher educational contexts (Mann 2001; 2003; 2005; Read, Archer & Leathwood 2003).

Building on Read, Francis and Robson's (2001) study of the impact of power relations on student voice in academic writing, Read et al. (2003), in particular, have much to contribute to an understanding of students' relationship with the university and how they cope with issues of power. Read et al. (2003) looked at 'negotiations and challenges' of university study through the concepts of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at an urban post-1992 university containing a statistically high proportion of 'non-traditional' students some of whom were black. They caution that 'non-traditional' and 'black' are '... both distinct and interrelated dimensions, an issue I hope I have already clarified. They suggest '... minority ethnic students are often explicitly aware of the role of ethnicity in the construction of 'belonging' and 'otherness' in higher education (Read et al., 2003, p.266). Further the 'Lack of familiarity with academic culture, and the effect of the unequal power relation between lecturer and student, can work to increase students' conceptions of isolation and alienation' (Read et al., 2003, p.271) resonating with some of my observations in the field. These findings are important as, not only do they contribute to understandings of what cultural diversity and difference might mean for non-traditional students but also as, they raise the issue of unequal power relations between students and lecturers which has implications for institutionally-ascribed identities (Gee 2000b) touched on earlier.

Read et al's (2003) study sums up the situation well for some 'non-traditional' students new to the academy negotiating academic literacies yet does not claim to consider who those students are or how their linguistic, cultural and social background and prior experiences impact upon student experiences. Importantly, they note that: 'Academic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced' (Read et al. 2003, p.261). I am not sure that this has ever been the case, whatever the historical or institutional context. Nonetheless, despite an increase in students from working-class and ethnically diverse backgrounds fitting the non-traditional student description, academic culture still appears to reflect dominant discourses and practices. A desire to understand how students respond to dominant discourses and practices encountered is reflected in both research questions, introduced in section 1.6 and repeated at the end of this section (p.68). At the same time, I am wary of the fact that the singular use of discourse is suggestive of a single monolithic academic culture while my experience of HE institutions, faculties and disciplines is that it is much more complex than that. A desire to unearth complexity is one reason why I sought to understand dominant discourses and practice norms through attention to the local and the every day. Read et al. (2003) clarified that while they focused on financial constraints but also found other 'cultural' factors to be influential, supporting Harris and Thorp's (1999) findings in this regard. They end that 'students from "non-traditional" backgrounds are also disadvantaged by an institutional culture that places them as the "Other"' (Read et al. 2003, p.262.), and as a consequence struggle to acquire literacy (Read et al., 2001), resonating with some of the deficit discourse in HE captured earlier in this chapter.

With reference to the experiences of black students in the US context, White and Lowenthal (2011, p.284) refer to a context of recent increased diversity it would appear is also not dissimilar to the UK HE sector which they see:

...in terms of culture, religion, race/ethnicity, native language, physical ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, levels of academic preparation, and family background (White and Lowenthal 2011, p.284).

This paper looked at the experiences of black students, also referred to as 'minority' students. They argue that reasons posited for the challenges and failure of students tend to centre on 'cultural differences, inadequate academic preparation for college, or minority students' resistance to the White college culture' (2011 p.284). There is minor overlap with some of my research themes (see Table 3.9) which helped to unearth some of the challenges faced by participants. As White and Lowenthal (2011) suggest, the importance of academic literacies required for full participation in HE is often ignored. For them, academic literacy, in the singular form, is '... students' respective exposure to academic discourse and willingness to

learn and employ it' (White and Lowenthal, 2011, p.284). While this is a significant piece of research it differs from a social practices approach to researching academic discourses and discourses in the academy which sees much that goes on in HE as tacit and implicit. Indeed, the phrase 'willingness to learn' suggests that responsibilities once again lie with the individual rather than the academy and in doing ignores the impact of power relations, expectation and experience of life before university echoing deficit approaches towards diversity and difference. Further, the singular pronoun 'it' indicates academic discourse is framed as being relatively homogeneous which I contest.

I saw evidence that some students were unprepared or had been unprepared but no evidence for unwillingness. For instance, at least two participants commuted from Surrey (pseudonym) each day which constituted a four-hour round trip (Fieldnote entry 12/11/2008; James narrative summary 11/11/2008). I move away from White and Lowenthal's (2011) findings as their explanations of mismatches and tacit assumptions do not explicitly acknowledge the role that power plays. I am also concerned with the characterization of 'minority', or 'black' students in HE as the onus is placed on the students and is much less about institutional workings of power. One further concern is that the minority college students are presented in essentialist terms with little acknowledgement of diversity and heterogeneity. White and Lowenthal (2011) continue that the challenges of learning to use academic discourse contribute to minority alienation and in some cases withdrawal from higher education. What does resonate with themes common to this thesis is a sense of student alienation. Their study also contributes to the research literature on the challenges that black students face as they navigate through the unfamiliar environment of the academy which reflects my first research question and resonates throughout much of this thesis.

Mann (2001) defines alienation as 'the estrangement of the learner from what they should be engaged in, namely the subject and process of study itself' (Mann, 2001, p. 8). This definition is later expanded:

By this I mean the experience someone may have in education, by which they feel unable to engage or contribute in ways which are meaningful and productive for the realisation of their own potential and learning requirements. This may include the experience of feeling held back, blocked, inhibited, estranged or isolated from what it is they are learning, and the study practices and learning processes, both individual and social, which are part of their particular learning context... (Mann 2005, p.43).

For some students their identities and lives outside the academy may contribute to a sense of alienation as experiences are tied up not only with institutional power, but also with wider historical contexts of students' lives, their 'historical circumstances' (Lavia and Moore, 2010). Discussions of alienation and a perceived lack of engagement, block or distance are particularly useful as they helped me to make sense of what I saw and heard on many occasions during my time in the field. To recap, alienation and engagement relate to the student experience and therefore the first research question more directly, but at the same time discourses within HE which seem to have consequences for the black student experience.

The sample of studies reviewed focuses on some of the experiences of black students in HE and sums up many of the concerns and motivations for this project such as an interest in the experiences of HE for non-traditional students. They also tie in with the earlier section on deficit orientations towards diversity and difference where those who are different are othered. The research questions introduced in section 1.6 helped me to interrogate powerful discourses influencing the students' experiences of HE, the implications for identity and knowledge making. 'An analysis of who the students are, and who they are becoming' (Thesen 2006, p.175) is an interesting though as yet under-explored aspect of the research literature. According to Thesen (2006), discourse and literacy practices have the power to shape and manipulate university experiences for the student writer and therefore affect the university experience and their ability to negotiate some of the inevitable demands placed upon them. I end the chapter by repeating my research questions for ease of interpretation:

1: How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

2: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

2.11 Chapter summary

The context of the thesis is globalisation, migration and one of on-going change in UK HE due to policies of widening participation which has led to increased institutional student and staff diversity. The chapter begins to make connections between the participants who took part in this ethnographic study and broader issues of globalisation, movements of people and their diasporic identities. I presented what I hope is an anti-essentialist orientation towards culture, diversity and difference which critiques a view of culture along solely anthropological, racial or national lines which previously saw culture as relatively fixed and

homogeneous. Instead I present a view of culture in an increasingly complex world which draws on postmodern and poststructural notions of heterogeneity and change as well as the ‘deterritorialised’ experiences members of a small group have in common at a particular time and place. I also discuss some popular yet what I contend are inadequate responses to an increasingly diverse university sector, and in doing so challenge some of the deficit discourses of widening participation and the ways in which the very students the policy brings to university are at times positioned. It is this critical, situated approach which presents literacy as ideologically driven.

Discourse emerges as significant for the thesis in two ways. First, in relation to power and the discursual construction of the social world. Second, in relation to a social practices approach to literacies as situated language use also important for ethnography. The chapter goes on to illustrate how a number of studies in the field of academic literacies address issues of power, knowledge making, identity and the non-traditional students in the academy and how work in the field informed my thinking and methodological approach. Research relating to the student experiences of HE and issues of ethnicity complete a short section on ‘black’ and ‘minority’ student experiences from which the themes of disengagement and alienation emerge. I also suggested that although research has focussed on some of the literacy practices and research findings on students from culturally diverse backgrounds, there is limited research foregrounding the complex and sometimes competing voices of HE students resident in multicultural Britain.

I argue that critical approaches to academic literacies research in conjunction with research on the black student experience share orientations which have informed the broader social, political and anti-essentialist concerns of this thesis. Reference to institutional power and institutionally-ascribed identities are two ways in which I foreground the complexity of the research context, and my desire to share the experience of eleven non-traditional students with diasporic backgrounds. The section on identity, at a slightly more conceptual level, also seeks to unite poststructural thinking on identity as hybrid and dynamic with thinking framed in postmodern terms as I attempt to grapple with some of the consequences of globalisation and migration on the people I encountered, living and studying in a global city. I hope that this chapter has begun to clarify some of the contextual reasons for the complexity and overlap in the way in which broad theoretical orientations of postmodernism and poststructuralism have been used.

I began the research process with a close alignment to UK academic literacies research as a teacher-researcher in a UK urban university. An in-depth exploration of literature on reading and writing practices was the beginning point for this thesis which builds on writer-oriented approaches to academic literacies in addition to other equally salient themes emerging from a critical review of the literature and data including identity and difference, alienation and power and their significance for discourse *and* social practices. The open-ended nature of the research strategy adopted led to research which moved away from writers and their texts closer towards issues of personal significance for the participants at the time of data collection. Despite this shift in analytical focus, the study foregrounds both institutional discourses and everyday practices which helped to reveal the resources a group of socially, culturally and linguistically diverse university students possess. Thus, the ethnographic lens remains useful for an exploration of tacit practices, hybrid identities and participants as knowers, despite the shift away from an analytical focus on the text they produced. Next, I link these theoretical orientations to ethnography as method and methodology (Lillis 2008) and, in doing so, illustrate how ‘methodology is inextricably intertwined with topic and theoretical perspective’ (Ivanič and Weldon 1999, p.169).

CHAPTER THREE: ETHNOGRAPHY AS METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

As Gee (2005, p.6) points out:

‘First of all, any method always goes with a *theory*. Method and theory cannot be separated. ...’

3.1 Introduction

All qualitative research involves interpretation of some kind and researchers need to be mindful of the implications of their methods, values, biases and decision-making for knowledge construction (Berg 2004; Gibbs, 2007). Throughout the chapter, I argue that methodology is linked to topic, theoretical perspectives and a complex set of beliefs, which have affected the ethnographic framing of the thesis. The chapter draws on a number of ethnographic concepts and themes such as reflexivity, researcher bias and tensions between a realist and anti-realist stance and applies them to the data collection strategy and my approach to data analysis. Rather than developing and presenting a rigid framework, these ethnographic themes constitute my approach to the data collection strategy. One criticism of ethnography from qualitative researches outside the field (for example, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013) is that it lacks methodological rigour. To counter this perception, the chapter includes a detailed discussion of the data collection methods and over-arching methodological approach I adopted.

The chapter builds on the literature review in order to link my approach to the negotiation of academic literacies and knowledge making to ethnographic method more explicitly. I also spent some time documenting the specific methods or ‘empirical tools’ (Lillis 2013, p.81) I used in order to make explicit how and why I collected and analysed the data in the way I did. Blommaert (2010, p.xiv) wrote that as: ‘... We are looking at a world that can no longer be neatly divided into clear and transparent categories, the theoretical paradigms need to be revisited as well’ (Blommaert 2010, p.xiv). This is true for this thesis and I have shown that postmodern thinking about change, mobility and globalisation is relevant as well as poststructuralist thinking on how our interpretations shape the world differently.

3.2 Acknowledging the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge

The modernist paradigm suggests the world is measurable, objective and neutral and is supported by positivist methodologies (Cohen et al. 2000; Gibbs 2007; Holliday, 2011). However, more recently, qualitative and ethnographic research has begun to question the

appropriacy of these methodologies (Gibbs 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Instead, postmodern paradigms see what is labelled as scientific research and enquiry as necessarily subjective and influenced by dominant ideologies and dominant discourses which is why I subscribe to a more interpretative view of social reality. What I mean is that commonly held understandings are influenced by dominant groups and dominant discourses. At the same time I do not reject the existence of a real world that is 'out there', yet want to underscore that it is experienced differently by different people.

My approach to methodology can be framed in poststructuralist terms which sees ways of knowing as mediated through language (Canagarajah, 1997). What is of interest here are accounts which are constituted both by me and by participants based on the view that any version of the world is shaped by the views and experiences of its participants. There isn't one single 'grand narrative' (Lyotard, 1979, p.37), but many truths, which is why I quote Burr who states: '... we should not assume that our ways of understanding are necessarily any better (in terms of being nearer the truth) than others ways' (Burr 1995, p. 4). I accept this position without fully rejecting the realist position and therefore sit in between the relativist position which states that society is entirely socially constructed and a view which maintains that structures such as the family, universities and so forth exist beyond researchers' imaginations. I remain mindful of the view that my interpretation of the world constitutes one out of several possible readings, and is influenced by my motivations and experiences prior to as well as during the project previously outlined in section 1.4. It is for these reasons that I decided to acknowledge my researcher biases and predilections as well as the significance and influence of context from the start. This view of the world as complex, constitutive and influenced by context has shaped my approach to methodology and data analysis, an approach I expand on in this chapter.

Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) text, subtitled principles in practice, guided my approach and one element of their work which emerged as salient is the importance of a reflexive approach. This section addresses some of the inherent tensions between the realism of some ethnographic accounts and the postmodern, anti-realist orientation taken up in chapter two. I take a realist position in the sense that I report accounts of what I saw and heard as well as other people's account of what they saw and did as accurately as possible. At the same time, I acknowledge that my world view necessarily affects everything I write, think and know echoing poststructuralist thinking that my own writing 'is not a transparent medium ... but a construction' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.14).

3.3 Researcher identity and knowledge construction

In the previous chapter, I introduced postmodern perspectives as one means of assisting understandings of increasing and ever complex diversity. This next section builds on how my desire to question some of the accepted understandings of the student experiences of HE has influenced the flavour of this research project. Adopting a reflexive approach, I make my views as explicit as possible as I discuss my research positioning, my teacher-researcher role and, rather more tentatively, the influence of my identity on my relationship with participants.

Kloos (1988) outlines three different epistemological positions for field workers. The first is where the field worker or researcher is seen as neutral and knowledge is located solely in the Other where the presence and influence of the researcher is rarely acknowledged. To the other extreme is a position where the fieldworker's perspectives are seen as unique and knowledge is anchored within that individual only (Kloos 1988) which is a view I reject despite my acknowledgment that emic or insider accounts were a valued resource. For example, during interview, Amina talked of the reasons for the move to Britain:

Her father was a nationalist and had a duty to provide for the poor but was kidnapped and was away from the family for about ten days which triggered the move to Kenya [from Somalia]. Her mother couldn't take any more.
(Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010).

A mid-position, in epistemological terms, is what Kloos refers to as dialectical. Here the field worker, in my case teacher-researcher, is an actor within the setting alongside the participants and the presence of the field worker during the research process and knowledge creation is acknowledged. This dialectical approach, influenced by constructionist thinking suggests that knowledge is bounded and situated within the research setting and sits in contrast to both the positivist position and an entirely emic perspective where the insider account is reified naïvely. At the same time I wish to acknowledge the limits of a wholly constructionist view of the social world as wider contextual issues can be overlooked. This resonates with my experience as my teacher-researcher role in the field has been far from neutral. However, I also wish to emphasise the global and contextual issues which influenced the development of the thesis quite significantly.

An explicit acknowledgement that I am situated in the social world is important. Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) ask us to consciously adopt a situated identity as a researcher in

order to engage dialectically within the setting. For Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) ‘*Dialogue* need not be taken literally to mean a conversation between two parties in practice, it often consists of multiple - even contradictory - voices’ (p.697). So, rather than accepting the positivist position that research biases render field research of this kind invalid, I make explicit the nature of my influences of the researcher and culture being described (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) through fieldnotes and observation notes. It is therefore useful to take up Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) point that observation, rather than being seen as one discrete standalone method, should be viewed as one way in which the researcher interacts with the group being observed. This mutually constitutive relationship with participants in the setting helps to influence and, at the same time, is influenced by participants and researcher through observations and reflections. From this perspective, identities are socially situated and therefore ‘...it would be naïve to rely on participants’ perspectives as data without recognising that that they too are socially-constructed’ (Ivanič and Weldon 1999, p.182) and *constructing*. It is for this reason that I engaged with participants through various data collection methods and I acknowledge that they too engaged with me, at times presenting contradictory interpretations of events. I also acknowledge that outsiders influence insiders and vice versa (Miles et al., 2013), but more than that I accept that my relationship with participants affected my interpretation of the events and issues, the research findings, and ultimately my own knowledge claims with regard to this thesis.

3.4 Acknowledging my researcher bias

The section above helps to illustrate my position that there is no clear single representation of reality but instead a particular construction of reality based on my biases, subjectivities and so forth. For instance, as an insider researcher I had more familiarity with the context of HE as well as the bounded setting as I conceived it, which is unlikely to have been similar to the ways in which participants experienced the setting.

3.4.1 The role of reflexivity

In its broadest terms, reflexivity is the awareness and acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge in the sense that a researcher helps to create the phenomena on which they report (Berg 2004; Burr 1995) because they are part of the social world. The term reflexivity is not always used in the same way by all authors, a practice which fits the view of the social world I have described so far as being contested. I see reflexivity as being made up of the internal conversations that people have in order to explain, justify and interrogate themselves and others in the social world they inhabit, as

described by Patel Stevens (2011). Reflexivity is further ‘... defined as an act of self-reference where examination on action bends back on itself’ (Patel Stevens, 2011, p.184) and can be said to relate to the construction of knowledge, but also more practically to what qualitative researchers *do*.

Gibbs (2007) suggests that qualitative research benefits from and needs ‘a self-critical focus’ (p.92), which I argue is what a reflexive approach to data collection and analysis has to offer. This view of reflexivity is important as it suggests reflexivity is both a theoretical stance to be acknowledged but also one to be practised. It is also a feature of postmodern approaches to research and relates to recent discussions about acknowledging biases and how they inevitably influenced the research strategy because ‘Everything is value-ridden and ideological’ (Canagarajah 2002, p.18). It is therefore important to be as explicit as possible about the position one holds on social, political and educational matters which is what I have attempted. In more practical terms for this thesis ‘acknowledgement’ means the explicit naming of my perspectives and collaborative stance with participants. A similar approach was adopted by Thesen (2006) who suggests that ethnography helps a researcher not only to theorise their role, but also to be open about their research purposes.

3.4.2 Acknowledging ethnocentrism – a form of researcher bias

‘Ethnocentrism is defined as the belief and feeling that one’s culture is best’ (McCurdy et al. 1995, p.10) and in order to manage ethnocentrism, it is important that all qualitative researchers become consciously aware of assumptions and biases during the ethnographic process. Although I cannot control my biases, I have become more aware of them as well as their potential consequences for participants and research outcomes through a reflexive approach to research. Through careful use of fieldnotes and reflections, I attempted to remain aware as much as possible of my own assumptions and biases. In doing so, I acknowledged my ‘naïve realism’, which is ‘the unconscious belief that the way we culturally see the world is actually the way it is’ (McCurdy et al. 1995, p.9). This point is significant because members of other cultural groups, as well as members of those in which I locate myself, may perceive the same behaviours differently and apply different meanings to them. Hence, there is an appropriacy to developing insider perspectives without necessarily viewing insiders as having complete ‘insider authority’ (Lewis and Ketter, 2011, p.136).

3.4.3 The role of emic and etic perspectives in acknowledging research biases

There is no consensus over how to write about or represent the Other. Just as I attempted to valorise my participants' voices I also attempted to bring in my own which may be seen as contradictory. Nevertheless, insider or 'Emic perspectives are central to understanding what is relevant to participants and thus core to understanding what is significant from the very large and empirically unwieldy notion of "context"' (Lillis 2008, p.360). That is to say, one useful means of determining what is and what is not relevant. Participant or insider perspectives and understandings of a cultural group (Lillis 2013) can inform etic or outsider perspectives a researcher may hold and vice versa. At the same time, it has to be recognised that qualitative researchers' etic categories and understandings which develop may differ from those of participants (Coupland and Jaworski, 2009) and it is perhaps inevitable that there are tensions between these two perspectives.

Nevertheless, I maintain there is value in what the insider, or emic perspective, can bring to an ethnographic study particularly in relation to how data is created, categorised and analysed, a view supported by Brice Heath and Street:

The *emic* or locally held perspective of an individual, group, or institution, such as a school, can bring into its knowledge system that which has been established from an *etic* or comparative analysis [italics original] (Brice Heath and Street 2008, p.44).

It is for this reason that I think it is important to, first of all, unearth perspectives which may differ from my own. It is also necessary to acknowledge my own biases in order to try to better understand life experiences and literacy challenges *precisely because* they are different from my own struggles and challenges.

I began the process of revealing some of my own biographical influences on the start and direction of the project in the introductory chapter. I continued to apply the practice of researcher reflexivity to reveal more of how my professional identity as teacher-researcher influenced the process and outcomes of the thesis. For instance, I cannot avoid the influence of my London-based academic background as an undergraduate and later, as a lecturer. With reference to the research aims, I was interested in what occurs at the interface between the dominant academic culture of Northcentral and a small, relatively powerless, group of students. Therefore, I acknowledge that what I write here has been produced in a particular context. In Hall's (1990) words, writing about cultural identity and diaspora: 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific.'

What we say is always “in context”, *positioned* [italics in original]’ (Hall 1990, p.222). It follows that biases or alternative ways of looking at or interpreting the world are not problematic as long as they are based on evidence and justified fully. Issues arise when they remain unacknowledged and therefore as much as possible should be foregrounded, following Holliday (2007).

3.5 My approach to ethnography

As a result of shifts in thinking about the complexity of people who live in the modern world introduced in the previous chapter, there have been a number of changes which have led to an enhanced understanding of:

... what counts as ethnography and ethnographic research, who conducts such research, where and how the research agenda is being pursued and how such research contributes to evolving knowledge based in education and the social sciences (Bloome and Greene 1997, p.181).

Nevertheless, it is still useful to remember that, in the past, ethnographic methods were criticised for descriptions which justified and ignored the potentially colonising effects of research (Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001; Greene and Bloome 1997; LeCompte 2002).

These changes lead to a range of methods referred to as *ethnographic* for which there is no single, commonly agreed definition. Greene and Bloome’s (1997) influential paper points out that it is used to refer to, on the one hand, an academic subject, a set of research methods but also, at the other end of the cline, to a written product or cultural artefact in the sense of ‘an ethnograph’. A number of key writers on ethnography have interpreted the term relatively broadly with reference to a range of qualitative methods, the most characteristic of which is some form of participant observation of routine and lives (for example, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) which I adopted after an examination of Harris and Thorp’s (1999) ethnographic approach to qualitative study in HE. Observation involves entering a social group in order to examine practices and often involves writing about the cultures of others (Greene and Bloome 1997, p.181) as well as the experiences of others. The advantage of an ethnographic approach is its ‘context-sensitive emergent quality’ (Atkinson 1999, p.646) adopted by those who wish to see the world from a point of view different from their own (McCurdy et al., 2005). Following Bloome and Greene (1997, p.181), I see ethnography as methodological enquiry as well as a cluster of empirical tools (Lillis 2013) including the observation of groups.

Indeed, much ethnographic research is concerned with the increasingly complex nature of modern Britain (Harris 2006; Preece 2006; Rampton 1995) and therefore also relevant to the Northcentral context. Here the view that a researcher's gender, class and ethnicity is important because urban, multilingual cultures are more fluid, complex and varied than many of the 'traditional' cultures studied in early ethnographic accounts, also reflects 'the postmodernist turn' (Angrosino and Mayes de Pérez 2000, p. 674). See for example, Street's (2001) publication of ethnographic fieldwork on cross-cultural literacy. The use of ethnographic methods can be further justified as: 'Since the late 1980s and 1990s ethnography has had to find its populations within the multi-layered, multi-ethnic, highly diverse and often contentious groups...' (LeCompte 2002, p.287) within society. The approach I adopted assists social and cultural understandings of literacy and identities in HE as one aspect of contemporary life in an urban, superdiverse centre like London, because it offers the potential for richer alternatives to and interpretations of the deficit approach to non-traditional students' abilities and potential outlined in chapter two.

As well as having relevance for the HE context in Britain, ethnography has been used to study literacies in both academic and non-academic settings in many parts of the world (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Barton et al. 2000; Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans and Dyers, 2005; Brice Heath 1983; Lillis 2001; Street 1993; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006) which is why work undertaking a social practices approaches to literacy has informed my thinking as well as research relating to the student experience in HE. Hall (2002) suggests that a general methodological approach to the investigation of institutional settings can be ethnographic, characterised in many ways by Brice Heath's (1983) classic study of community literacy practices in the home and in school. Also, as discussed in chapter two, through a review of a small selection of research papers (Lillis 2001; Harris and Thorpe 1999) since the 1990s ethnography has been a legitimate means of researching student literacy practices in HE. As a method, it has been viewed as a tool with which to develop more critical and contextually-sensitive perspectives on the experiences and the scope of what is involved in the negotiation of academic literacies.

At this point I need to acknowledge, for a second time, Harris and Thorpe's (1999) early ethnographic study carried out in London which influenced my thinking and interest surrounding methodology quite significantly. The study was carried out with 'non-traditional' rather than 'international' students and looked at 'the effects of learning on different cultural expectations' (Harris and Thorp 1999, p.5). Harris and Thorp's (1999)

approach involved 'both participant observation and ethnographic interviews' (p.5) which I chose to follow by assuming a role of teacher-researcher which I expand on in section 3.4.1. There were of course differences as, for instance, I was unable to embed myself into the programme courses fully due to teaching and family commitments and because of the constraints of, but also desire for, ethical researching discussed later on in this chapter. However, I was able to interview and observe participants in one of their core courses.

In many ways, I followed the traditions characterised by Green and Bloome (1997) and LeCompte (2002) of researching *in education* which is often carried out by teachers, lecturers and university-based researchers. According to Lillis (2008), research concerned with both context and practice is often borne out of a concern for pedagogic practice, a view articulated in previous chapters. During the project, as the ethnographic experiences unfolded, I focussed on the participants as knowledge makers more than the writing they produced and in doing so moving away from more text-oriented approaches (see for example: Harris and Thorpe 1999, Ivanič 1998 2006; Lillis 2001; 2013; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). I made this distinction in chapters one and two due to, in part, the 'untimely' writing practices of participants which took place extremely close to submission deadlines, my perceptions of resistance in others to sharing drafts for research purposes; and in some cases no academic writing at all. That said, I do not see this as problematic as I wanted to remain as responsive to the challenges and practices reported and observed.

3.5.1 Ethnography as method and methodology

Ethnography has been described as '... a form of qualitative research which combines several methods, including interviewing and observation' (Fielding 1993, p.154). This is what Lillis (2001) refers to as ethnography as *methodology* which involves sustained engagement with participants over a period of time, using a broad range of data for collection and analysis and a commitment to seeking out what is relevant to participants (Lillis 2008).

Ethnography as method and methodology has been adopted by those undertaking a social practices approach to researching literacy in educational contexts. Text-oriented approaches to academic literacies, as discussed in chapter two, can adopt ethnography as method which is where the influence of the context of research on aims and methods remains relatively hidden. However, the second methodological approach, according to Lillis (2008), is where researchers make use of multiple data sources characterised by sustained time in the field. I

argued earlier that it is appropriate to take a broad, contextual view of academic literacy which incorporates not only reading and writing at university but the values attached to such practices. As a result, I found this distinction particularly useful given the complexity of HEIs and the diverse cultural context of Northcentral in particular.

To recap, the approach to ethnography in an educational setting I developed was not concerned with the explicit form, function and genres of text as a unit of analysis. Instead I chose to work with a small group of students in order to explore what was involved beyond 'talk around text' (Lillis 2008, p.355). To achieve this, I developed an approach to ethnography as methodology (Lillis 2008) as I explored accounts of both researcher and the researched (Cameron et al., 2002). The next section explains how the data collection methods support my claims of ethnography as sustained research activity for this study. In order to achieve this, I show how varying perspectives on participants' experiences of undergraduate study enabled a more lucid understanding of ways in which participants reshaped themselves through some of the literacy-related practices they engage in during university study.

3.6 Introducing the data collection strategy

I adopted a mixed methods approach which contributed positively to the thesis and following Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) influential work. Several ethnographic methods were adopted, rather than relying solely on observation or on ethnographic interview. These methods not only have a degree of overlap with previous language and literacy research adopting ethnographic approaches in university settings (for example, Canagarajah 1993; 1997; Harris and Thorp 1999; Hermerschmidt 1999; Preece 2006; Thesen and van Pletzen 2006), but were selected because such interventions were likely to be perceived as part of the day-to-day experiences of student life at university by participants and those around them. My position is that the reflexive, anti-essentialist ethnographic approach I outlined has clear application to academic literacies methodology as including an understanding of practice, which has helped me to conceptualise how identity and identification are linked with discourse.

Class observations and individual interviews emerged as the more significant parts of the qualitative research strategy, although the project remained firmly committed to a multi-methods approach associated with ethnographic methodology. The remainder of this section

addresses the methods for data collection displayed in Figure 3.1 below and how each method contributed towards the overall strategy. Indeed, the deliberate visual overlap across the oval shapes illustrates my attempts to depict the concurrent, organic and sometimes messy nature of the process.

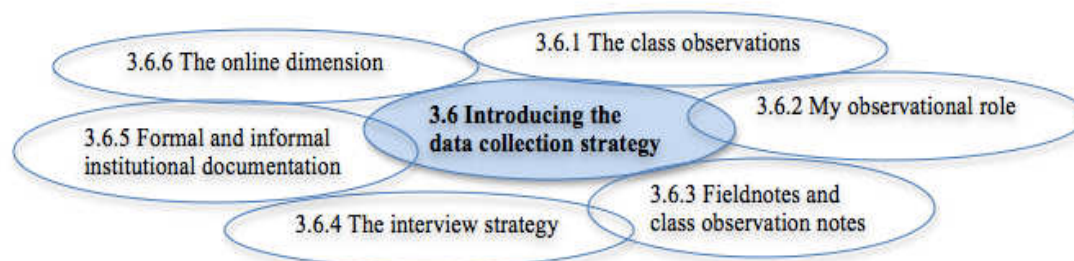


Figure 3.1: Ethnographic data collection methods

3.6.1 The class observations: what I did

Observation is a significant part of the ethnographic brief. It was adopted as a key part of this research strategy following a number of key related academic literacy studies (for example, Canagarajah 2002; Harris and Thorp 1999; Hermerschmidt 1999; Preece 2006; Thesen 2006). This section deals with the centrality of observation to ethnographic method and reflects the significance of lectures to the student experience of academic literacies (Thesen, 2006). Observation is significant for understanding practice in the sense of examining:

... micro-macro relationships inside and outside classrooms; how ways of knowing, being and doing are constructed in classrooms; and how academic and social identities are socially constructed ... (Rex and Green 2010, p.576).

Observation can be useful for exploring the cultural identities of those we are studying by helping the researcher to form a 'thick description' (Geertz 1993, p.7) by 'Going into a social situation and looking ...' (Angrosino and Mays de Pérez 2000, p.634). Indeed, direct participation of this kind is the basis of ethnographic method, involves prolonged observation of a group or culture, 'looking as well as listening' (Creswell 1998; Lillis 2008; Silverman 1993; Tedlock 2003) and note-taking.

After discussions with my supervisor, I decided on a research strategy which involved two groups for comparison as a beginning stage of the data collection process. Classes for observation were selected after advice and guidance from the course leader for the year three

applied social science dissertation course (pseudonym) I worked with. The lecturer had been supportive of the project and suggested his own year three class for observation. He also suggested contacting one of the first year applied social science lecturers. I later learnt that the two lecturers occupied adjacent offices in the City Hall Building (see Figure 3.4). One of the strengths of this approach was that both the first year and third year courses observed addressed issues of social exclusion and social policy. We have already seen from the literature in chapter two that HE policy and issues of engagement, resistance and alienation emerge as significant for the experiences of some under-represented groups in UK HE. For this study, first year and third year courses from the same programme were selected and the rationale for this was that it would be likely that one would emerge as the more fruitful group to work with in terms of participant profile and willingness to participate. What actually happened was more complex than planned and unpredictable as I became immersed in the cultures of the classrooms through weekly observation of lectures and seminars.

I wanted to understand more about the students enrolled on the courses and therefore felt that interviews away from these cultural encounters and knowledge making activity of lecturers and seminars alone would not be sufficient to address the research questions in any meaningful way. Through attending lectures and seminars amongst participants, I was in a better position to develop an insider perspective (Hamersley and Atkinson 1995; Roberts 1994) which in turn helped me to assess inferences made from observations (Burgess 1985 in Hamersley and Atkinson 1995). I fall short of being able to claim that I was ever able to ‘... interpret the world in the same way as they do,’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.8) given my teacher-researcher role, status and inherent power differentials. I think this would be a naïve claim on my part. Yet, after many hours of observation, writing and reflection, I was able to interpret behaviours with greater confidence than if I had not interacted with participants in a natural setting. This was especially important as observation helped me to investigate participants’ identities, their relationship with Northcentral as well as how participants not only approached writing and other texts produced but also participated in university life.

Non-participant observation, or non-interventionist observation, has at times been overshadowed by researchers in favour of participant observation which has been more widely recognised as a method within social research, suggest Adler and Adler (1994). However, participant observation where a group of learners becomes the subject of the ethnographic study was not considered an option by Northcentral’s Ethics Committee as it

was felt students would not have had the choice to opt out. This is why I adopted the role I did in order to understand and know the culture of the group under study (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). A second more practical purpose of the observation was to make contact with students to interview (Harris and Thorp 1999) who later became key participants. Furthermore, observation contributed towards my understanding of why participants responded in the way they did during interview as well as provided an enhanced understanding of their experiences of being at university.

3.6.2 My observational role

Focussing on the nature of observation theoretically, there are four ways in which researchers can occupy the field (Gold 1957; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995):

These [researcher roles] range from the complete participant at one extreme to the complete observer at the other. Between these, but nearer the former, is the participant-as-observer; nearer the latter is the observer-as-participant (Gold 1958, p.217).

Although officially I was a ‘complete observer’ I reject the existence of this role as I do not see the researcher role as neutral, nor could I ever have been an observer only as I was a member of staff with a professional history, and previous contact with lecturer B as well as some of the year three participants. Indeed, at times, I was more than a complete ‘observer as participant’ due to lengthy and sustained class observations as well as the cyclical nature of the qualitative interviews conducted. My role as ‘participant-as-observer’, or participant observer, during lectures and seminars more accurately reflects how my role developed over time and there is some evidence to indicate that my role as participant observer altered behaviour, events and interaction. For example, during one observation the lecturer asked me a question directly in front of the class: ‘*Do you know Jack London?*’ (Class observation five, year one 09/12/2008) with reference to the author. So, although I found it appropriate to modify my role according to the nature of interaction during observation within the group and individuals, in practice this was often dictated by participants, reflecting the dialectical nature of research (Kloos, 1988). Indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson claim ‘Everyone is a participant observer’ (1995, p.125).

As a novice researcher observing groups for the first time, I drew on Spradley’s (1980, p.78) checklist as a resource to help to make sense of the immediate context of observation and took notes accordingly. For instance, in my case the physical ‘space’ was the classroom plus

other research sites; the ‘actors’ or the people involved were the lecturers and students. ‘Practices’ were categorised as a set of related, routine activities that participants carried out. The ‘objects’ were ‘the physical things present that seem to be significant, such as laptops, chairs and clothing. Some of the single acts or actions that people did emerged as significant such as greeting each other and leaving the room unannounced (Fieldnotes, 02/12/2008). ‘Time’ and ‘goals’ were significant in as much as they related to the activities people were trying to accomplish such as organising and delivering presentations and producing written assignments. ‘Feelings’, or ‘the emotions felt and expressed’ (Spradley 1980 p.78), such as embarrassment, anger and discomfort were also observed and described. An example of this is when I wrote ‘I squirm’ (Class observation eight, year one) in response to an exchange which caused embarrassment and discomfort. In summary, in the early stages of observation, I adapted Spradley’s (1980) checklist for ethnographic observation.

3.6.3 Fieldnotes and class observation notes

The systematic construction of fieldnotes remains a major method in qualitative social research and for this reason they are also a significant part of the core data collection strategy. Fieldnotes are ‘the traditional means in ethnography for recording observational data’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.175) and can be used to record observations after interviews as well as to make a permanent record of participant observation after an event or social action. Fielding (1993) suggests that writing full fieldnotes enables researchers to maintain a systematic perspective. Nevertheless, I maintain that the production of effective and ‘full’ fieldnotes is necessarily a selective and interpretive process as not every utterance, action or interaction in a lecture, seminar or social gathering can be observed or transcribed.

That said, I created two types of fieldnotes which aimed to document observations as fully as possible which allowed for the emergence of salient events, action or comments from participants as well as reported interactions with other significant actors with whom they interacted. The first type are ‘*class observation notes*’ (see Appendix Two for samples) and the second type I refer to as ‘*fieldnotes*’. Although both types were created systematically as part of the research strategy, there were differences. For class observation notes, I recorded the proceedings of lectures and seminars as well as focussed on the behaviour and interactions of individual speakers. I took verbatim notes of speech where possible and especially when I felt it was significant. I also added contextual information and descriptions of non-verbal or extra-linguistic behaviour, supporting conceptualisations of literacy practices involving the non-linguistic as well as the linguistic. Following Hammersley and

Atkinson (1995), verbatim speech was indicated by quotation marks while other observational comments were placed in square brackets. Themes emerging from my own experiences and thinking were written down during observation. This format allowed space for the documentation of ‘observable’ data on the left hand side of the page and for a more reflexive account of my experiences and observation in the classroom on the right hand side of the page, which also contributed to my word-processed fieldnotes. This practice ensured a clear separation of observation from my additional commentary.

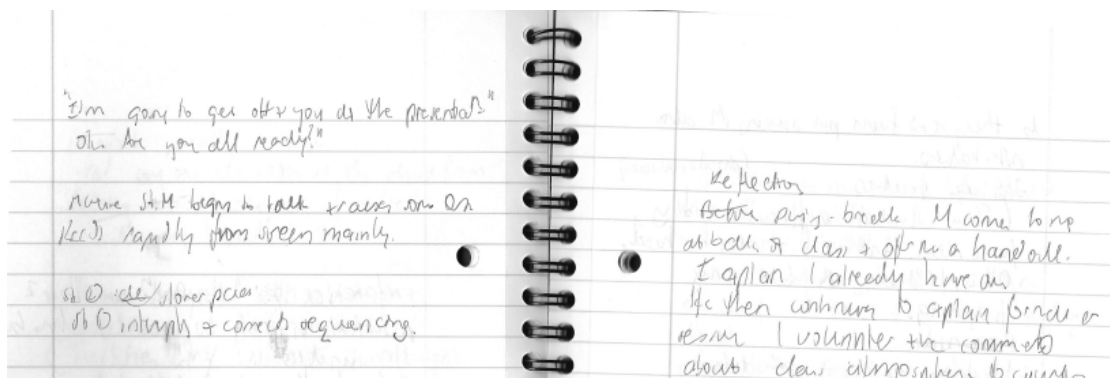


Figure 3.2: Image of class observation fieldnotes

Hand-written notes made during observations, as can be seen from Figure 3.2 above, were word-processed as soon as possible after each class. The purpose of this lengthy process was to identify and develop themes emerging which would feed into subsequent observations and interviews and also inform data analysis referred to as analysis in action (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). An example of this was when I interviewed Mary who reported that financially moving house was hard and at one stage she and her daughter lived in a single room for several weeks (Mary, narrative summary 09/12/2008). This helped me to make sense of class behaviour more sensitively. Similarly, Vera’s reference to her own language use as ‘local English or pidgin’ and being ‘unable to complete her education in Liberia because of the war’ (Vera, narrative summary 09/12/2008) was valuable when assessing classroom discourse and comments about life before Britain.

In order to achieve the richness and quality of notes required, a certain amount of note-taking in the field needed to occur unobtrusively. For instance, I tended to write when the students did and listened when they did during class observation. This behaviour was less problematic in first year lectures where my role moved along a cline towards, at times, a less prominent role of non-participant observer (Gold 1958; Hornsby-Smith 1993), as I was not visible to all students in the lecture room at all times. On the other hand, where interaction

was more intimate and less formal, the documentation of research activity had to take place once interaction had ended and was therefore more reliant on memory.

I called the second type of notes *fieldnotes*. Whilst in the field, later on in same the day, following Swann's (1994, p.32) advice, or during the days that followed, I added what I refer to as *fieldnote entries* to a research diary as and when they occurred to me which I also word processed at a later stage. These entries were produced systematically although they were less predictable in frequency, content or length as each entry reflected my ideas, reflections and significant thoughts as and when they occurred. However, unlike the class observation notes, I chose not to append or scan them due to the personal nature of reflections and sensitive information written about individuals and the institution. I felt that to anonymise them sufficiently would render them unreadable, instead adopting a 'for your eyes only' approach following Gibbs (2007, p.29). In Hammersley and Atkinson's words, they are 'highly personal and private documents' (1995, p.176).

This practice of documenting the field was helpful as there was some interaction with participants which did not fit comfortably into the category of either class observation or interview. This was in contrast to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who classify such forms of interaction as interviews: '...spontaneous informal conversation in places that are being used for other purposes...' (p.139) I acknowledge instead that this is a grey area and the division is not always obvious. In summary, for the purposes of this study, observation notes and research diary fieldnote entries, were a useful link between observation and other forms of data collection and recording within the setting. I have also begun to demonstrate how my researcher role was dynamic and changed as I moved across the various sites of data collection (Table 3.2) in the field and as my role shifted from a non-participant to a more participatory role. Fieldnotes and observation notes were an essential dimension to the collection of rich data through which meanings and interconnected themes emerged.

3.6.4 The interview strategy

One aim of ethnography as methodology outlined earlier is to support an understanding of the insider perspective (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Roberts 1994) of the group identified in the research setting. Roberts (1994) suggests that:

The insider perspective is achieved through extended informal interviews or ethnographic conversations in which informants are encouraged to describe and account for the cultural practices of their day to day lives (Roberts 1994, p.16).

What I have conceptualised as interview constitutes a complex, yet productive, part of the data collection strategy which is one reason why I had chosen to write about individual and group interview separately. I start by providing an overview of the general approach to interviewing I adopted. I then detail how I conducted interviews drawing on a classification of the various types of interview which developed whilst in the field. This is followed by an explanation of the participant validation process.

Interviews help to bridge the gap between more traditional ethnographic approaches and methods of research common to applied linguistics (Ivanič and Weldon 1999). They were built into the data collection strategy in order to assist me in gathering ‘rich, detailed data directly from participants’ (Sherman Heyl 2001, p.369) about their pasts; about their perceptions of academic culture they find themselves in; and also to explore writing and reading practices from their perspectives over time. ‘Interviews in ethnographic research can range from spontaneous, informal conversations’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.139) in settings used primarily for other purposes where the researcher’s role of interviewer and participant observer is blurred, to more formal pre-arranged private meetings. However, as explained in the previous section, I did not treat spontaneous, informal conversations as interview as they were not digitally recorded. Also, I did not prepare questions or prompts for exploration with participants, which occurred routinely before interviews took place.

Interviews contribute to an in-depth understanding of participants’ communicative practices and also contributed to insights into group behaviour. Overall, they serve as a powerful narrative form for examining the intersection between the individual and the group (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The interview strategy was made up of elements which were structured and elements which were more akin to unstructured social interaction by both researcher and participants following Hammersley and Atkinson (1995):

Ethnographers do not usually decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and do not ask each interviewee exactly the same questions, though they will usually enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.152).

In my case some of the interviews became 'long conversations' (Lillis 2008, p.362) with a number of participant interviews lasting 45-60 minutes. They were also a useful way of gaining a sense of who was being observed in seminars and lectures and who the group of participants were. They are an important part of the suite of multiple data gathering methods and complement participant observation. As Hammersley and Atkinson indicate: 'What people say in interviews can lead us to see things differently in observation' (1995, p.132). The reverse is true in that what is said may confirm deductions made on the basis of observation. They were also organised to generate further lines of enquiry to be explored in subsequent interviews.

Harris and Thorp (1999) used an open-ended questioning technique for their ethnographic approach to interviewing university students which I adopted as a start point for questioning here. I also endeavoured to display interest without appearing intrusive or judgmental, which is important when the aim of the research is to explore a group of students in order to gain insider perspectives. Once again, I do not claim to be neutral in my responses and interactions with participants. Block (2000) cautions against always taking interviewees reports at face value as they contain elements of self-presentation, representation and co-construction of meaning. The same is true of comments and questioning from researchers. What this meant in practice was that, when, and if appropriate, indirect and open-ended questioning was used to encourage more reticent participants to reveal a range of negative as well as positive attitudes, beliefs or experiences, for example: '*How do you think other students feel about that?*' In doing so, they serve as a powerful narrative form for examining the intersection between the individual and the group (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

The interviews I conducted can be characterised as less structured rather than unstructured as there was a purpose in mind to the conversations which developed. The interview questions and prompts that follow show how interviews were guided. My position is close to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who claim that interviews are never simply conversations, because the ethnographer has a research agenda and must maintain a certain amount of control over them.

I now describe the different types of interviews conducted which were informed and shaped by me as teacher-researcher and by participants. Data collection was purposefully open-ended and consequently took a variety of forms which I have summarised in the table below.

Table 3.1: Features of the different types of interview

Type one	Type two	Type three	Type four
Biographical interview	Follow-up interview	Writing practice interview	Talk around text interview
early exploration	for participant validation purposes	with prepared prompts for further exploration	text selected by participants, recorded as appropriate only

However, one feature of the interviews to be acknowledged, which reflected the thesis focus as a whole, is that the majority of the interviews as they evolved could be categorised as writer or participant-oriented and therefore fit types one to three more readily.

3.6.4.1 Biographical interviews (type one)

Firstly, what I call biographical interviews were organised to gain an insight into the individuals that make up the cultural group, and secondly, to generate further lines of enquiry to be picked up in subsequent group and individual interviews. A further aim of these initial interviews was to ‘...capture the historical trajectories of speakers’ (Mufwene 2010, p. xii). Individual interviews were conducted in my office (site 2, Table 3.2) and participants were asked to sign a second consent form (Appendix three) giving me permission to record them digitally and to use the data captured for research purposes.

The interview questions below were used to direct the initial biographical interview while, at the same time, allowing participants a sense of agency during the process. Giddens (1991) relates ‘self identity’ to an individual biography which he sees as continually integrating events in the world and therefore tying in with a dialogic nature of defining and negotiating who we are and how we are represented. The first six questions were used to facilitate exploration of the identities and biographies of the participants. Questions eight to twelve were adapted from Thorp and Harris (1999, p.6) in order to explore the experiences of participants during their time at Northcentral as well as beyond Northcentral.

Biographical interview guide (type one)

1. I'd like to start by finding out a little bit about you. Who you are and where you've come from?
2. Why Northcentral University?
3. Why applied social science (or other major)?
4. Why social inclusion/social policy?
5. How do you feel about some of the subjects and topics under discussion?
6. How is Northcentral for you?
7. What assignment are you working on at the moment? How's that going?
8. What has stood out for you during the last week or so?
9. What sort of day have you had so far?
10. When you talk to your friends about the course, what do you say?
11. And your family? What do you tell them about the course?
12. When you look back over the weeks [year] since September, what stands out for you?
13. How's the course going? Is there anything else you'd like to say?

It must be stressed at this point that these questions were used in a responsive manner with each participant and as a result, questions were also adapted, paced differently or skipped according to the responses from participants. For example, questions eight and nine were sometimes prioritised to make them feel at ease before addressing issues of text production or alternatively challenges and opportunities.

3.6.4.2 Constructing the narrative summaries and validating the process (type two)

Subsequent follow-up interviews (type two) were also used as a means of gaining participant validation for the narrative summaries and as a way of exploring meanings, experiences and changes relating to the course, texts and writing practices over the months of data collection. Participants' summaries comprised a valuable and valued part of the strategy. After the recorded type one interviews took place, I transcribed, retold and reconstructed the participants' stories to provide a biographical account (see Appendix four) of what they chose to reveal and how they chose to respond to open questioning of any given topic. This section focuses on the construction of narrative summaries which use '...a participant's own words from interview transcripts to describe experience over an extended period of time' (Miles et al., 2013, p.185).

The process became a part of the data collection strategy I particularly valued and in many ways characterised my sustained time in the field. Here are a few words on the process I adopted. I digitally recorded the first interview (type one), wrote an account and then invited participants back for a follow-up interview (type two). Following Guerra (2009, p.1652), when writing and reconstructing narratives, I edited for grammar where necessary in order to

prioritise content over form. At times, it was also necessary to reorganise ideas that were repetitious and which I felt may have impeded interpretation and knowledge making or indeed could have made participants feel uncomfortable in any way. I also tended to highlight sections of the recording I had been unable to interpret due to poor recording quality. At the start of the second interview, I explained the purpose of the validation process, and then invited participants to read the transcript I had created based on the recording of the previous interview. I told participants to take their time and that they had as much time as they needed to read what I had written. I then asked for clarification of words and phrases I had highlighted or underlined because: they were unfamiliar; I did not understand their significance; or the recording itself was unclear due to background noise and so on. As an example, I interviewed Kate on 20/03/2010 and after producing a written account, we met for a second time on 27/04/2010. I underlined the object of the statement, people, for further discussion:

... most of the time she does not have time to meet with people ...
(Kate, 20/03/2010)

During our second meeting, Kate explained that she meant she did not always have time to meet lecturers, her fellow students and expanded further adding that she was *supported* by lecturers, two students, her Mum and her partner.

In some instances, I prepared a set of prompts (See Figure 3.3 below), or guides (King, 2004), sometimes hand-written on a 'Post it' note, for further exploration and also asked participants how they felt reading after the narrative account. As I transcribed I used second person pronouns in order to distance myself from the texts so that what I wrote remained their words as far as possible, following Gibbs (2007). The prompts were used for meaningful exploration of identity construction and themes emerging from the experiences and understandings of the requirements of the community of practice into which they had entered.

Here is an example of notes created as prompts for a follow-up session:

Notes for interview/tutorial (2) - struggling with course work since last month (Nov) - decided to be open rather than get upset – worried - nervous at start of course - support from study group - T Blair analysis of speech in progress? - citizenship feedback - pidgin, S.E., Norwegian - When course over? Where?
--

Notes interview tutorial (3)
 (1) changes from area studies with French to areas studies with app social science (joint honours only)
 (2) conclusions finding of assignment-
 (3) “the more I write, the more things come in my head”
 cohesion, coherence and word limit
 word limit without losing sense
 (4) - feedback –ve;
 2 assignments, politics, written in own words
 lecturer, books, journals
 Why? How? Which represents what you are thinking?
 - Which more comfortable to you?
 (6) Talking about politics: “you need to make people know”
 At this stage I can't convince them
 (7) – and interview ‘I do find myself developing ‘
 expand – language, linguistically, socially, intellectually

Figure 3.3: Sample prompt notes

I am not claiming that accounts of participants’ experiences are neutral or value-free, rather that participants were free to comment verbally or annotate what they felt was significant to them, including points of inaccuracy. This research activity was also a way of gaining feedback (Miles et al., 2013) on my own interpretations. More than this, the process fed into the broader research strategy and as explained above the first interview became the basis for the second along with my observation notes, fieldnotes and experiences. The narrative summaries were used for shared reflection with participants as well as my own reflection on action. These measures provided a genuine reason for a follow-up interview whatever specific form it took. While acknowledging the role of power in research interviews, I aimed to provide a space for participants to retell their stories. It was also common with Mary and Vera in particular for their most recent experiences to lead on to discussion topics of their choosing, irrespective of what I envisaged we might talk about. In these cases, the prompts prepared were discarded because they were less pertinent than the conversations which developed.

3.6.4.3 Writing practice and talk around text interviews (type three and type four)

Practice is important conceptually as well as a methodologically as a way of unearthing practices in the sense of repeated, routine everyday experiences, events and actions. It helps the analytic knowledge making process to make sense of what people do habitually, and is useful to help make sense of participants’ perspectives. The project developed organically in the field following the relatively open and ethnographic nature of the research. Interview type three and four are introduced in the same section because both types (see Table 3.1) focussed on what participants did with texts and how they felt as writers more directly than other types and styles of interviewing I adopted.

Follow-up interview guide

What's communication like here?

- Reading and writing at university
- Language used (academic discourse, course terminology)
- How do you feel about some of the subjects and topics under discussion?
- What assignment are you working on at the moment? How's that going?

To recap slightly, according to Maybin (2000), the New Literacy Studies began to conceptualise literacy in terms of social events and practices which meant that particular attention is given to people's language use around texts, how this is culturally determined and the meanings and values attached to it. Type three interview tended to focus on conversations, discussions and open questioning surrounding what participants did and were doing with texts at the time of data collection. In these instances, interviews were either much more open-ended in ethnographic terms which meant that they were more like informal conversations or were characterised by talk around text of the participants' choice and in this respect had overlap with what I refer to as type four interviews in Table 3.1. This often related to a written assignment they were drafting, an academic text they were reading and thinking about, but not necessarily a piece of text produced by participants. These interviews were recorded.

Type four interviews were student led and therefore only recorded when I felt this research activity did not interfere with proceedings. Student writing was saved electronically or a hard copy stored as and when it emerged as salient for participants. For example, participants who had already signed a consent form and arranged a tutorial (type four interview) because a deadline was due were not always recorded even though they may have been happy for me to do so. Instead, student writing of participants' choice was used as a tool to talk about writing and other literacy-related practices as a means of focussing discussions on what emerged as significant for participants. I planned for the open nature of the interviews to make participants feel at ease so that they would be more likely to set the agenda engendering not only insider perspectives on the immediate research setting, but also on the broader issues of text production and how participants felt about it. For example, Fred remembered that 'the tutor commented that some of the group were writing like journalists ...' (Narrative summary, 13/01/2009). Mustapha noted that that the English style of writing was different to French (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008); whereas Kate reported she did not write differently for different subject areas as for her writing was about an emotional connection to a topic (Narrative summary, 23/02/2010).

3.6.4.4 The group interviews

Group interviews were treated differently as explained in the next section. In addition to individual interviews, a small number of group interviews took place; see phase three, Table 3.3. The reason for this was to contribute further to the ethnographic methodology as I attempted to create multiple, deep perspectives on participants. For example, Mona was observed in classes (5/11/08 and 19/11/08), interviewed individually (19/11/2009; 17/03/10; 23/03/10) and interviewed as a group member (19/11/08) across two academic years. Second, group interviews also engendered the exploration of the intersection between the individual and the group; and third, they became part of the mixed methods approach to help reveal strategies for communication within the group, which may also contribute to an understanding of the group as it was constituted at that time.

Group interviews were recorded digitally and referred to as parallel sessions and research sessions in correspondence with participants and lecturers in order to distinguish them from the seminars and lectures I observed. There were fewer group interviews than the individual sessions as they proved difficult to organise. The four group interviews (19/11/2009; 10/02/2009; 24/02/2009 and 19/11/2010) were not transcribed or rewritten as a matter of course as it was not my intention to seek participant validation for these encounters although they proved to be a rich source of data for cross-referencing purposes. In limited cases, data from the group interviews were drawn on during individual interviews. For example, for Mona's biographical history I summarised details revealed during the group interview the same way as for individual narrative accounts. This was to provide data for individual interview discussion while at the same time recognising that there is no such thing as an objective, neutral transcription. Group interview data have been stored digitally and there is reference to them in the fieldnotes:

I make notes from the group interview I had with Mona in Nov 2008 and the research tutorial in March 2009. This takes me 5-6 hours and I run out of time to type up these notes in narrative form. Instead, I pick out themes and formulate questions to ask her when we meet the following day. I plan to type up at later stage as I have an intensive week of 4-5 possible interviews coming up.

(Fieldnotes, 22/03/2010)

I provided participants with some initial guidance through the open-ended questioning (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3). The strength of this approach was that the informal, participant-led nature of the interviews provided an opportunity for me to observe group interaction, whilst taking a much less vocal role. Like the individual interviews these sessions were an

opportunity to explore student experiences and how they engaged in literary-related practices.

3.6.4.5 What actually took place

At the project planning stage, I had envisaged exploring a range of writing produced by participants, *with* participants. However, I found that in some cases, due to untimely writing, and in others a reticence to share, a necessary shift occurred away from the texts students were reading and creating, again reflecting the open ended nature of the research process. As a result, there were fewer type four interviews than anticipated. This was unproblematic in the sense that there was never any desire to carry out textual analysis quite separately from the participant as writer as this type of research activity would not have contributed to the fulfilment of the research aims or indeed to the commitment to empowering research (Cameron et al., 1992). I was more interested in the reported, observed and shared experiences of the writer in the setting. That said, the lack of drafts presented for discussion during student-led tutorial interviews was unexpected as this practice formed a significant part of my professional role and research aims at the time, where talk around text (Lillis, 2013) was a daily occurrence. However, what did occur was a discussion of lecturer expectations, interpretations of assignment guidelines and possible approaches to text production, participants could potentially adopt. This practice is illustrated in the short extract which follows:

Vera and VO then talk about how she might approach this new citizenship assignment on forced marriages.
(Vera, narrative summary, 27/01/2009)

As a result of my sustained engagement, the conversations which developed proved useful for the analysis of literacy practices and provided some evidence of students' reshaping of ideas and approaches. At times, conversations more closely typified literacy events, defined as discrete, observable happenings or behaviour involving texts. According to Brice Heath (1983) and Street (1984; 1993), repetitive activities involving a text can be a useful beginning point for exploring literacy. To clarify, type three and type four interviews formed part of the research strategy in as much as they involved me working with and listening to students talking about their writing.

What took place during these encounters was also more difficult to categorise according to the different types of interviews summarised in Table 3.1. It was not unusual for a discussion

of a narrative summary (type two), a discussion of significant critical experiences (Nombo 2006) affecting participation and engagement (type one) *and* a discussion of writing practices sometimes with and sometimes without texts present (type three and four) in addition to the narrative created in the field to occur in the same meeting. This is an example of what I mean by open-ended, participant-led research and why I claim that data generated are co-constructed by researcher and participant with different worldviews, understandings, agendas and interpretative positions. The construction of the narrative summaries (Appendix four) are one example of text co-constructed with participants which proved a significant data source and are consequently referred to in data chapters, hence the detailed account here.

3.6.4.6 Summing up the interview process

The direction and nature of this thesis has been influenced by the different types of interview I have characterised in this section. All interview types were similar in that they were confidential, ethical, informal and participant led. There was also a greater degree of overlap and responsiveness across all the different interview types than the sub-headings suggest. However, there were some differences. The exploratory biographical interviews, follow-up interviews and writing practices interviews were digitally recorded. Interview type four was not recorded as interviews which fell into this category were much more participant driven and for this reason fieldnotes were created after the event. Group sessions followed the format for type one and type three interviews. The influence of researcher interpretation cannot be avoided which is one reason why key participants were invited back for a second interview to comment on the narrative summary constructed on the basis of their accounts. Thus, observation, interviewing and the construction of narratives provided the opportunity for the creation of rich and varied evidence of how students experienced the setting, their relationship with fellow students and faculty, their reporting of how their literacy practices changed as well as the influences of institutional practices and processes on participants. These areas of exploration are reflected in the research questions and interview prompts as the same exploratory questions were used as a basis for questioning for both individual and group interviews. In fact, data gathered from all interviews proved extremely rich and contributed to the research strategy.

3.6.5 Formal and informal institutional documentation

Woodside-Jiron (2011) makes the distinction between informal documentation such as ‘private correspondence’ and formal documentation such as ‘policy documents’. For this thesis the definition of formal documentation has been extended to include any written text or stretch of discourse which would have been produced irrespective of the project. This definition, therefore, includes institutionally ratified documentation such as course and programme handbooks. Handbooks, which contained the timetable, contact weeks and dates, learning outcomes, details of formative and summative assessments, coursework deadlines and weekly topics and aims, were collected and stored because of their connection to observational and interview data. Close reading of formal documentation was necessary in order to make sense of the institutional setting I entered, the significance of such texts and how participants engaged with and interpreted them. Course Guides and Course reader booklets, cross-referenced in the observation notes produced, were supplied generously by both the lecturers observed. Additionally, I received all class handouts distributed during observation which included: photocopies of PowerPoint slides, additional reading material, amendments to assignments and changes to the timetable which was especially pertinent for class one (see Table 3.4). Documentation of this kind has been filed, but has not been reproduced within this thesis due to issues of anonymity.

This activity of mutual distribution and collection made me feel and behave like an ‘observer as participant’ more than a detached observer as noted earlier in 3.4.1. An example of this is when I decided to read *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair over the Christmas holidays, a book about the experiences of Lithuanian immigrants working in the meat packing industry in the US in the early twentieth century. The novel was on the course’s course reading list (see Course Guide, p.4) and was recommended by Lecturer B. I found it a depressing, hopeless read about poverty, exploitation and social exclusion, but also at the same time felt compelled to read it to gain a sense of what the group was undertaking.

On a lighter note, during interview type three and four in particular, assignment briefs as well as assessment criteria often located within course guides were a valuable resource. This form of documentation enhanced my cross-referencing, and helped me to understand and to interpret talk around writing practices and their potential impact on participant identities.

Their collection and subsequent reading and re-reading aided the development of a thick description and contributed to a sense of interrelated experiences and connections amongst the group, all of which informed data analyses and contributed to analysis in and on action (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

3.6.6 The online dimension to data collection: emails, text messages and the VLE

As teaching through what were known as ‘e-tutorials’ formed an important part of my teacher identity at the time of data collection, I was keen to develop online communication with participants using email as an integral part of the research strategy. Returning to Woodside and Jiron’s (2011) distinction once again, less formal ‘private correspondence’ was produced during my time in the field as a direct result of my intervention. Email and text messaging had the potential to strengthen the research strategy as communication could be initiated and developed by participants as much as by me, further contributing to an empowering research strategy (Cameron et al., 1992). Initially, I viewed emails and text messages produced by participants as a potentially useful way of working with the group in order to stimulate thinking about emerging academic practices and changes to identities. However, I found that participants often chose to use this medium over phone calls to confirm meetings which the following fieldnote entry illustrates:

I log on this morning and there is an email from Mary who confirms a meeting next week.
(Fieldnotes, 11/11/2009)

A second example of the role of email was when I missed the start of a morning’s observation and I apologised to lecturer A by email. Here is the lecturer response to a message I sent:

Hello Victoria
At least Fred came to the lecture and said he liked it after I asked him a very determined way!!!
The group presentations were fine.
See you next week. xxx.
(Email, February, 2009)

I suggest the example provides additional evidence to support my claim that I was temporarily emerged in the cultural group. I also used email more formally to communicate with participants via anonymised distribution lists.

To contribute further to the research aims and to complement the use of emails and texts, plans for an online discussion forum were built into the strategy using the University's VLE. I considered an online dimension to the project important as it reflected the predominant way in which staff communicated with students, even full-time students. However, this was more problematic than I had originally anticipated. Ethically, messages had to be anonymous to avoid colleagues with site administrator roles being able to read posts to discussion boards. Anonymity could have been guaranteed technically, but ethically I felt it was important to have some sense of who was posting messages in order to respond appropriately. I also needed to know the identity of writers for data analysis purposes. Despite the obstacles I encountered, I wanted to leave the opportunity for this form of communication with participants to develop naturally once I became more established in the field as it seemed in keeping with the ethnographic research strategy. Additional reflections on my attempts to integrate an online dimension to the research strategy can be found in Appendix Five.

This rather lengthy section details the data collection methods which I suggest enabled the creation of a sufficient range and depth of interconnected data in keeping with ethnographic research in academic literacies. I further illustrate how I adapted and adopted ethnographic methodology to address the desire for ethical researching *with* participants. Data collection methods also support why I claim I had access to multiple perspectives on participant experiences enabling a greater appreciation of what undergraduate study was like for them. There remained throughout an underlying concern with a group of non-traditional students' experiences of Northcentral attention to the negotiation of literacy practices, power and identity as indicated by the two research questions. Class observations and the narrative summaries constructed as a result of interviews emerge as the more significant data collection methods.

3.7 Revealing the research setting

... careful attention needs to be paid to observing and making sense of the contexts in which reading and writing activities take place and people's perspectives on these (Lillis 2013, p.80).

Locating a project within a setting and context is an essential early stage in the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000; Holliday 2002; Layder 1993). Chapter one introduced the context of this thesis, not only in terms of its linguistic, cultural and social diversity, but one which has undergone significant and rapid change in recent years. This

next section focuses more narrowly on the research setting in order that discussions and analyses of cultural and social phenomena can be firmly and meaningfully located within it. As a consequence, I present Northcentral University, which at the time of data collection was my place of work, and the site of my research. Holliday (2002, p.37) suggests that ‘...exactly where, when and with whom the research will take place’ is important. For the purpose of this project, “Setting” denotes a focus on the intermediate forms of social organisation’ (Layder 1993, p.9) in and around the university and its social and institutional structures as well as the social practices people engaged in. I describe the setting and then explain how it emerged, has clear boundaries and is easily identifiable. To achieve this, I have drawn on Holliday’s criteria for research settings (2002; 2007): location, time, interconnectedness, appropriate size and access.

I begin with location as it can be useful to think of setting as a kind of physical space even though it is more than this. The research project took place on a university campus which can be thought of as a clearly demarked setting ‘within which there were several sites of data collection as can be seen from Table 3.2 and Figure 3.4 (Sketch of Northcentral Campus and Research Setting):

Table 3.2: Sites of data collection

Site 1a	Lecture room and seminar room year one
Site 1b	Lecture room and seminar room year one
Site 2	My office
Site 3a	Seminar room year three (2008-9)
Site 3b	Seminar room year three (2009-10)
Site 4	In and around Main Building (pseudonym)
Site 5	Year three interview room (2009-10)

Lecompte (2002, p.288) suggests there can be situations where the traditional view of a physically located site does not apply. However, the more traditional characteristics of site do apply here as the various sites shown in Table 3.2 were ‘grounded in real geography’ (p.288), yet remained sufficiently small for the purposes of data collection.

Observations took place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from November 2008 to March 2009 and again on Thursdays in December 2010. Participants were interviewed from November 2008 to May 2010. Time in the field was extended from an initial single

academic year to a second year due to participant drop-off. I had planned to continue working and researching with the first year group as they moved into their second year in order to explore change as they negotiated their relationship with the academy. I made several attempts to make contact with the participants I had previously observed and interviewed the previous year. The extract from the fieldnotes below shows some of the challenges I faced at the time:

I now wonder whether after me now sending a letter, email and text to the second years that any further communication from me will be viewed as unwanted junk mail although texts are sent to students from the university including xxx so it is not unusual. I will also send out similar texts to politics year 2 students on Tuesday plus those participants who have made contact.

(Fieldnote entry, 17/03/2009).

I took the lack of response to emails and letters as an indication that the group of participants was no longer interested or able to participate. There was one exception, Mary, whose experiences and narratives continued to contribute significantly to the thesis that developed. Table 3.3 provides a more comprehensive summary of what took place longitudinally:

Table 3.3: Three different phases of data gathering activity

Pilot phase - Summer 2008
Ethical approval sought Pilot survey with health science group (pseudonym) (See Appendix Seven for details) Phase helpful in developing teacher-researcher role
Phase two - Entering the field: November - May 2009
Institutional ethical approval gained Data gathering commences Contact with first year and third year groups develop differently as the groups construct identities and ways of working Individual and year one group interviews conducted Institutional documentation gathered Observations November - March
Phase three - Consolidating data gathering: November - May 2009
Data gathering continues Some participant drop-off Contact with a second group of third year students studying the same course with the same lecturer due to participant drop-off Observation November 2009 Individual and year three group interviews conducted Two participants repeat academic year

I observed three Applied Social Science classes as part of the class observation strategy (see 3.4.1). I attempted to interview third year students (2008-9) but, with the exception of two participants who fitted the profile of being over 21 and a long-term, or perhaps permanent resident of the UK, this proved unsuccessful. I observed the first year cohort until March 2009, phase two in the table above, in order to have a clear sense that saturation had been reached (Charmaz 2003; Cresswell 1998) and to enable researcher-participant relationships to develop outside the classrooms through research interviews. I also needed to fulfil some of the essential practical tasks such as gaining written consent from everyone attending classes. Another way of illustrating what I did and when is to divide the time in the field by classes rather than time phases of data collection, which is what I have done below:

Table 3.4: An overview of class observations

	Class one	Class two	Class three
Lecturer	Lecturer A	Lecturer B	Lecturer B
Disciplinary focus	Social policy/ social exclusion	Social policy/ social exclusion	Social policy/ social exclusion
When	11/2008-04/2009	11/2008-03/2009	11/2009
Numbers Enrolled	29	9	12
Mean attendance per observation	14	6	11
Participants Interviewed (pseudonym)	Mary Fred James Mustapha Vera	Mona	Mr N Amina Kate Maisha
No. of observations	14	6	2

Table 3.4 above shows the class observations schedule and the pseudonyms of the participants I interviewed at least once. We can see that with the exception of Mona, who deferred her dissertation submission, the 2008 third year group (class two in the table above) were not productive in terms of participants presenting for interview. Technically, Mona was a member of the first third year cohort but I was able to interview her across two academic years as she was writing up her dissertation and amenable to interview participation. The second third year group (class three) was observed twice only but these observations were

followed up with a group interview and individual interviews plus some limited participant validation due to the closeness to dissertation submission dates. Further details of all the participants I interviewed can be found in Table 3.5. To clarify, I observed a group of nine final year students in 2008-9 the majority of whom did not have time or did not express interest in follow-up interviews. I then observed a further twelve students in 2009-10 from the same course which also corresponded with the first year course in terms of curriculum focus as an alternative means of sustained access.

3.7.1 Place, space and identity

‘The world of every day life is structured both spatially and temporally’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.40). Although Berger and Luckmann (1966) are more concerned with the historical dimension to the social world, they commented that the spatial dimension is significant as it also has a social dimension such as the physical features of the setting which influence where and how people intersect and interact. This was true for lecturer-participant interaction, as well as where my interactions as teacher-researcher and data gathering took place.

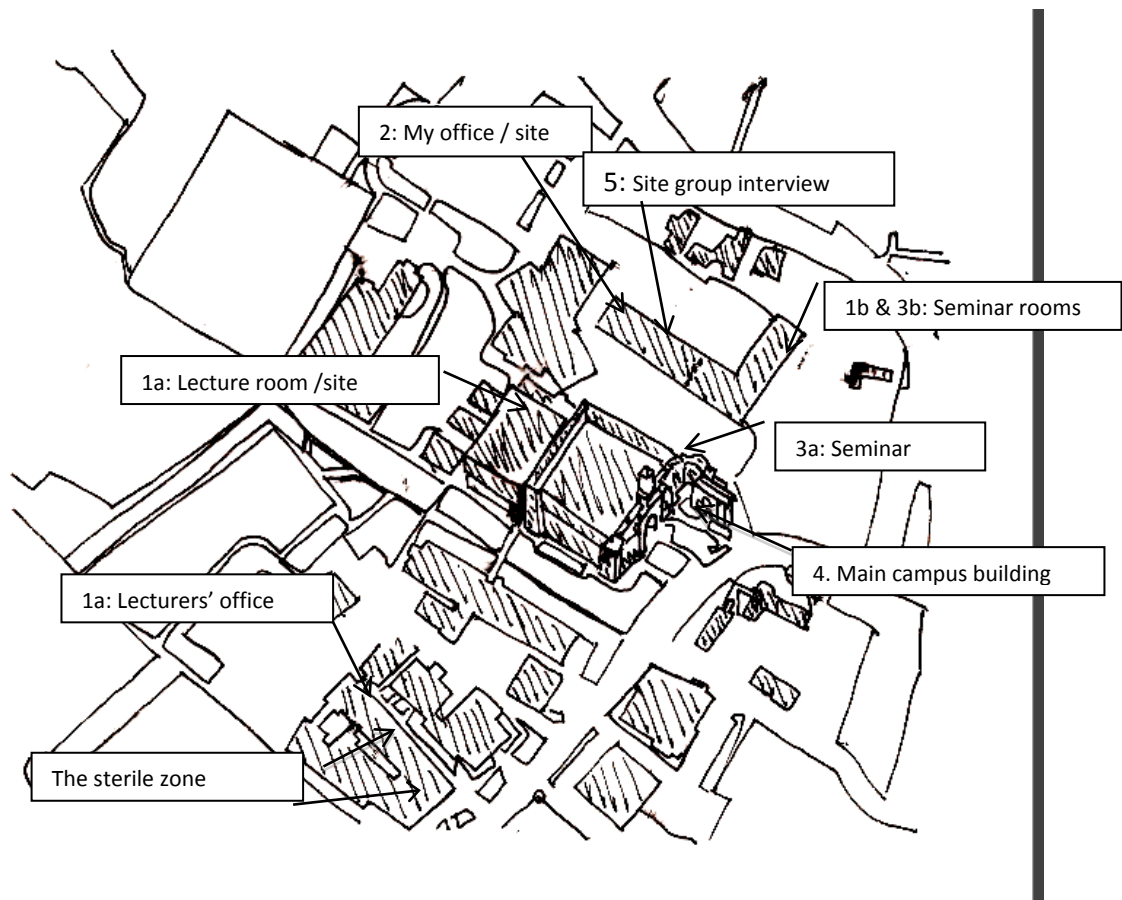


Figure 3.4: Sketch of Northcentral campus and research setting

The campus map, in the figure above, helps to elucidate the links between ‘place, space and identity construction’ (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.204) as well as a sense of the research setting’s interconnectedness. The map relates to ‘place/space as the *location for* discourse’ (p.204) and knowledge making as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue for a link between ‘identity and location’ highlighting the significance of how the two interact. Their point seems to be supported as the lecturers’ shared office was located in a ‘no access zone’ for students as no official teaching took place there. What was more surprising was that students were not allowed to meet teaching staff for tutorials in that particular building (City Hall Building) or indeed move freely through certain areas. Informally, lecturers referred to it as ‘the sterile’ area or zone (per. comm.). Indeed, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) comment these are not ‘neutral phenomena’ and argue crucially that ‘... who gets to occupy spaces...’ (p.210) is a part of understanding identity and power relations. Following Benwell and Stokoe (2006), I suggest the map, including The sterile zone, tells us something about the institutional identity of Northcentral and how students were viewed as problematic. This did not go unnoticed by two participants and Mona commented that: ‘They have locked themselves in their offices and they look at you from afar’ (Narrative summary, 19/11/2008).

In contrast, the location of my office at the time (Site 2) was advantageous for data collection as there were no physical restrictions or ‘zones’ and participants were able to seek me out which helped the development of my teacher-researcher role. Once when I was in our staff kitchen, Vera entered and said: ‘Sorry for following you, can I come and see you on Friday?’ (Fieldnote entry, 09/02/2009). In hindsight, one criticism of the research strategy is that it ignores multimodal aspects of discourse although I noted visual elements of data such as spatial seating arrangements in observation notes.

3.7.2 A sense of interconnectedness

The different sites of data collection go some way to demonstrate my role within it. As noted, I was set apart physically from colleagues outside my immediate team, yet I was still able to interact with other colleagues in a separate building. In some ways I was as visible as the course lecturers, and certainly more accessible, which enabled me to sustain time in the field, necessary for ethnography as methodology, emphasised by Lillis (2008). This interconnectedness of spatial arrangements within the research setting in conjunction with my professional role reflects the fluidity of data collection which at times took place on more than one site in a single day.

Importantly, the setting comprises a ‘sufficiently small’ (Holliday, 2007, p.34) group of undergraduates who share goals and interests in studying social policy, development and international politics and who share the desire to graduate successfully. They also share other characteristics encapsulated by the term ‘non-traditional’, such as age, place of long-term residence (see Table 3.5) and identification with the African diasporic community, real and imagined (Anderson, 1983) which emerged during my time in the field. I had partial access to the group from the start through my role as writing instructor which facilitated the pilot phase. Gaining initial access to the field was relatively easy as links and contacts were already established through my work at the university, although I found that the process was more complex than Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest. This was possibly a reflection of the dual teacher-researcher role adopted and the sheer complexity of large institutions. Access was later institutionally approved by gatekeepers on the relevant ethics committee and by the two lecturers who agreed to be observed who also provided written consent for this to occur. Figure 3.5 below illustrates the process of constructing and clearly identifying the research setting and its essential features.

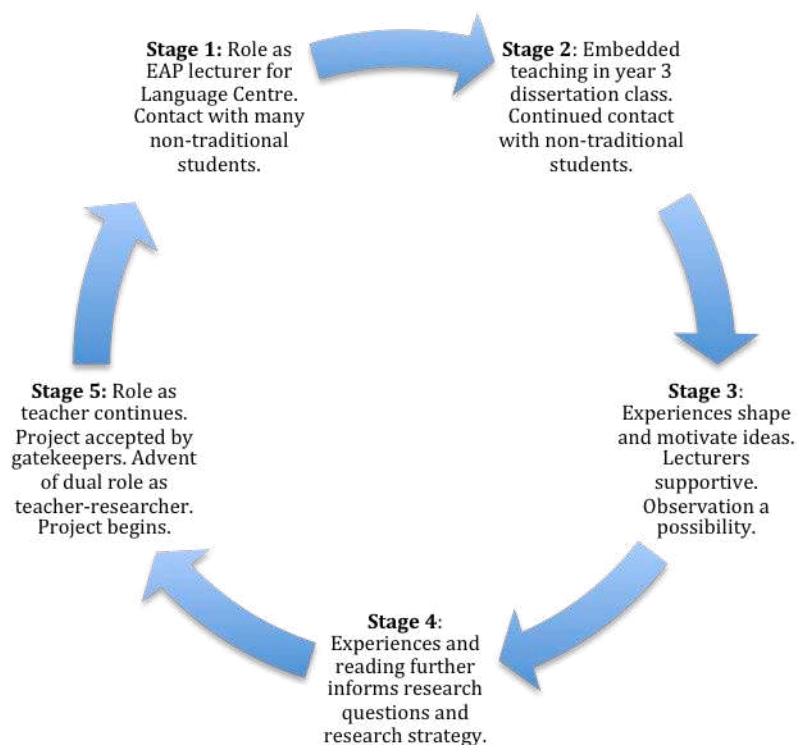


Figure 3.5: Constructing the Research Setting and Entering the Field

It can be seen from Figure 3.5 that the focus for this investigation was developed from within the setting. Initially, the setting was the entire Applied Social Science Campus (pseudonym,

stage one). As I began to formulate ideas, I moved closer towards a group of students on a small cluster of undergraduate degree programmes within the Applied Social Science Faculty (Stage two). As I talked to and worked with lecturers teaching on the programmes who subsequently endorsed my ideas (Stage three and Stage five), I began to think of the setting as more manageable. Research question formulation followed (stage four) although it has to be said that two-dimensional diagrams of this kind tend to simplify a process that was rather complex and messy. There was a sense of spiralling and focussing as the 'research problem and setting are closely bound together' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.36). As a lecturer engaging in research at my place of work, my motivations for research and the setting constructed for the purposes of research were necessarily intertwined. In other words, my long-standing institutional role of providing dissertation support on an Applied Social Science degree moulded the research questions and as such the setting can be considered a 'site of encounter' (Rampton 1997, p.585) motivating the research, as suggested by Holliday (2007).

Although I benefited from being able to adapt my place of work into a fieldsite, there were potential constraints of a different kind to consider, such as potential pressure from institutional gatekeepers or research funders to disseminate findings either formally or otherwise. Similarly, lecturers may have wanted feedback on how their students were progressing in terms of academic literacies and the demands of their courses. I could have been placed in an awkward position ethically had I been asked to reveal observational evidence that compromised others. For example, at the start of student presentations, Lecturer A would routinely move from the front of the class and sit next to me at the back of the class in order to observe and take notes. An extract from my class observation notes reveals that on one occasion 'he apologises for the chaotic nature of the session.' after which 'I volunteer a positive and truthful comment about class atmosphere' (Observation 1, year one) to counter the discomfort I detected over the erratic nature of the course delivery. At other times, participants revealed more negative aspects of their experiences of their time at Northcentral University, and I had to weigh up initial ease of access to the research site with possible institutional scrutiny and future restrictions on my work. Despite these concerns, I felt that there may not be a sufficiently well defined and bounded culture or degree programmes elsewhere that I could access practically or physically as teacher-researcher. This concern is supported by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.38) who suggest that: 'The role of pragmatic considerations must not be under-estimated'. As ethnography involves a researcher participating directly in the setting, I felt I had the potential to engage more fully

as an institutional insider than if I appeared as a newcomer on a less familiar degree programme.

As a consequence of these considerations, I endeavoured to transform my own place of work into a fieldsite for ethnographic enquiry and at this point I acknowledge that doing so influenced my field role and analytic stance. Rampton (2007) states that ethnographic research of this kind, where the research project stems from concern over professional or institutional practice within a setting involves the process of the researcher moving from the inside out in order to gain '*analytic distance* on what's close at hand, rather than a move from the outside inwards' and in doing so '*trying to get familiar with the strange*' (p.590). Rampton adds that the process of research involves a constant move between these two positions especially for those working and researching in the same place of work. I experienced moving in closer into the site of data collection within the setting (see Figure 3.5) and then oscillation outwards as I began to make sense of data gathered.

In summary, I have presented the research setting, and one example of how a setting can reflect institutional identity drawing on Bewnwell and Stokoe's (2006) theorising on identity and location. I touch on my teacher-researcher role within the setting in order to illustrate how what I saw as particular characteristics of the setting were linked to the formulation of my research questions and methodological leanings. I gave a brief account of the role and influence of institutional gatekeepers and the need for ethical approval. The next section expands on what took place. In fact, Figure 3.5 above can be taken as a starting point for documenting the process of entering the field, but this time with special attention to ethical considerations such as consent and anonymity. I deal with what was involved in gaining consent as this was a significant part of the institutional process I went through, but also an essential part given the life histories of some of the participants involving civil war, asylum, alcoholism, racism and the political and social dislocation involved in moving from a familiar place to a less familiar or unknown one, as suggested by Park (2011).

3.8 Ethical researching

‘The key to ethical researching is to minimise the harm or cost and maximise the benefit’ (Gibbs 2007, p.101)

3.8.1 Confidentiality, anonymity and consent

Miles et al. (2013, p.63) suggest ‘Confidentiality and anonymity are usually promised – sometimes very superficially’ and therefore it is worth summarising what I did, especially as participants could potentially be identifiable to others who were in the setting at the time. I removed any potential for cross-identification through use of pseudonyms. All locations within London, the institution, names of campuses, buildings, faculty and programme names have been changed. In addition, lecturers observed were anonymised as well as other teaching staff. I refer to the two lecturers I observed by letter: A and B. Other lecturers are referred to by a single letter as they are introduced into the data analysis.

Additionally, the University’s Ethics Committee stipulated the need for written consent from every student attending each course I observed: 29 year one students and 21 year three students although fewer actually attended during observation (see Table 3.4). Letters and stamped, self-addressed envelopes were sent to all students’ addresses extracted from the University’s student record system. Additionally, emails were sent to anonymised distribution lists of students on each course. The aim of this research activity was threefold: firstly, to inform all students of the project and my intention to observe classes; secondly, to ask for written permission to do so; and thirdly, to recruit potential key participants interested in taking part in parallel interview sessions. As already stated, different terminology was necessary to differentiate consent for observation from consent for research interviews and discussions which were discursive spaces created specifically for research purposes. Sample copies of this initial communication letter outlining the project and sample consent forms for the class observations can be found in Appendix Three. It is worth noting that a similar process for gaining additional consent from all participants who joined the group interviews was undertaken. As a result some participants signed two consent forms.

Overall, I felt confident that participants understood what the project involved, what research participation would mean for them and that the information on the forms was sufficiently detailed and clear for those attending the courses to make an informed choice about whether

to sign or not. I also provided opportunities for students to ask me about my research which many did. Although the lecturers gave verbal consent several months before observation began, I also needed written consent. A sample version of the form the two lecturers signed can be also be found in Appendix Three, while the hard copies have been stored. After institutional consent was gained at the end of October 2008 (see Appendix Six), a number of administrative steps had to be taken before I could begin class observations or contacting individual students.

3.8.2 Making contact and the beginnings of data collection

After sending emails and postal correspondences, the next step was to introduce myself in person. As a consequence of the year three lecturer's relative informality, I began observing the third year group a week before the first year group. In fact, the lecturer was happy for me to begin observations as soon as possible as he was aware of the ethical approval delay I had experienced due to campus relocation and the long-term absence of two key members of staff. The lecturer had told the group the week before that I would be attending the seminar and asked them if they had any objections: nobody had apparently. I introduced myself at the start of the first seminar, and used the following script I prepared as a prompt, although I did not read out a verbatim account:

Hello, my name is Victoria and many of you will have received a letter and email from me telling you about my research project. To recap, I am doing a research degree in Language Studies while I continue my work for English Language Support (Pseudonym) which specialises in Academic Writing and xxx. I would like to sit in on this Tuesday/Wednesday xxx course in order to observe and take note on communication events and talk around text. I need your permission to do this and would be very grateful if you could sign and date the consent form. Secondly, I am also looking for a group of students from all backgrounds who would be interested in participating in the research project on language and communication at university. I am interested in your experiences and in telling your stories, and would like to meet with you on a one-to-one and in a small group basis. What's in it for you? There is no extra incentive or writing support in one sense. All students across the university are entitled to discuss their writing with a specialist. However, what you might gain is the opportunity to discuss issues surrounding language and literacy and academic writing in a confidential environment. If you are interested in participating or finding out more, please email or phone me. My details are on the information sheet. Thank you. Do you have any questions?

Consent forms began trickling in at a rather slow pace from both first years and third years. Fortunately, I was able to obtain signed consent from members of each group at the start and end of classes each week. A pattern of interaction began to emerge as one or two students would approach me at the end of the lectures and seminars each week, during class breaks and sometimes in the corridor outside as we had to vacate the classroom. Some of the third

years commented that they had been taught academic writing by me in their first and second year students. One person asked about gaining help with a project proposal, which was possibly a reflection of my writing instructor status rather than teacher-researcher role. Other students from both year groups expressed interest in the project, but said that as they were employed outside the university, and would participate if they were able to but expressed some doubt. However, early on, I received email enquiries about the project and what was involved. This initial contact with students in person and via email enabled me to set up individual interviews with those students who had expressed interest.

3.8.3 Minimising harm

I recognise that there may have been blows to self-esteem for participants during the prolonged and sustained data collection process although not necessarily because of the process. I built in on-going support in order to minimise any potential harm or emotional discomfort of any kind. For example, some of the participants interviewed reported challenging life events, such as eviction, which occurred beyond the Northcentral setting. I also noted challenging social encounters during observation some of which subsequently fed into the research themes. My awareness of some of the critical experiences participants had undergone meant that my teacher-researcher relationship with several of the participants was at various times intense, illustrated by this example:

Later at 11.45am Mary and I chat briefly in my office. She says she has to go to Social Services because she has drastically reduced benefits compared to the previous year and she doesn't want to give up the course and 'go on the bottle.' She is upset and we discuss briefly what we will talk about the following day. (Fieldnotes, 13/01/2009)

What this sharing and awareness meant was that to pursue my research agenda in terms of a direct discussion of literacy practices at times like this would have been unethical. Gibbs (2007, p.101) confirms '... the researcher/informant relationship is one of mutual trust and one of some intimacy', which I hope I respected at all times.

Given many of the participants' life events, I reflected a number of times to what extent participation was volunteered freely. On reflection, I felt that those who volunteered to be interviewed and recorded on more than one occasion indicated that consent was 'strong' (Miles et al., 2013). There was, however, one instance where I felt a student was too vulnerable to participate despite their agreement to be interviewed, recorded and, having signed consent forms. I noted reasons for this in my fieldnotes (09/12/2009) and deleted recordings. Although 'High levels of trust and willingness' (Stevens and Patel 2011, p.183)

were demonstrated by participants who volunteered to be interviewed, in this instance this was not sufficient.

3.8.4 Openness, trust and disclosure

A researcher role should be characterised by ‘openness and disclosure’ (Angrosino and Mays de Pérez, 2000, p.692). I aimed to be as open as possible about the purpose of the project and to share and discuss as much as possible. As noted earlier, by revealing my relative progress, interests and intentions to participants was not without its disadvantages as it was time-consuming in nature, as noted by Ivanič and Weldon (1999). However, it does seem that that my relative openness and willingness to share thoughts and reflections on my research aims in broad terms was reflected in the amounts of disclosure as well as the nature of disclosure. For example, Vera and Mona informed me of family relationship breakdown prior to their time at Northcentral in addition to reasons for disrupted schooling. All participants offered some sensitive information about their background and home lives such as racism and discrimination. This is documented at various points in fieldnotes and narrative summaries for Fred, Mona, Mary and Mr N.

I gained trust through maintaining participant anonymity and repeating what I told all participants at the start of the project about the use of pseudonyms, the right to withdraw, as well as my thinking underpinning the participant validation process. An example of this in practice is when a third year participant asked me not to include negative comments made about a dissertation supervisor during interview and I didn't. Secondly, as already discussed earlier in this chapter, my deliberate availability via phone and email as well as physical accessibility in the setting enhanced accessibility and trust. I felt that this level of rigour was necessary to conform to UK HE research protocol outlined in documents produced by the British Sociological Association (2004). Next, I present more information on the undergraduates who became the cultural group I worked with.

3.9 The participants

The participants were first introduced in section 1.4 and this next section discusses who they were, their background and identities in more detail. However, first of all, a note on nomenclature is needed. When referring to people volunteering in research studies ‘subjects’ is often the term chosen by human sciences adopting the experimental method; ‘respondents’ by sociologists to reflect a post-positivist approach to methodology; and anthropologists use ‘informants’ as a label, according to McCurdy et al. (2005). Informants may seem a likely

choice for an ethnographic study but instead I chose participants to reflect my approach to research as I attempted to engender ethical researching through my *participation* in the setting as well as seeking participation from a group of students.

It may seem contradictory that the data collection strategy has clarified that I observed a number of university *classes* while approaches to ethnography see groups of individuals as a *culture* reflecting views on the complexity of the research setting and social reality. However, I maintain that the eleven key participants can be considered members of a group for a number of reasons. They attended lectures and seminars at Northcentral at the same time as each other and they all attended more than one of the lectures and seminars I observed. Second, they all participated in individual interviews and one group interview. Third, with the exception of James, they were over twenty-one at the start of their degree course. Despite being eighteen, James was a dominant and engaged member of the group during classroom observation and also participated in research interviews on more than one occasion. The participants identified with Africa in some way, even though their identification and diasporic connections were experienced differently reflecting the inherent heterogeneity of any group. With the exception of Kate who was born in Britain, all were long-term residents of the UK. In addition, as can be seen from Table 3.5 overleaf, they were all completing one of three possible applied social science degree pathways. This also meant that I had some awareness of the other courses they referred to. All participants were taught at least one course by lecturer B during their time at Northcentral, although for the first years this was not the course I observed. Also, all attended reasonably well which meant they were more available for interview. We can see that despite the differences in language background, country of origin, pattern of contact with me, and degree pathway, these students can be considered a group with shared characteristics, as well as prior and current experiences which bound them together during my time in the field.

What is more, tables of this kind have a tendency to show, for example, languages spoken in terms of binaries and etic categories which fail to account for the ‘complexity of language use’ and can mark students superficially according to their language practices (Mangelsdorf 2010, p.113). For these students, we can see that multilingualism appears normal although I acknowledge that the table alone was not intended to portray how people felt about language use and literacy practices. This last point relates to how I enabled categories and themes to emerge. It is important to note at this point that the participants’ information displayed was gathered during interview and open questioning. To clarify, I completed Table 3.5 which

follows after categories developed organically as a result of time in the field, the nature and pace of the biographical detail revealed, rather than imposing categories into which participants' details were added.

Table 3.5: Summary of the eleven key participant profiles

Pseudonym	Approx. Age	Background	Country of birth/countries lived in	Educational background	Languages spoken	Degree pathway [pseudonym]
1 Mary	40s	One dependent lives with her; unsure of the whereabouts of other children.	Rwanda / Kenya UK	Rwanda; schooled in Kenya; Access to HE course at another London university	English, French, Swahili, Yerwanda, Luganda, other 'local' languages	Area studies
2 Fred	30-40	Kenya, middle class, dependents	Kenya	Unknown	English, others unknown	Area studies
3 James	18	Born outside UK, schooled in UK; works 25+hours/week Lives with father	Only UK mentioned	Mainstream UK	English L1, others unknown	Politics
4 Mustapha	30-40	From a diplomatic family; two dependents	Various African nation states France	Unknown	English, French	Area studies, Applied social science
5 Vera	38	Divorced, one dependent aged 13, recently moved to London.	Liberia, Norway for 9 years, UK	Disrupted due to civil war and erratic payment of school fees, adult education Norway.	English, Kreyol	Politics
6 Amina	20s	Brother a lawyer; second brother works for Somali Relief in Oxford. Father a development worker and Russian speaker	Somalia, Kenya and Uganda	O levels in Ugandan boarding school; A levels in UK and gap year.	English, Somali.	Area studies

		kidnapped during conflict.				
7 Kate	25	Lived in London all her life; mother English, father Nigerian; raised by single parent; own children 5 and almost 3; son autistic.		Schooled in London; degree studies interrupted twice due to pregnancies.	English.	Applied social science
8 Maisha	40s	English grandmother and Kenyan grandfather who lived in UK, now deceased. Dependents, at least one son.	Kenya	Studied tourism at college in Kenya	Swahili, English, Kikuyu, French.	Area studies
9 Mona	30-40	Parents worked for Embassy in Tanzania and UK; has daughter in sixth form; worked as care worker in Peterborough; in UK since 1999.	Tanzania, UK	Compulsory schooling in Tanzania. Reported did not have sufficient background in English; ESOL student in UK.	Swahili, English, understands Kyrangi.	Applied social science
10. Mr N	30-40	Reported coming from a poor family; owns land in Congo; worked for a dairy in London; has four children.	Congo	French system in Congo; studied ESOL in London; completed 1 st year computer science at Northcentral in 1996.	English, French, Portuguese.	Area studies
11. Sade	40s	Two teenage sons; works for CAB	Nigeria	Primary and secondary schooling in Nigeria. Completed business degree in at a London University.	English; others unknown	Area studies, Applied social science

With reference to the table of participants, I created the pseudonyms. For some of the pseudonyms selected, the initial letter is the same as the actual given name which acted as a mnemonic to facilitate data management and analysis. The choice of pseudonym also often echoed participants' cultural and religious background or given name. One exception was Mr. N who introduced himself formally and remained Mr. N in my memory. The age of participant was often revealed during interview as part of an extended response to the question: *'Can you tell me a bit about yourself, who you are and where you have come from?'* When age was not stated, I estimated the participants age range based on physical appearance, reported age of children and other key events such as leaving school. The country of birth and countries lived in were also revealed during interview. Participants were not asked this question directly; and hence, there is a gap for James who stated he was born outside the UK, but not where. The same is true for languages spoken and degree pathway as I was interested in how participants constructed themselves as well as what they saw as significant life events and academic literacy resources. In doing so, I address Thesen's (1997) criticisms of identity categories which are often constructed by researchers.

3.9.1 My relationship with participants

During my time in the field there were instances where I felt as though I was part of the group. I draw on field and observation notes to provide evidence for this claim. There was quite a bit of sharing and familiarity with the group as my presence became familiar and was acknowledged. For example, James was cooperative when I enquired into gaining validation. I was handed religious material and Fred invited me to a Bonfire night party. There was also evidence to indicate that I was viewed as writing instructor who happened to be doing some research which was perceptive and understandable. For example, during interview:

Mary asks VO what a draft is and whether she thinks it is a good thing. She also asks for clarification because she wants to approach her work in one and not two ways.' ... 'She is working on two assignments which she has brought to show VO. They talk about a politics essay which she began writing the week before.
(Narrative summary, 12/10/2009)

Perhaps because of this awareness of my institutional role I acknowledge some of the criticisms of so called dialogic and empowering research which attempts to include participants but does not resolve power relations which remain unequal. Researchers own readings carry the most weight as researchers have more say: I was no exception.

3.10 Approaching the data analysis

3.10.1 What qualitative researchers do

I wrote earlier that ethnography is a set of methods for which there is both agreement and disagreement (Hammersley, 2008). After a review of qualitative research methods publications which deal with data analysis (for example, Berg 2004; Cohen et al. 2000; Gibbs 2007; Gordon 1992; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Brice Heath and Street 2008; Gibbs 2007; Miles et al. 2013), I found that there are a wide variety of approaches. There is no rigid framework for analysis to present in the sense of a framework for discourse analysis and there is also no standard format. Instead I have chosen to present my reflexive approach to data and data analysis as one of iteration and cyclical processes and practices. In order to achieve this, there is some necessary overlap with chapter two and earlier sections in this chapter in which I introduced concepts such as researcher biases and reflexivity as my dialogic interaction with the research setting remains significant. This next section is roughly divided into two: what researchers do in principle and what I did as I sketch out my approach in some detail.

Articulating relevant research processes and practices was more difficult than I had first anticipated reflecting the realist stance of some qualitative research methods publications. Focussing on common features of qualitative research, what to omit, leave in and foreground are important (Miles 2013), even though the: naturalistic commitment to “tell it like it is” tends to force the process of analysis to remain implicit and under-developed (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.206).

Miles et al. (2013) argue that although many qualitative researchers document what has taken place successfully transparent ‘procedural accounts’ (p.294) of the analysis itself are less frequent, which is what I found. For example, in a chapter entitled ‘Analysis and home from the field’ (Brice Heath and Street, 2008), their account of what is involved in analysis lacks detailed explanation with the exception of comment such as ‘Later distinctions become clearer’ (p.84). Precisely, how analysis occurred with the exception of reading and re-reading is not expanded despite claims of guidance for social practices research methods. Hammersley (1994), highly influential in the field of ethnographic methodology, manages to counter the shortcomings that “It is less specialised and technically sophisticated than approaches like the experimenter social surveys’ (1994, p.1) but fails to mention data analysis. Similarly, Swann (1994) provides detailed guidance of observation notes and transcriptions, yet in a section on analysis writes that ‘Transcriptions can also help you to look more closely at qualitative aspects of talk ...’ which is referred to as ‘insightful observation’ (p.46). Swann

(1994) goes on to highlight criticisms of ‘open-ended explorations of talk’ (p.46) but no further illustration of the process of analysis is provided concluding that:

Talk may be recorded and analysed in a more open-ended way ... [and] researchers frequently quote selectively from what field notes or transcriptions. (Swann, 1994, p.47)

This is more transparent guidance but lacks the detail or depth to assist novices. It seems that some qualitative researchers consider data analysis to be an art form insisting on intuitive approaches (Miles et al., 2013), and this admission reflects the findings of my preliminary review of a selection of relevant qualitative research methods literature (Brice Heath and Street 2008; Hammersley 1994; and Graddol et al.; 1994; Swann 1994). Barton and Padmore (1994, p.208) concede, with reference to interview analysis, that there are challenges to dealing with unstructured data in terms of determining ‘a finite set of analytic categories’ (Barton and Padmore 1994, p.208) which I acknowledged as I devised my own. It also seems that established researchers do not always make explicit what they do, and this taken-for-grantedness is in part due to the research genre. Like Charmaz (1990) I see the analysis as something which emerges and the next section attempts to clarify what I did.

3.10.2 An iterative process: analysis in and on action

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. They see it as iterative and dialectical in the sense that there is a constant and recurrent movement between data and literature. Analytic choices are made continuously (Miles et al., 2013). Reflexivity emerges as important as there is a need for ‘dialectical interaction’ between data collection and analysis, such as movement between the data and literature. The first step in the iterative process is to deal with ‘unstructured data’ (Hammersley 2008, p.206). However, what this means varies considerably depending on the strategy and methods adopted. On the other hand, there are complex documentation matrices for specifically developed analytic operations (see Miles et al., 2013). What I found to be a useful approach to the documentation of these analytical processes was the writing of detailed observation notes and fieldnotes following ethnographic principles and procedures.

The distinction between analysis in and on action is relevant for ethnography as methodology because it reflects analysis that took place during sustained time *in* the field as well as analysis of documentation and reflexive thinking *after* time in the field. Analysing both in and on action is important as opportunity to collect new data to fill gaps and test hunches and hypothesis remains fluid. As a consequence, Miles et al. (2013, p.70): ‘... advise interweaving data collection and analysis from the start.’ It follows that the practice of ‘Writing is itself a form of analysis’ (Miles et al. 2013, p.117) which references not only the reading and rereading of data types, but also the writing and drafting process.

There were numerous examples of analysis in action which affected analysis on action. For open-ended interviews, much interpretation occurred *during* the process. For instance, when talking to Mary in my office one day she revealed that she had recently changed her name by deed poll (Field note, 14/01/2009). It was a critical moment, which affected what I did and said quite significantly, and the comment was also clearly pertinent to the research questions which explore potential changes to identity. A further example reflects the role citizenship played for participants who were studying citizenship as a curriculum area but at the same time had undergone or were undergoing the process of taking the Life in the UK Test (Gov.uk website, 2014) themselves as a step towards UK citizenship. A third example of my analysis in action already discussed in some detail is the critical reflection and highlighting of points for queries and discussion of narrative summaries in preparation for and during interviews.

Related to the data constructed in the field, an example of analysis on action took the form of cross-referencing across a number of observations at different times. This is one way in which the links between personal identity, lived experiences and knowledge of dissertation topics selected emerged. For example, in the case of Mr N, there was a reciprocal relationship between discrimination he experienced working with migrant workers from the EU (Fieldnote, 18/03/2010) and his dissertation topic relating to EU employment policy. So far I have described the approach to data analysis as an iterative process and one which consists of both analysis in action at the time of data collection as well as analysis on action which consists of critical rereading, highlighting and labelling data sources away from the field which provides some analytic distance. The analytical work I engaged in supported ethnography as methodology as an approach by highlighting the longitudinal, iterative dimension to analysis.

3.10.3 Highlighting critical experiences: an example of analysis in and on action

My aim was to examine a range of data types ‘to compare and relate what happens at different places and times in order to identify ‘event incidents’ (Greene and Bloome, 1997), which are those events which have ‘sustaining influence’ (Lillis 2008 p.186) or critical experiences (Nombo, 2006). The next section is purposefully illustrative. I draw on Nombo’s (2006) definition of critical experiences for university students as something which impacts decisively or significantly on how we view ourselves in relation to events and experiences. This is because ‘... critical experiences are related to the contexts in which they occur and act as important signifiers of an individual’s identity’ (Nombo, 2006, p.186). I documented participants’ critical experiences as I became aware of them during time in the

field. It is for this reason that in addition to highlighting underlining and extracting data, I produced event histories for participants in an attempt to avoid portraying the group of participants described in Table 3.5 as homogeneous. Here, however, I use one member of the group as an exemplar of the *kind* of experiences that some but not all students encountered, but not because I claim the participant is in any way representative of the other group members. Table 3.6 which follows is one example of ‘data condensation’ Miles et al. (2013, p.12) which refers to the transforming of data from the corpus of field notes, observation notes, narrative summaries, institutional documentation and so forth. Importantly, this is not only a process that occurs prior to analysis but *is* analysis and forms part of the process of making analytic choices further supporting the approach of analysis in and on action. It is worth pointing out that the table and figures throughout the thesis are also part of the data analysis process as I condensed and represented the words and experiences of the group as well as my own.

Inevitably, I made decisions about what to include and what to exclude. The aim of this research activity was to foreground critical experiences through an examining of not only routine practices or ‘literacy-related social practices’ (Woodside-Jiron 2011, p.173) but also what was significant for participants with reference to Nombo’s (2006) definition above. How this worked in practice was that I examined evidence that either referred to Mary indirectly, such as fieldnotes, my class observation notes or had been produced by Mary more directly, such as narrative summaries and emails. To put it another way, I focussed down on data which not only relates to the research questions, but powerfully so. The left column overleaf highlights significant critical experiences for one participant which influenced engagement with the academy including appropriate and meaningful text production. The right hand column shows critical experiences relating to the London context but also influenced Mary’s sense of who she was. Detailed analysis of this kind was important in order to help understand patterns of activity that constituted ‘normal’ everyday behaviour for participants but also the pattern of activity which participants found impacted significantly on their experiences and identity, following Nombo (2006).

Table 3.6: Mary's first year timeline: an example of critical experiences influencing academic literacy development

First year	Critical experiences relating to academic literacies	Critical experiences relating to wider context
October onwards	Delayed enrolment	Housing and financial issues
	Attending, but not engaging	Identifies as a recovering alcoholic
	Perceived lack of effective guidance on reflective diary	On-going housing issues
	Group presentation on poverty	Moved to new area
	Missed deadline for Blair analysis	Childcare issues
	Politics essay	Driving offense
	Failed citizenship essay on homelessness	Driving test
	Missed presentation due to driving test	University counselling support
	On-going writing & language support	Contact with Alcohol Concern
	Misinterpreted timed essay title	Thoughts of dropping out
	Attending but formally dropped out	-
	Misses fieldtrip to Brussels, field report not attempted	Fails to complete first year
May	Formal deferral	-

Table 3.6 shows how the iterative process of analysis in and on sustained engagement with participants resulted in the foregrounding and highlighting of several critical experiences. This example of data condensation I present is a result of analysis in and on action which draws out recurring themes from several data sources, some of which I found occurred across several participants' lives. What is key to analysis is that these critical experiences were seen as interrelated with those of *other* participants; housing issues (Mary and Vera) and disappointing assignment feedback (Mary, Mr N, Mona, Vera and Fred). These experiences contributed to the creation of research themes. For example, the first two rows show that Mary identified as a recovering alcoholic

and for separate reasons reported housing issues which fed into research theme two 'Disengagement and Distance'. It is not without some poignancy that as a result of the process of analysis in and on action pertaining to this participant, we can see that because of the reported housing and financial issues resulting in eviction, this particular participant failed an essay on homelessness for a citizenship course. Interrelatedness of critical experiences and curriculum content is one reason why themes explored in chapter five, emerged so significantly. To summarise, prior knowledge as well as life outside the university played a key role in how participants were able to engender a relationship with the academy, its staff and students, as well how they engaged in academically literate practices. Table 3.6 goes beyond condensation, extraction and summarisation, taking into account critical experiences within and beyond the setting which influenced opportunities for negotiation and development of academic literacy practices. The research themes are presented in the next section.

3.11 Constructing the research themes

The next phase to emerge during the iterative process was the development and creation of the research themes. Coding and categorising in the sense defined by qualitative researchers such as Cohen et al. (2000); Gorden (1992; 1998) or Miles et al (2013) were not suitable ways of approaching data analysis for this thesis because categories were not purposefully predetermined (for example, male/female, black/white) but emerged as salient through open-ended questioning, observation and time in the field. I did not attempt to create objective categories following procedures laid out by Gorden (1992), for instance, nor did I code numerically or with a symbol as I have already established my ethnographic approach would not support this form of analytic intervention.

There are, however, steps or concrete operational procedures (Gorden, 1992) I took. More specifically, what I did was read through fieldnotes, class observations and narratives in order to highlight each fragment of relevant information. This practice of analytic memoing is a very useful one and reflects what I did such as underlining, highlighting and extracting data. A clear statement of operational procedures and processes researchers undertook are helpful and, following Barton and Padmore (1994), I analysed data thematically. Gibbs (2007, p.31) argues that coding is 'essentially the process of identifying passages in the fieldnotes, observation notes or narrative summaries that exemplify certain thematic ideas and giving them a label – the code', but I wanted to avoid themes becoming too fixed too early on.

What I did, in terms of how I approached data analysis, is in line with an inductive oriented study where phenomena and recurrent themes emerge as the fieldwork develops and as data analysis

develops. Indeed, word choices like phenomena and theme reflect a unit of analysis which, rather than focussing on a single text, an individual or group alone, considers the broader historical, political and social contexts of the project in addition to individual experience suggest.

3.11.1 The relationship between the data and the research themes

Gibbs advises tables are ‘a convenient way to display text from across the whole data set in a way that makes systematic comparisons easier’ (Gibbs 2007, p.88). Table 3.7 provides a second example of the data analysis process I undertook which I include here as a means of summing up the cyclical, iterative approaches to data I have emphasised. Gibbs (2007) recommends being selective in the amount of information that goes into a table like this which ‘... can be précis, summaries, key quotations or key words from the coded texts’ (Gibbs 2007, p.88). Clustering can occur along thematic lines at the same time as displaying examples of what Miles et al. (2013) refer to as ‘jotting’, and Gibbs (2007) as analytic memoing. Data included in the left hand column below shows examples of analytic memoing in order to highlight data along thematic lines. I also physically marked data as I intended to follow up on words, or issues which ‘deserve analytic attention’ (Miles et al. 2013, p.94). This approach can be detected in a number of data examples where I highlighted significant extracts. I did this by rereading field notes, observation notes and narrative summaries in order to look for recurring similarities that might form more general themes. In essence, I adopted the process of identifying and grouping passages, words and phrases in the data that exemplify thematic ideas which is what I have illustrated procedurally here. The result of this process is displayed below. Again, like the previous table illustrating the critical experiences for *one* participant, this table illustrates the analytic memoing and development of *one* research theme for illustrative purposes.

Table 3.7: Table highlighting the relationship between the data and the research themes

Data highlighted	Research theme and sub-themes example
<p>Fieldnote entry: Fri. 9th April 2010:</p> <p>Mona ... apologies for her asking me to switch off the recorder the week before when she was critical of her supervisor.... She explains that she is anxious and nervous because she was abused. I ask her if she is referring to an experience at NC, but she says no, before.</p> <p>At the end, we joke a little about my leave week and she thanks me for not giving up on her. She is emotional and wipes a tear from her eye. We arrange to meet on the 19th April.</p>	<p>Theme 4.2:</p> <p>Othering, neo-racism and experiencing discomfort</p>

<p>Observation six, year one:</p> <p>Lecturer A has made an error for which he apologises. Lecturer A asks Hamdi to do it.</p> <p>HAMDI: I'll do it, init, just to make it level?</p> <p>LECTURER: Ah, you're, you're trying to curry favour?!</p> <p>LECTURER: How many of them [co-presenters] ... do you see?</p> <p>HAMDI: I don't really see them, but I can call them.</p> <p>Lecturer and Hamdi then arrange his tutorial. (Observation six, year one).</p>	<p>Interconnected sub-theme:</p> <p>4.2.1 Currying favour</p>
<p>Observation eight, year one:</p> <p>'There is also further confusion as the lecturer confuses Nancy with Mary. They are both Black African females. He is insistent and I find the exchange extremely uncomfortable.</p> <p>LECTURER: 'Well, why did you come to see me?' '...Yes, you came to see me.' [His face colours with emotion as he says it]</p> <p>[He means why did she come and see him about the presentation topic, if she is not in fact going to present on that topic]</p> <p>NANCY: 'That was not me.' [shaking her head]</p> <p>[He is emphatic and now her face colours. The lecturer continues to insist for 2 or 3 seconds more, then realises his error and apologies explaining that a few students came to see him about poverty, while, Nancy came to see him about her PDP (Personal Development Plan). He had forgotten. The exchange is embarrassing and discomfoting.</p>	<p>Interconnected sub-theme:</p> <p>4.2.2 Mistaken identity</p>

<p>Mr N, Narrative summary, 18/03/2010:</p> <p>There are some lecturers who want to distinguish between the foreigners but not realising that they come from a different background. Some lecturers don't give foreign students time to express themselves. They think the ones born here have time to express themselves while those from Africa, Asia and Latin America don't. He feels less this way because of his accent and some people laugh at him sometimes. Mr N says that there are two lecturers who are tough, not helpful but tough, with students who have difficulties expressing themselves. [His leg shakes as he speaks]</p> <p>Fieldnote entry 18th March 2010:</p> <p>'Today Mr N mentions racism and being overlooked for promotion as one reason why he decided to return to HE.'</p>	<p>Interconnected sub-theme:</p> <p>4.2.3 Leg shaking</p>
<p>Observation one, year one:</p> <p>'There is laughter and hilarity associated with/surrounding one of male students. Unsure who he is at this stage but later learn it [the name] is Eastern European. Same student explains graph and others interject.</p> <p>I was unable to hear exact words exactly but the lecturer comments on this student's name and how unpronounceable it is. The lecturer makes light of the fact that he has not attempted to pronounce the man's name and missed it off the list rather than attempt to do so. How does the student feel about this?</p>	<p>Interconnected sub-theme:</p> <p>4.2.4 Mocking, ribbing and othering</p>

The table above displays data thematically as part of analysis on action, this time once sustained time in the field after the event. The aim of this analytic activity is 'to understand a phenomenon better by *grouping* and then *conceptualising* objects that have similar patterns or characteristics' (Miles et al., 2013, p.279). As a result, the highlighting, grouping and categorising of data across the range of data sources fed into the research. For example, data selected from a range of data sources contribute significantly towards the research theme called 'Othering, neo-racism and experiencing discomfort' presented in the right hand column. This research theme in turn was divided into four sub-themes: Currying favour, Leg shaking, Mistaken identity and Humour and othering. These themes and sub-themes guide the structure for chapter four which is reflected in the numerical labelling (4.2-4.4) above. In short, the themes data highlighted relate to sub-theme one and represent one example of data condensation which I argue is necessarily a selective activity.

3.11.2 Summing up my approach to data analysis

The data analysis section has revealed my approach to data analysis not as one of objective coding of qualitative data (c.f. Gorden 1992; Miles et al. 2013) but an iterative process of analysis in and on action. My approach to data analysis reflects my pattern of interaction with participants. Research themes emerged and continued to be shaped and reshaped after detailed, critical and careful analytical reading and reflections. The themes were also influenced by my biases, my relationship with participants, as well as the co-construction of meaning during and since my time in the field. My approach to data analysis further illustrates a reflexive approach to research which I have attempted to make as transparent as possible. To perhaps re-state the obvious, rather than testing previously formulated hypotheses, I purposefully allowed meanings to emerge while at the same time maintaining a high degree of systematicity and rigour through attention to detail.

3.12 The research themes

To recap briefly, there is a direct connection between the example data highlighted in the left hand column of Table 3.7 above, to the research theme ‘Othering, discomfort and neo-racism’ and its associated sub-themes. A more comprehensive display of all six research themes and sub-themes can be found in Table 3.8 below:

Table 3.8 The research themes and sub-themes

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL EXPERIENCES INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY LIFE	CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE ACADEMY
Theme 4.2 ‘Othering, discomfort and neo-racism’	Theme 5.2 Negotiating dominant practices
4.2.1 Currying favour 4.2.2 Mistaken identity 4.2.3 The challenges of being ‘foreign’ 4.2.4 Mocking, ribbing and othering	5.2.1 Competing discourses and the Personal Development Plan (PDP) 5.2.2 The critical practice of giving and receiving feedback
Theme 4.3 Complex identities	Theme 5.3 Life experiences intersecting with the curriculum
4.3.1 A second choice place 4.3.2 An ascribed late identity 4.3.3 The kids versus the mature students 4.3.4 Speaking English with a post-colonial accent 4.3.5 Changing identities and British citizenship	5.3.1 Work-based discrimination 5.3.2 The special case of politics 5.3.3 Links between social exclusion and knowledge making 5.3.4 Lone parenthood
Theme 4.4 Disengagement and distance	Theme 5.4 The resources participants bring to the academy
4.4.1 The Impact of life before Northcentral 4.4.2 The everyday practice of non-attendance 4.4.3 Silence and resistance	5.4.1 Living amongst the people you study 5.4.2 Poverty as a resource for knowledge making

Barton and Padmore (1994) wrote that, for their study, 'some of the research themes were implicit in their interview questions, while others stemmed from the analysis of the interview transcripts' (Barton and Padmore 1994, p.208). This is what I found as I attempted to answer the existing research questions as well as address new questions which emerged as salient during my time in the field and as an outcome analysis and critical reflection. Themes implicit in the research questions are based on the literature reviewed and my intuition, about the challenges students face at Northcentral. These are writing as a site of struggle, the importance of identity as a dimension to academic literacies and the significance of power relations in complex institutions. Other themes, however, emerged as a result of analysis in and on my time in the research setting. 'Othering, neo-racism and experiencing discomfort' is an example of this. Inevitably, there was some overlap across themes. For example, research theme 4.3, 'A Complex Deficit Identity', emerged from the data, but was also relevant to themes implicit in my research questions as well as relevant to the theme Deficit discourses (section 2.5) explored in the literature review.

As already stated, the two data analysis chapters which follow are structured according to themes illustrated in Table 3.8 above. The first data chapter presents and analyses data supporting the first three themes: 'Othering, neo-racism and experiencing discomfort', 'A Complex Deficit Identity', and 'Disengagement and Alienation' in relation to the student experience and in doing so address the first research question more directly:

1- How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

The second data analysis chapter builds on chapter four and focuses on the final three research themes: Negotiating dominant practices; Life experiences intersecting with the curriculum, and The resources participants bring to the academy. As a result, the themes explored in chapter five are more closely related to research question two: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

3.13 Chapter summary

I began the chapter with a discussion of how my beliefs, biases and assumptions necessarily influenced the construction of knowledge and are influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives on ethnographic methodology. At the same time, I acknowledge the existence of the social world beyond the one I created. Reflexivity and reflexive accounting of the research processes and procedures also emerge as significant in terms of my researcher positioning, data construction and approach to data analysis. I acknowledge that my biases and world views influenced the open-ended nature of the research strategy I outline here and that my field role was far from neutral.

I introduced the participants and some of their overlapping experiences to illustrate my involvement and relationship with them in support of my claims of ethnographic methodology, ethical researching and multiple, interrelated data collection methods. The Northcentral setting was introduced as an appropriately interconnected and suitably complex site for the project. Data collection methods are discussed in some detail in order to justify my methodological approach, but also to assist social and cultural understandings of what is experienced and valued by a group of university students. Class observations and interview emerge as the most significant of the data collection methods which also assisted understandings of the context, the group, the individuals which made up the group and implications for identity. Data gathering and analysis did not focus on talk around student texts production, despite my original expectations. Research can still be said to have focussed on the negotiation of literacy-related practices which were instead evidenced through class observation and extended interview. I argue throughout that the shift in strategy and methods away from text-oriented practices was unproblematic for the open-endedness of this ethnographic research.

Ethical and non-essentialist researching is something I value which is one reason why I attend to the process of constructing the narrative summaries in detail. This is despite the fact that I concede the undergraduate participants did not hold a relationship of equal status within the research setting with me as teacher-researcher. Instead I demonstrate how I created a variety of spaces for participants to construct their own accounts. I explored insider perspectives in order to contribute towards an understanding of what a small group of undergraduates do and what they see as important. The ethnographic exploration was assisted through a deepened understanding of the context of Northcentral. The data analysis sections are sufficiently detailed in order to both clarify and exemplify what I did. Analysis in and on action are key as is the highlighting of critical experiences as a result of iterative and cyclical processes and procedures outlined, such as memoing, jotting and

highlighting. Two examples of data display illustrate how the analysis in and on action aided grouping, categorising and thematic development and vice versa. I also show how the themes and sub-themes emerged as a result of the over-arching iterative process. The final section introduces the research themes which guide the data chapters. Finally, I end the chapter with a diagrammatic overview of research themes as preparation for the data analysis chapters.

I argue the approach adopted supports ethnography as methodology and my interrogation of the research questions. Indeed, my choice of chapter title emphasises sustained engagement with participants over time. The methodological approach documented illustrates a highly contextual, practice-oriented approach to literacy but also elucidates what I did, the development of an insider perspective influencing data analysis and the research themes created. The ethnographic concepts of anti-essentialism, reflexivity and the foregrounding of insider perspectives constitute the methodological framework for the thesis. As a consequence, I hope I respected the narratives and voices of all participants involved.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL EXPERIENCES INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY LIFE

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four develops the themes which emerged from the data analysis introduced in the previous chapter: 4.2 Othering, discomfort and neo-racism, 4.3 Complex deficit identities and 4.4 Disengagement and distance. I introduce a number of examples to demonstrate the ways in which critical experiences at university and beyond impacted upon sustained engagement in the university setting. Thus, there is close attention to data relating to participant experiences in order to interrogate the first research question. I argue that all the themes are literacy-related as I discovered there was a variety of ways in which life before and beyond the academy, as well as critical moments in the university setting influenced knowledge making and the negotiation of academic literacies. As a result, I focus on participants' experiences and challenges of negotiating the academy before attending to knowledge making and the resources participants bring to the academy more directly in chapter five, themes first introduced in the literature review chapter.

4.2 Othering, discomfort and neo-racism

In this section, four data analysis examples demonstrate the different ways in which the university was experienced by a number of participants: Currying favour, Mistaken identity, The challenges of being 'foreign' and Mocking, ribbing and othering.

4.2.1 Currying favour

The first year course observed was structured so that each student was assigned a small peer group and also assigned two presentation topics to be delivered across the course of the academic year. The first was an introductory 'step one' presentation. The second 'step two' presentation (Course Reader 2008-2009, p.3) was a progression and therefore scheduled later in the academic year. Class presentations were not formally graded but students were given verbal feedback. Students were new to the institution, the Programme and new to each other; and each week I observed there was confusion over who was presenting what, when and with whom. As a result, the practices which developed around the presentations became significant and run across a number of themes in this chapter. They are particularly relevant to the first two examples, Currying favour and Mistaken Identity.

The first example stems from an observation of the first year undergraduate class. At the end of a seminar, the lecturer and a group of students were trying to arrange a group presentation and I made the following notes on interaction between Hamdi (pseudonym) and the lecturer:

Hamdi gets out a blue Filofax which has a blue leather cover. It looks a little like the Qur'an with Arabic writing on the front. It becomes apparent that there has been some error and overlap with allocation of presentations. The lecturer has made an error for which he apologises. The lecturer asks Hamdi to do it.

HAMDI: 'I'll do it, init, just to make it level?
LECTURER A: Ah, you're, you're trying to curry favour?!
LECTURER A: How many of them [co-presenters do]... you see?
HAMDI: I don't really see them, but I can call them.
Lecturer and Hamdi then arrange his tutorial.
(Observation 6, year one)

What struck me about this exchange was that the lecturer asked Hamdi for help and then accused him of 'currying favour' when he agreed. Rather than being thanked, the student was accused of doing something rather dishonourable. At the time I felt the lecturer misrepresented Hamdi's intentions as he was, in my view, trying to alleviate the lecturer's predicament by 'making it level' in his words. The verb choice also indexes the importance of power relations in the exchange. In contrast, I had previously observed an articulate student who, in class at least, was engaged and contributed to seminars positively. This is reflected in these observation notes from an earlier seminar:

Let's not be naive here ... it comes down to the same thing...' [He (Hamdi) talks about relativism and helping others. He (Hamdi) reads from the article more than once as a means of supporting his point of view]
(Observation 4, year one)

In addition to engaging in seminars and the day-to-day administration of the course, I noted in my fieldnotes that he had expressed an interest in participating in my research: 'I sent him an email 2 weeks before which he acknowledged' (Fieldnotes 16/12/2008). In contrast, the lecturer's less than positive evaluation of Hamdi as someone motivated by self-interest and seeking additional favours may have implications for patterns of engagement: he no longer attended (Fieldnotes, 20/01/2009; Observation eleven, year one) the classes I observed. I found it significant that this was the last time I saw or heard from this student and later on in the year I made reference to this fact:

With the exception of Hamdi, who I have not seen since before Christmas.
(Observation 11, year one)

I am not suggesting that the lecturer's response to Hamdi's offer was the reason for his non-attendance; nor do not wish to claim that the way Hamdi was treated was intentional. That said, religious and ethnic difference as well as differences in age, status and clothing were striking. For example, the fact that the 'black' student wore traditional shalwa kameez¹ while the 'white' lecturer wore Western dress made his treatment all the more stark. Hamdi's compliance is less surprising

¹ Traditional dress worn by men and women from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

given the lecturer's status and relative power, and the data highlights not only Hamdi's embarrassment and discomfort but also how individuals in less powerful positions are treated unfavourably. Delanty, Jones and Wodak (2008, p.13) suggest that racism is now 'less direct and more diffuse' and is less likely to be expressed overtly in terms of hostility towards race or ethnic difference. I do not mean to imply that the lecturer was a racist. I observed the lecturer on 16 occasions and there was no evidence that this was the case. However, there is some evidence of neo-racism where, rather than intentional othering of non-dominant groups, the effects of certain behaviours and discourses can disadvantage individuals along racial lines (Baker 1999; Spears 1999).

4.2.2 Mistaken identity

A second data example relating to othering and discomfort associated with the student experience relates to two female students Mary and Nancy. I observed the same lecturer confuse the two students for approximately three minutes when during the start of a class he asked who was presenting that day. Nancy was present, but Mary had not yet arrived and I made the following notes on the critical moment:

There is also further confusion as the lecturer confuses Nancy with Mary. They are both Black African females. He is insistent ...

LECTURER A: 'Well, why did you come to see me?' '...Yes, you came to see me.'

[His face colours with emotion as he says it]

[He means why did she come and see him about the presentation topic, if she is not in fact going to present on that topic]

NANCY: 'That was not me.' [Shaking her head]

[He is emphatic and now her face colours. The lecturer continues to insist for 2 or 3 seconds more, then realises his error and apologises explaining that a few students came to see him about poverty, while Nancy came to see him about her PDP (Personal Development Plan). He had forgotten. **The exchange is embarrassing and discomforting.**

9.47am **Mary** arrives late.
(Observation 8, year one).

Although the exchange in the classroom was between Nancy and the lecturer, from my perspective it seemed that Lecturer A did not recognise either Mary or Nancy, two women of African appearance and accent, half way through their first year. This oversight is despite separate appointments with him on different topics. Mary talked to the lecturer the previous week (Narrative Summary, 14/01/2009) but he had forgotten and Nancy did not correct him. Not only does the exchange cause embarrassment for Nancy and the lecturer due to the intensity of the situation but I, along with other students present, experienced some emotional discomfort. The two students' 'blackness' and the lecturer's 'whiteness' added to the intensity of the situation. The identities of these two women did not seem important despite the considerable level of investment they reported. This interpretation is supported by Nancy

on a separate occasion when during an interview Nancy expresses her views on being a mature student with family responsibility:

Some subjects [lecturers] forget our responsibilities as mature students and they treat us the same. For example I've got three kids. I must work with them, do their homework and once I've finished with them I do my own.
(Group interview, 02/2009)

The participant's comments on the challenges of being a student with additional responsibilities echoes Norton's (2000) research findings, which point to a high level of investment made by migrant learners of English. I found the extract to reveal that significant time and energy is invested into Nancy's family's education in addition to her own. Once again it was difficult to ignore differences of race and gender, which seemed to intensify as Nancy was accused, indirectly, of lacking an ability to prepare an appropriate and timely presentation. It seemed to me that rather than being supported, Nancy, like Hamdi, seems to have been accused of something she did not do nor had intended to do. This second example relates to othering and, in particular, disbelief in the abilities of the Other (Holliday 2011) to carry out academic matters efficiently and with integrity.

4.2.3 The challenges of being 'foreign'

The next two data examples also relate to my observations of what I felt was discomfort experienced by key participants during class interactions as well as observations during my time in the field more generally. As I conducted a biographical interview, I noticed Mr N's leg shook as he recounted some powerful experiences of discrimination and the challenges of being 'foreign'. The point is significant as it relates to Mr N's relationship with the academy as his narrative indicates that he felt that lecturers othered students from Africa, Asia and Latin America:

There are some lecturers who want to distinguish between the foreigners but not realising that they come from a different background. **Some lecturers don't give foreign students time to express themselves.** ... the ones born here have time to express themselves while those from Africa, Asia and Latin America don't. He feels this way because of his accent and some people laugh at him sometimes. Mr N says that there are two lecturers who are tough, not helpful but tough, with students who have difficulties expressing themselves. **[His leg shakes as he speaks]**
(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

The data reproduced above originates from a much longer interview. I found the extract isolated above to be particularly significant as, at the time of data collection, the physical tremors I observed were significant enough to note along side the participant's recounting of his experiences. Added to this, the tremors also seemed to be a manifestation of the discomfort he experienced stemming from his perceptions of discrimination from 'some lecturers' who he felt didn't 'give foreign students time ...'. Mr N had been resident in the UK for over 16 years (Narrative summary, 18/03/2010) and for

this reason was classified as a home student by the university. Even so, there appeared to be an intense desire to tell his story. It is also noteworthy that he refers to students from 'Asia, Africa and Latin America', the visible minorities, as not having time to explain themselves. He does not appear to suggest that lecturers laugh at his accent, confirmed later on in the interview. At the time, I was struck by the power and intensity of what Mr N said coupled with the physical shaking.

Mr N did not know me well, yet despite this relative lack of familiarity, he shared a great deal of what I interpreted as feelings of being the object of discriminatory practices which disadvantage students from certain backgrounds and origins. He refers to this sense of othering by distinguishing 'the ones born here' with those students 'from a different background.' He also alluded to the challenges of being foreign with an accent during his time at Northcentral, as well as the difficulties, as he as he saw it, associated with being treated unsympathetically by academic staff:

He goes on to talk about a lecturer who doubted the work he produced was his own. **They did not trust him** and added to this there he did not receive any feedback and it was only after his exam on socialism that they began to trust him. **There are things that he doesn't want to say but he knows why.**

(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/02/2010)

The second data extract shows that Mr N talked in some detail about the scepticism he encountered over the ownership and authenticity of his own work and whether the academic text he had produced was in fact 'his own'. Attribution of ideas is an important and sometimes contentious part of academic writing and I wanted to explore what seemed to be a plagiarism incident further as he said: 'There are things that he doesn't want to say but *he knows why*.' Ethically, however, I had to refrain from exploring the assertion as this was the first time we had met for interview on a one to one basis. The continual tremors, suggested he already appeared to be contributing a great deal emotionally and physically. Mr N refers to matters of text production and expressing oneself academically in writing in addition to the challenges of expressing himself in English. Accent, or ways of speaking, is particularly salient for social identity (Lippi-Green 1997). The first data extract from Mr N's narrative account illustrated that there are complex identity issues relating to speaking English with an accent in terms of how he sees himself as he refers to being laughed, his accent and not being trusted by lecturers. The theme of socially significant ways of speaking in relation to language variety is important and emerges later in this chapter (4.3.4 Speaking English with a post-colonial accent).

This student's varied and challenging life experiences were embodied through physical tremors during interview. This is in line with Rosen's (1990) findings which noted mature students in an urban setting 'shaking and sweating' during interviews as they talked about the experiences of HE study.

The example also highlights perceptions of marginalisation, discriminatory practices and in some instances indirect, or neo-racism which, for this participant, was a consequence of coming from elsewhere. According to Zeleza (2009), a diasporic identity relates to a sense of belonging associated with a place which has been ascribed a marginal or less valuable identity in comparison to more ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ cultures. Diasporic identity appears significant. It shifts between identity rooted in London for many years and, at other times, ‘an African’ with an ‘accent’ and someone who has difficulty expressing himself, and in doing so highlighting the complexity of identity.

4.2.4 Mocking, ribbing and othering

The slightly colloquial nature of the sub-title may seem out of place, but it captures the essence of the event I elaborate on next: the public poking fun at a student’s name just over a month into his first year of undergraduate study. The student involved was from an EU member state and for this reason I did not categorise him as a key participant or invite him for interview. Nevertheless, a number of the students I interviewed were present and this student, Mindis (pseudonym), was frequently present during classroom observations. His embarrassment, as well as my own, is note-worthy. During the seminar I wrote:

There is laughter and hilarity associated with/surrounding one of [the] male students [Mindis]. Unsure who he is at this stage but later learn it [the name] is Eastern European. Same student explains graph and others interject. I was unable to hear exact words exactly **but the lecturer comments on this student’s name and how unpronounceable it is**. The lecturer makes light of the fact that he has not attempted to pronounce the man’s name and missed it off the list rather than attempt to do so. How does the student feel about this?
(Observation 1, year one)

As it was the first week of the year one observations, I struggled initially to make sense of what I heard and saw. In fact I searched for alternative ways of characterising what I observed. ‘Mocking’ and ‘ribbing’ are rather intense in terms of semantic derogation; yet, it became clear that the lecturer and a sizeable portion of the class laughed loudly at this student’s expense. Therefore, from what I observed, the terms seemed appropriate in two ways. Firstly, the phrase appeared to represent the lecturer rapport building with the class at the expense of an outsider. Based on my knowledge of the students’ origins, my access to the university record system and reference to fieldnotes, I noted that there were several students from Norway in the class but only one from Eastern Europe. Additionally, I felt the lecturer took advantage of his position of authority in the class at that time rather than risk looking foolish by mispronouncing a name, something staff at the university did frequently in a context of great linguistic and cultural diversity. The student’s isolation was heightened as so many of the class were visible minorities from Britain and elsewhere: he was a ‘white’ outsider. Rogerson-

Revell's (2007) study found that humour can be a sign of collaboration and inclusion but also a sign of collusion and exclusion. Observing the student as the butt of a joke was surprising as this class member was an active participant in class discussions and had just completed an explanation of graphs on a handout for the benefit of the class (Observation one, year one). Humour relates to feelings of superiority and there is, therefore, a trade off between those who share the joke and the person who is the object of derision (Rogerson-Revell 2007). This seemed to be the case for Mindis as he was othered by the group.

This data example indicates that discomfort can be experienced in multiple ways. It was not the lecturer's comments alone, but the response of the class that was felt so intensely. This example of what went on in a university classroom at the time of observation reveals how power can shift within a group. More specifically, powerful classroom discourses remained with the lecturer but also appeared to shift in favour of those in the class who could be described as more established visible minorities. On this occasion, the change in classroom dynamics was at the expense of the student present, in part, as a result of recent EU enlargement policy. At the same time, I was shocked that this kind of event could occur in a Northcentral classroom. It seemed unkind and unprofessional, partly I suspect as my teacher training experience emphasised student-centredness and my beliefs in anti-essentialism and anti-racism were so entrenched.

4.2.5 Summing up

This theme has illustrated the sometimes intense and discomfoting experiences associated with the challenges of negotiating academic practices for a number of participants and those around them, which I argue resulted from unintentional bias and other forms of indirect discrimination I characterise as neo-racism. This occurred despite signs of engagement from Hamdi, Nancy and Mindis as they attempted to engage with their lecturer and peers. I have also shown that participants' attempts to negotiate, in the sense of overcoming difficulties and challenges, the experience of being at university was not always successful as at times they were assessed unfavourably and unfairly. Classroom practices which centred around the group presentations were not always a positive experience for lecturers or class participants, and were also accompanied with emotional discomfort and intensity. These factors, I argue, influence literacy events such as oral presentations. In addition, data begins to reveal the complexity of classroom discourse and how lived experiences at Northcentral were influenced by life experiences prior to university as well as during university. In the case of Mr N, this related to what he felt were false accusations of plagiarism, but also to the hurt and pain associated with speaking with the 'wrong' accent (Lippi-Green, 1997).

4.3 Complex identities

There were a number of examples during my time in the field where identities seemed to be ascribed on behalf of others and where these newly ascribed identities were not positive. This form of identity construction has been touched on in the previous section in which I explored incidences of intense discomfort experienced by members of the group. This next section continues to discuss identities which shift across time and space, evoking notions of diaspora and hybridity yet, at the same time, presents data which highlights a complex institutional identity. I analyse five examples in turn: A second choice place, The Late ones, The kids versus the mature students, Speaking English with an accent and Changing identities.

4.3.1 A second choice place

In the previous chapter I introduced the sterile zone (Place, Space and Identity 3.7.1) in order to introduce the complex institutional identity of Northcentral and the impact I argue it had on students who were prohibited from accessing certain areas of the campus in which the lecturers' shared office was located. In this chapter, while the focus remains on institutional identity, I present data which illustrates both participant and lecturer perspectives.

Starting with Mr N, data reveals Northcentral came second after another London university. The participant explained during interview:

He didn't pick Northcentral. His ESOL tutor picked it ... He wanted to go to London Metropolitan University because they did international development, ...
(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

Mr N was accepted onto a similar course to development at Northcentral but he explained that it was not his first choice and his options seem to have been limited by his previous educational experiences.

Similarly, some of the participants I engaged with viewed Northcentral as a second choice even though their experiences, once enrolled, were reported as positive in Sade's case. This is highlighted in the second part of the data extract below:

Northcentral was not her first choice: it was Bedfordshire, but Northcentral accepted her first. ... Bedfordshire didn't reply in time so she got Northcentral Applied social science is relevant to her work as an [Citizens Advice Bureau] adviser and she chose Area Studies because she is really interested in development issues. That was the link she could see as well as a course of study that had more of a focus on gender issues and that was the plan that really drew her to Area Studies.
(Sade, narrative summary, 01/04/2010)

There can be said to be some similarities between Mr N and Sade's experiences if we interpret the lack of a reply as a lack of a timely offer as 'Bedfordshire didn't reply in time'. There are many possible reasons for Mr N and Sade not receiving offers from their first choice universities, but what I see as common to these participants is that Northcentral was reported as not being their first university choice.

The next example supports my view that the Applied Social Science programme was also constructed less positively than others. During interview Mona explained that as a result of her work experience in health and social care (Narrative, 19/11/2009), she applied for a course in Applied Social Sciences after being rejected by the Social Work Faculty:

Initially, **Mona wanted to do social work rather than Applied Social Science**, but ended up doing Applied Social Science [pseudonym] as she was not accepted by the Social Work department. She finds xxx interesting, but is wondering what job she might do. (Mona, narrative summary, 19/11/2008)

I found that in Mona's case the Applied Social Science programme seems to have been constructed less positively than Social Work as she stated she '*ended up* doing Applied Social Science [pseudonym] as she was not accepted by the Social Work department.' The programme she was studying did not appear to be her preferred choice. Once again, options seem to have been limited for these key participants. These examples also have some application to a more nuanced understanding of participants' complex identities and life experiences and how and why students came to study at Northcentral and the Applied Social Science course I observed more specifically.

The next critical experience occurred as a class was ending, although everyone remained seated. Caitlin (pseudonym) was the only member of the class who over the months of observation displayed features characteristic of traditional rather than non-traditional university students. As the session ends, Caitlin speaks to the lecturer:

Caitlin informs lecturer that there are no classes next week except for a risk course [pseudonym] because another lecturer had arranged a trip. Caitlin continues explaining that the lecturer responsible for the risk course [pseudonym] said she has spoken to him [the lecturer] about it.

LECTURER A, deliberately: I am sorry, but I cannot² remember her speaking to me about this at all.
[Lecturer's face reddens, blushes and he looks extremely uncomfortable.]
Caitlin apologises for the confusion as a trip to the UN

² Underlining signifies word stress.

has been arranged for the following week.’
(Observation 13, year one).

The observations noted on this occasion would seem to indicate that it is the lecturer who experienced discomfort in the presence of his class, as well as me as observer: ‘Lecturer’s face reddens, blushes and he looks extremely uncomfortable.’ This incident intensified as Caitlin appeared to relay information on behalf of another programme leader, but also due to the public way in which the highly experienced lecturer was informed by Caitlin, a first year undergraduate. It shows how, for a moment, power and authority shifted away from the lecturer towards Caitlin embodying the popularity and power of the other course. There seemed to be a hierarchy emerging between the institutional ‘academic tribes’ (Belcher and Trowler 2001) where some degree pathways were afforded greater prestige, student numbers and agency than others. What I also found significant at the time was how Caitlin, the only class member who could be described as traditional in the sense that she appeared to be ‘white’ *and* who sounded to me as though she spoke English as a first language, informed the lecturer of a trip which impacted on his course so significantly. I am aware that applying categories of this kind masks the richness of Caitlin’s background and depth of experience. Nevertheless, this example illustrates something of the identity afforded the entire group institutionally, including the lecturer. I knew very little about the ‘risk’ course, yet Kate’s visible identity markers and language use, closer to standard prestige varieties of English than many of the other students in the group I had heard, provide the possibility of a further post-colonial dimension to the power differentials of the group enrolled on the programme. I suggest the incident shows how a first year undergraduate was on one occasion ‘vested with institutional authority’ (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.88).

In fact, additional observational data appears to support my claim as, while gathering his belongings, the lecturer repeats that he must have been told the previous year but that he does not remember the arrangement. Data shows that this was stated emphatically: ‘I am sorry, but I cannot remember her speaking to me about this at all.’ He also comments that the Area Studies team has taken the whole of the second year to xxx, leaving him with only two students, so he cancelled the class:

LECTURER A: **‘I know this is an unpopular class’** he says in response to my suggestion that the UN trip may signal to students that one course is more important than others for students.
(Observation 15, year one)

I suggest this incident was experienced acutely by the lecturer as he raised the issue in response to a comment I made at a later date. The conversation I noted and subsequently highlighted in this example was a reminder of how lecturers and degree programmes seemed to compete for student numbers:

Conversation with Lecturer A during class observation suggests that **there is competition among the major pathways for students** ... as he commented that this year **students seem to be shifting away from area studies towards politics**. This vying for numbers may have an impact on applied social science courses, students and the standing of the Programme all the way through.’
(Fieldnotes, 10/02/2009)

Indeed, the lecturer seemed to dwell on this point, later blaming a power struggle between programmes as we chatted one day at the back of the classroom:

The conversation moves on to Faculty politics and how criminology and sociology spilt from xxx and politics **largely due to self-interest**. He reveals that this course is really a sociology course and not xxx, but that they cannot teach it due to the political split. He explains that **most second year students shift away** from xxx and towards development.
(Observation 12, year one)

Summing up, it would appear from my perspective that it is not only participants who framed the programme in deficit terms: there is evidence that some faculty appeared to do so as well. In addition, data also highlights the fact that competition among three degree pathways (Applied Social Science, Politics and Area Studies) had a disproportionate affect on the course I observed. The programme’s identity as less popular, evidence through conversations with a number of participants as well as the lecturer, was compounded by the way in which the UN trip to Brussels was announced to the group, coupled with the lecturer’s own reference to the class as ‘unpopular’. It is quite possible that the conversation or meeting between faculty staff had been forgotten by the lecturer. Nonetheless, the fact that one programme could have such a negative impact on another was striking. There is evidence to show how participants constructed aspects of the university and programme identity in deficit terms. For instance, Northcentral was viewed less favourably than comparable institutions in a number of other ways: ‘... the library closes at 10pm which is early compared to other universities such at the University of xxx, which is open 24 hours’ (Mona, 19/11/2008). I cannot claim that this second choice perspective was held by all students who were enrolled on the programme, but analysis from observations and interview summaries indicates that a sense of deficit emerged from both students’ and the lecturer’s comments. We can see how discourses surrounding the class observed are influenced by power hierarchies and, according to Gee (2008), how the workings of power affect how people think; and I would argue some of the choices participants made. There is some evidence from the two data extracts above that the lecturer at least had experience of undergraduate students tending to ‘shift away’ from his ‘unpopular’ course, towards other programmes once they had the option. This last point is also supported by evidence collated in Table 3.5, Summary of the eleven key participant profiles, which shows that only two out of the eleven participants indicated they were specialising in Applied Social Science (Kate and Mona). Furthermore, according to the university student record system, the number of students enrolled on the year one Applied Social Science course was 29; and just 9 and 12 for the corresponding year three courses (see Table 3.4). A downward trend

in enrolment numbers alone does not prove that the course was unpopular; yet, a range of data sources suggests that it was considered the least popular option out of the three degree pathways (Politics, Area Studies and Applied Social Science).

4.3.2 An ascribed 'late' identity and the impact of untapped resources

Here I explore how one lecturer ascribed a number of students with the essential identity, 'late'. Over the four months I observed the class, there was continual confusion and lack of clarity over the administration of group presentation topics and schedules which dominated class proceedings. As a result, it can be useful to think of the discussions surrounding the group presentations as constituting part of the every day practice which informed and was influenced by the group:

NANCY: 'Have you changed the topic for the presentation?'
LECTURER A: 'Well, we need to work this out as a group
[Hesitantly]. [Mary looks confused as the lecturer continues to address the whole group.
Mary tries to get his attention once more...]
MARY: 'Which topic?'
[The lecturer goes over to Mary finally and they discuss the topic which it turns out is a duplication of today's presentation.]
LECTURER A: '**I remember now, you were one of the late ones** turning up.
(Observation 6, year one)

The data extract above highlights an example of how two participants attempt to negotiate what is required of them. It also highlights how attempts at negotiation were challenged as interaction between the lecturer and participants seemed to be dominated by unequal power relations. Even though the lecturer appears to acknowledge the challenges they all face indirectly: 'Well, we need to work this out as a group', he also seems to blame the students who question him, referring to them as 'the late ones'. I suggest 'the late ones' was an essential identity category ascribed to those students who were late starting the programme. It was articulated many times as the lecturer struggled to organise the group and maintain control of the course. Out of context the word 'late' may seem benign, but I suggest it reflects a deficient image of these non-traditional students as being unable to work autonomously and collaboratively, skills idealised in higher education. The practice of ascribing the identity of students as 'late' was not restricted to Mary or Nancy as can be seen from the next example of Mustapha, a 'non-traditional' student with diasporic connections:

Lecturer goes on to house keeping matters of who presented today and who is presenting the following week. ...

LECTURER A: 'Right, that's group 6 sorted out'
LECTURER: '.... Group 7, I didn't even know I had Group 7!?'
[Jokingly]

MUSTAPHA ‘You made it!’
RETORTS:
LECTURER: **‘Yes, I remember you were very late.**
 (Observation 8, year one)

Mustapha attempted to challenge the lecturer; yet, like Mary and Nancy he was essentialised as late and appeared to be blamed for the administrative challenges the lecturer encountered at that moment. One reason for the problem of assigning presentation topics and students arose as a proportion of the class were not present at the very start of the semester which presented significant problems for the lecturer, and hence the reference to lateness. However, it seemed to me that the challenge of such organisational matters were, in part, a consequence of the course design rather than being caused by ‘the late arrivals’ (Observation 13, year one) alone. The continual reference to students not only starting late, but being a late kind of a person was powerful because of the high proportion of participants ascribed this essential label. Added to this, I did not see the lecturer take responsibility, publicly at least, for the difficulties and challenges encountered. There is no doubt that lateness caused additional logistical challenges, but it seemed unfair to blame the individual.

For instance, the lecturer referred to Mary as ‘one of the latecomers’ in order to clarify that she was one of those individuals who cause problems for themselves because they joined the course late (Fieldnotes, 16/12/2008). This suggests that difficulties arising are seen as a ‘result of individual choices or circumstances rather than [stemming] from structural or systematic forces’ (Lewis and Ketter, 2011, p.135). Logistical problems become problems associated with the individual and not the institution. The data reveals quite a bit about the power relations at work at particular moments in the university classroom and how othering of this kind surrounding the organization of class presentations became routinised discourse practice.

I now introduce Mustapha, one of ‘the late ones’, in order to provide an illustrative example of the rich life experiences the participants I worked with brought to the academy:

Mustapha is originally from Congo but spent most of his childhood in France where most of his schooling took place. As a child he travelled a lot, mainly to French speaking West African countries such as Ivory Coast, Togo and Gabon. He left Congo when he was four. He comes from a diplomatic family: his father works for the UN and his mother used to be an Ambassador. They changed countries according to the appointments his family received. Mustapha now lives in xxx and drops his son off at school before he commutes to xxx four days a week. Mustapha originally elected to take Development with French as he felt he needed to continue with French. Soon after, he realised that he needed to try something else. **Mustapha started xxx course in week 6, ...** (Mustapha, narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

This extended data example created after an extensive interview with Mustapha offers some evidence that Mustapha had had a rich and varied life before starting university and, from what he reported, appears to be reasonably accustomed to changing environments and cultures. Data illustrates that he lived and was educated in a variety of different African countries because of his family’s

responsibilities. Later in the interview, he stated that he ‘actually returned to Congo for the first time in 2006 as he was planning to go back there or perhaps somewhere else in Africa’ (narrative summary, 09/12/2008). I suggest life experiences like these suggest that Mustapha was likely to be able to contribute positively to class seminars and debates and controversies in the Applied Social Sciences.

In contrast, during observations, several of the students I observed were constructed as self-interested (Hamdi), disorganized (Nancy) and late (Mustapha, Mary). Additionally, Mustapha’s diplomatic family background is a vivid reminder of how unfavourable identity categories such as ‘late/not late’ mask the complexity of life before university and which, in this case, impacted on disciplinary choice.

4.3.3 The kids versus the mature students

A third example relates to how participants I worked with positioned themselves, and others in the group, in less favourable ways. The focus is on the mature, non-traditional student profile of the vast majority of the group observed and interviewed, who were situated amongst a smaller number of college or school leavers. Feelings of disadvantage reported relate to the complex identities which emerged during the study and which had implications for the identities constructed by students on behalf of their peers, as well as themselves. The next extract introduces James, one of the ‘kids’, who I talked to as he returned to validate a narrative summary:

He started in mid-October in learning week 3. He lives with his father but does not talk to him much about uni life. James commutes up to 4 hours each day to come to ‘uni’ and, as a consequence, it can be difficult for him to arrive on time for a 9.30 lecture. He would have to leave home at around 7.30am to do so. He also works and recruits for the Army Cadet Force. These responsibilities end late. He missed the lecture today for this reason.
(James, narrative interview, 11/11/2008)

The data above illustrates how from my perspective it became apparent during the exploratory interview that James shared the many challenges of juggling university life and work commitments with some of the mature students in the group, such as Fred, Vera, Maisha and Mr N. This involved working several hours a week and included substantial commuting across London. Despite the responsibilities outside the university setting he mentioned, he described himself as ‘a lost kid’ with reference to his institutionally situated identity:

He is aware that he is one of the younger ones as when he talks to people and says that he is 18 they respond that that is pretty young. Most other students he talks to on a random basis are over 20. This makes James feel like a lost kid.
(James, narrative interview, 11/11/2008)

After talking to James at length on two occasions, there appeared to be a sense of disadvantage as James referred to himself as a kid in contrast to the mature students who ‘are over 20’. James was not

the only member of the group who referred to some of the undergraduate students as 'kids'. There are other instances where age and reference to 18 year olds as children were made:

Vera is also concerned because she believes that she is older and that some of the kids in the class are very good. As a consequence, they don't need to strain because the foundation has already been built. She admits she is not the only one having problems, but that some of the others do not come forward.
(Vera, narrative summary, 27/01/2009)

In contrast to James, Vera assesses the kids as 'very good' and who 'don't need to strain'. The data extract below shows how Mona also compares herself unfavourably to the younger students who she felt were better than her. The following is a paraphrase of fieldnotes taken as she talked freely one day in my office:

MONA: Before I couldn't contribute anything... **you know these kids are better than me**, so since you've asked me ... you know it helped me to open up ... I feel I have something to contribute to people.'

VICTORIA: Who?
[I press her on which people she is referring to and she confirms people in general]
(Fieldnotes, 17/03/2010)

Once again, a sense of being at a disadvantage emerged as Mona and Vera compared themselves unfavourably to 'the kids' who, from their perspective, had superior credentials. It is interesting that James opted to refer to himself as 'a lost kid' and 'pretty young' compared to other students at the start of the academic year. There is also a real sense of a group identity emerging as the younger students refer to non-traditional students as 'old' while the 'old', mature students refer to the eighteen year old as 'kids'. Rather than highlighting tensions between the mature students and kids, there was no real evidence of this, I suggest the data highlights tensions and anxiety surrounding academic study. This position is not without its contradictions as Fred states: 'The proportion of mature to non-mature students is fine' (Narrative summary, 13/01/2009). However, Fred clarifies this point further during a group interview:

But at the same time we realise, look, **he's got more time to read**, he's, he's got more time to read the assignments.
(Group interview, 10/02/2009)

During an individual interview with Fred, I found that he was keen not to blame who he referred to as 'the younger ones' (Narrative summary, 13/01/2009) for his experiences. Reporting his experiences, he admitted:

'Sometimes, **the time to read is not there** because of family commitments but it is also very difficult when you have not been in a classroom for 15 years' (Narrative summary, 13/01/2009)

All the same, he was critical of the institution for attracting non-traditional students in the first place. The degree had a target audience of both school-leavers and mature students as indicated by publicity which appears to place equal emphasis on both groups:

The course would appeal to sixth formers with a range of knowledge and **mature professionals** interested in current affairs. An A level in Politics is not required. (Undergraduate courses website³, 2010)

This point is picked up by some of the mature students during interview and put succinctly by Fred who says that the qualifier mature student ‘should not be there’ (Group interview 10/12/2009). Those interviewed felt that once they arrived they were treated exactly the same as other students. In other words, participants felt there was no dispensation or acknowledgement that they had family and work commitments outside the university. The views expressed contrast starkly with Lecturer A who stated any challenges or difficulties were personal and brought about by the individual (Fieldnotes, 16/12/2008) and thus not the responsibility of the University.

The identities the mature students ascribed the more traditionally-aged university students reflects their awareness that ‘the kids’ were likely to be better prepared for university study, as well as having more time for university study once enrolled. Here identity categories, alongside a range of overlapping and interrelated data, are useful for unearthing significant discourse practices despite the complexity and diversity of the participants who made up the classes observed. On this occasion, identities constructed by the group did not appear to assist the negotiation of literacy-related practices, but instead reflected underlying anxiety and concern with the challenges of university study.

³ URL withheld due to issues of anonymity.

4.3.4 Speaking English with a post-colonial accent

The title of this sub-theme references Lippi Green's (1987) book *English with an Accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. This section is concerned with the effects of varieties of English on social identity. Not all participants elected to talk about their language background or English language use but several did: Vera, Mr N, Mustapha and Mona, for example. What they reported touches on the complexity of diasporic identities which emerged during the previous section 4.2.3 (The challenges of being 'foreign'), where Mr N spoke of the implications of his background in terms of the difficulties he encountered expressing himself and about the fear of being laughed at in class (Narrative summary, 18/03/2010). This section contains two examples. The first relates to the challenge of speaking Swahili as a first language on family relations and subsequent text production. The second picks up some of the themes introduced by Mr N relating to speaking with an accent, the challenges of speaking a non-prestige variety of English.

With reference to the impact of first language, Mona initiated talk about her background and, in particular, what she saw as the significance of Swahili to her predicament, the fact that she was resubmitting a piece of course work:

English was used as the official language when the Socialist government came into power when Mona was in year one. They changed the language policy from English to Swahili. Mona felt that her parents were okay as the educational system used English and they didn't have any problems. However, the problem for her came when English stopped being the language of communication. Mona feels that, as a result, she did not have a good background in English because she used Swahili. Mona also speaks the language of her parents, Kyrangi. Her parents use it and although she understands, she cannot speak it. She is fluent in Swahili. In Tanzania she uses Swahili rather than English as it is the official language. Mona finished her primary and secondary schooling in Tanzania. In 1999 her family came from Tanzania to work in the Embassy here. Even though she was better at writing than speaking, she felt she did not have a good enough background in English and decided to improve her English when she came over.
(Mona, narrative summary, 19/11/2008)

The statement about understanding but not speaking Kyrangi may seem contradictory, yet less so if it is seen as a statement about language repertoire. More importantly, her first language, Swahili, is contrasted with her parents' use of Kyrangi. From my perspective it seemed that there were clear language and identity conflicts for Mona who was schooled in 'Swahili rather than English' as her parents were. What is also significant is the sense of distance from her parents Mona communicated: 'they didn't have any problems' while, in contrast, she does. The outcome and influence of national language policy was deeply felt by this participant as she talked about her childhood education in Tanzania. The use of Swahili as a medium of instruction was problematic and despite being her first

language, she appears to view Swahili in terms of the low prestige attached to it compared to English. Amina shares Mona's view of Swahili as being less advantageous than English:

Her father was in pursuit of a better education for his family and at the time did not want his children to stay in Nairobi and learn Swahili, the native language, because he believed it would not benefit them.'

(Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010)

Although at no point during the project did I seek to verify evidence as a deliberate strategy, Mona's experiences with regard to the impact of Tanzanian language policy are reported in the literature. For instance, the introduction of Swahili in favour of English was one response to the colonial system in Tanzania (Blommaert 2010; Mazrui 1997) and what is clear is that the use of a language, any language, cannot occur outside power relations. There was also a sense that diasporic connections remained strong as participants talked about who they were, where they came from and the impact on their academic experiences at Northcentral.

Non-standard varieties of English also emerged as significant for how participants framed academic writing challenges. Vera, for instance, blamed her challenges with text production and her source of language errors on pidgin English, in doing so emphasizing the importance of standard English:

Vera explains that although the medium of education in Liberia is also English, she speaks what she describes as local English or pidgin. Only those who are able to complete their education or go to a good school are able to speak standard English as most of the public schools in Liberia lack good facilities. Vera believes that she speaks pidgin English and that when she writes this is the cause of her grammatical errors today. This stems from the fact that she was unable to finish High School in Liberia. It was a private fee paying school and at times her father struggled to find the money to pay the fees for her and her siblings as well. Because of this financial situation, there were gaps in Vera's education, even before the onset of the civil war.

(Vera, narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

Vera describes herself in deficit terms on several occasions; such as, 'a high school drop out', as someone who got to tenth grade only, and as someone who was unable to complete her education in Liberia because of the war (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008). She resumed her education in Norway where 'she learnt Norwegian as well as how to read and write for 2 years' (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008) after which she migrated to Britain. Despite her multilingual repertoire, it is possible that there were residual gaps in Vera's education which meant that she had not achieved 'full literacy' (Blommaert 2010, p.162) in English, and that as a result all language skills were not yet equally or fully developed. I suggest that her life experiences were also likely to be contributory factors to the challenges of negotiating reading and writing at university. Vera expressed regret at not being able to finish her education and become an independent person (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008):

...they [College admissions] said that **they could not accept what she had done in Tanzania** so they suggested she did a pre-Access course instead to see how she got on. This made her feel bad because **she had to prove that she was capable and that just because she went to school in Tanzania did not mean that she did not know anything.**
(Mona, narrative summary, 19/11/2008)

It seems to me that both Mona and Vera recognised the importance of not only educational qualifications but also standard English for their identity. If qualifications gained elsewhere and language varieties spoken as a result of a colonial past and distant contexts are marginalised, it is less surprising that the students I worked with viewed themselves as lacking compared to ‘the kids’. ‘The kids’, from the perspective of key participants, spoke English as a first language; had been schooled in English; and importantly had more time to apply themselves. It would seem that from what key participants reported, being rejected by other institutions and other programmes adds to this sense of disadvantage. I suggest participants’ educational experiences and multilingual repertoires, however sophisticated, inevitably influenced the way in which they were able to engage and negotiate with Northcentral. Life experiences appeared to affect not only personal identity, but also the nature of relationships with others with whom participants identified. These relationships indicated younger members of the group as well as family members, illustrated in the section below. I suggest tentatively that these experiences had some influence on text production. For instance, Vera wrote that her language background was ‘the cause of her grammatical errors today’. During interview there was some evidence that Mona frames her language background as problematic in respect of the challenges she was experiencing at the time of data collection.

Additionally, discourses surrounding speaking and writing ‘proper’ English with the ‘right’ kind of accent emerged as important for a number of participants. Firstly, Kate stated that she always tries to speak ‘proper English’ because she was ‘the academic one in the family and it used to annoy her when people said things wrongly’ (Narrative summary, 23/10/2010). This sentiment appears to be shared by Mr N who also referred to people not speaking properly:

Mr N likes studying with different people whose words you can note-down, words he is not familiar with, and then go and research them. **The problem is that some people, who are around us, do not speak properly**, and so if you stay with them you may confuse and mix up words and he wonders why he spends time with them. Then when he wants to involve them, they accuse him of being English and of changing his way of talking. They say he is trying to copy the English style. Mr N admits that sometimes he changes his accent and his friends do not recognise him when he answers the phone.
(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2009)

I cannot say categorically that he is referring to ‘some people’ from the group of participants I observed, but this does seem possible. Positioning of this kind may have been for my benefit as Mr N

may have chosen to identify with or appeal to me as a teacher-researcher with an interest in language and literacy. He may also have been influenced by his interpretation of me as someone who spoke English ‘without’ an accent and somehow different to the ‘people who are around us’ at that time. A different, or perhaps additional, interpretation is that he was projecting views expressed by his daughter about *him*. I inferred, from the information he provided, that she would be likely to speak standard forms of English as she had been born and in London:

... his daughter wants to challenge him. She also laughs at his accent and says he is an African. She thinks ... [she] knows English and that she is cleverer than him: she does not have an accent. However, he is aware that even though his accent is not good she is not cleverer than him.

(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

Children routinely challenge their parents’ authority in different ways. However, significant to this thesis is that he reports that his daughter ‘does not have an accent’ but that *his* accent is ‘not good’. As everyone has an accent of some kind, these comments seem to fit notions of distancing resulting from language differences between home and school, or home and the prestige English characteristic of higher education. As a result, non-standard accents, or not speaking properly are amplified as ‘socially *unacceptable difference[s]* [italics original]’ (Lippi-Green 1997, p.173).

It seems that both Mona and Mr N see academic success as intrinsically tied to standard language use, despite being fluent speakers of English commensurate with the length of time spent in the UK. I have touched on evaluative comments from participants relating to speaking Swahili, those with ‘African’ accents described as ‘not good’, and being laughed at by others who use varieties closer to Standard English. The link between the sense of deficit associated with speaking ‘local’, pidgin or English with an African accent, Liberian Kreyol for instance, signifies the complex historical relationship with more standard forms of English, often afforded a downgraded status (Phillipson 1992; wa Thiong’o 1986). Participants reported this was important. Therefore, it seems necessary to stress the importance of contextual, non-linguistic factors affecting what participants felt about their language backgrounds. I want to stress that, based on the evidence presented so far, challenges of negotiating literacy-related practices are unlikely to be linguistic alone. This is a view first articulated by Street (1984; 2004), who argued it is the non-linguistic that becomes significant in literacy practices. The examples illustrate the many ways in which language use is bound up with power as well as other non-linguistic factors.

4.3.5 Changing identities and British citizenship

So far, I have written very little about the ways in which participants reported or were observed to have changed as they negotiated their relationship with Northcentral, specifically. This is because the other themes discussed so far emerged powerfully during the analytic process. I have already presented evidence that illustrates a range of critical life events significant to how participants saw themselves which occurred before time at Northcentral. In this section I argue that significant identity work occurred for many participants, but that changes were not necessarily a result of engagement or successful negotiation with Northcentral, sometimes occurring *before* undergraduate studies commenced. Participants reported they were long-term or permanent UK residents and that they had identities, which were situated outside as well as inside the UK in some way. As a result, the process of gaining British citizenship (See gov.uk website June 2014) was a topic which arose for a number of participants.

During an extended biographical interview, Mr N talked about his educational experiences in France and in Congo before that (Narrative summary, 18/03/2010). He also reported racism and discrimination in the workplace in London and later at Northcentral (see section 4.1.3), yet, despite these varied experiences both inside and outside the UK, he seemed relatively positive about gaining British citizenship:

He's got rights. He took citizenship and now thinks like a British person because he is part of society, living in society. As a citizen of this country, he needs to bring [contribute] something,
(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

In contrast to my own post-structural perspectives on identity, it seems that, for Mr N, citizenship represents something quite solid and tangible. 'He *took* citizenship' and is now 'part of society'. There was, however, some ambivalence associated with changes in citizenship expressed by other participants:

Mary expresses a desire to go back home to Rwanda to fight poverty and she feels that **being a British citizen** will help her achieve this. She does not want to be in the UK on benefits and end up in a nursing home. She concludes that having a British passport is a good thing as **it will make life easier; but, it will not change her as a person.**
(Mary, narrative summary, 20/01/2009)

Interestingly, Mary is careful to state that there is an absence of change to personal identity as a result of gaining British citizenship. However, the statement, coupled with changes to body language and voice quality observed, suggests there may be more ambiguity or emotional discomfort associated

with this bureaucratic move than articulated verbally at that point. There appears to be some conflict associated with the changes Mary was experiencing at that time:

... she should not really be doing it, but that she has started the process which she is doing for her daughter.
(Mary, narrative summary, 20/01/2009)

It would seem that Mary did it, gained British citizenship that is, 'for her daughter' in order to secure identical legal status and documentation for them both. Viewing the process of becoming a British citizen as something 'she should not really be doing' contrasts with more public discourses, reflected in, for example, government reform which took place in order that the processes of gaining citizenship would become 'meaningful and celebratory rather than simply a bureaucratic process' (HMSO 2002). According to Hanauer (2008, p.198):

The acquisition of citizenship, the bureaucratic process of changing the legal status of residence in an institutionally defined territory termed a nation, is usually perceived in legal, societal and personal terms as major positioning of the individual.

However, the quote above, which suggests citizenship involves major repositioning, sits in stark contrast to Mary's claim that 'it will not change her as a person.' I was also unsettled to learn that Mona may have taken the citizenship test because of my influence:

Mona says that she took the test and is now a British Citizen and that I triggered something in her when I mentioned xxx last year. **She was aware that through her studies and general awareness that this would become harder and the criteria and process would change.** I ask her how she feels and she replies that **although she is pleased, her heart is with the people in Tanzania.**
(Fieldnotes, 17/03/2010)

It seems that Mona also made this significant change to her identity for pragmatic reasons, suggesting that the bureaucratic change is as much about individual access to resources than a new identification with Britain necessarily. Hanauer (2008) suggested that with regard to citizenship test taking, diasporic identity remains separate from this legal identity associated with nation.

Fieldnotes indicate that participants were not entirely comfortable with talking about the process of gaining British citizenship, despite a high level of sharing about other equally complex life issues. I suggest this reluctance may be a reflection of British citizenship being seen as a pragmatic necessity rather than a positive choice as 'it will make life easier' even though, for instance, Mary reported 'she should not really be doing it' (narrative summary, 20/01/2009). Even so, there does seem to be some complex identity work taking place not least as both participants were careful to refer to their 'first' nation states of Rwanda and Tanzania. I deduce that there are implications for identity as these

women have ‘deep identification’ (Hanauer, 2008) with Rwanda and Tanzania, as well as life in the UK. Data hints at more complex and unsettling changes to how they saw themselves. Also of relevance to this thesis is the discovery that participants were both studying citizenship (‘she was aware that through her studies’) as an academic subject at university and at the same time having to ‘prove’ their ‘Britishness’ through completion of a Home Office citizenship test. This reciprocal exchange between academic subjects studied locally and individual identity and identification elsewhere is picked up in the next chapter.

4.3.6 Summing up

There was a tendency among some, but not all, of the group to reflect on the fact that either the institution or the programme they were undertaking had not initially been their preferred choice, further limiting their options as they saw it. The data also reveals a complex and interrelated set of deficit identities among those who defined themselves as speakers of non-standard forms of English, or speakers of languages other than English, for a variety of reasons. There is also evidence that participants positioned themselves less favourably in comparison to other, mostly younger, students in the group. Challenges of negotiating the academy were hindered by essential identities such as ‘the late ones’ which were applied to a number of participants. Indeed, some participants were assessed unfavourably despite the institutional practice of allowing ‘late arrivals’ onto courses several weeks into the academic year. As a result, even though participants were equally complex and different, participant identities were often constructed in essential terms by others around them as they became aware of the challenges of undergraduate study. I suggest that challenges of university study were experienced all the more starkly by students like Vera, Mona Mary and Mr N, given their rich and complex backgrounds and educational experiences, which in some cases were disrupted and truncated due to financial pressures and violent conflict.

The data analysed so far has elicited very little evidence of successful negotiation, belonging to or identification with Northcentral even though participants commented on the students around them. Instead, belonging is evidenced through the naturalization process. While literature indicates this might be highly significant in terms of repositioning of the individual (Hanauer 2008; Home Office 2002), the data from this study indicates some ambivalence and public unease as participants talked about the process of gaining British citizenship. Therefore, despite highly personal and significant *legal* changes to identity, the permanency of British citizenship seems to be resisted with a preference for more dynamic identification moving between local and more distant communities.

I have begun to draw out a sense of distance reported by Mr N, Mary and Mona, in particular, as a consequence of how they constructed experiences before and during their time at Northcentral. Analysis has also begun to highlight participants as knowledge makers as much as it does their complex diasporic identities and tangible life experiences influencing their relationship with the academy. This next theme builds on a sense of disengagement, or distance from the process of study and its implications for the successful negotiation of academic literacies.

4.4 Disengagement and distance

This theme is divided into three sections: The impact of life before Northcentral, The everyday practice of non-attendance and Silence and resistance. Many powerful examples emerged during analysis in and on action and I have been necessarily selective in the process of data extraction and highlighting. I developed the first sub-theme around Mary as many of the experiences reported had some resonance and overlap with other members of the group.

4.4.1 The Impact of life before Northcentral

I have already illustrated in the case of 'Mistaken identity' (4.1.2) that, despite individual attention from lecturers in class as well as meetings separate to the timetabled classes, there were gaps in understanding of the nature of personal experiences which may have impacted upon students' attendance, punctuality and engagement. Here I present data from an extended biographical interview with Mary in order to illustrate the complexity of background and life experiences of this key participant. Mary's life before and during her time at university was rich, reflected in powerful narratives:

She is originally from Rwanda but was forced to leave as a result of the genocide. She was privileged to be able to study in Kenya. Mary had a varied professional career in Rwanda, working mainly in the field as, for example, an insurance company and for an HIV AIDS organisation. As a consequence of this fieldwork she speaks a range of languages which include English, French, Swahili, Yerwanda, Luganda and a number of local languages. She describes herself as a linguist and she had to learn the languages of local people to be to carry out her work as a counsellor effectively. However, it was because of this work that she had to leave her home.

(Mary, narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

Evidence from the relatively short extract above highlights Mary's multilingual repertoire in addition to her varied life experiences. It is also worth noting that although black and over 21 at the start of her degree programme, it is questionable whether she identified as working class, challenging essentialist perceptions of the identities of these students as 'non-traditional'. Additionally, after settling in London, Mary reported financial worries and eviction, revealing compelling reasons for late arrival onto the course:

She used to live in xxx in a two-bedroomed flat but felt that she had to move away and put everything behind her. It was mainly for the sake of her five year old daughter. Mary moved to xxx with her daughter in September 2008. Financially, the move has been very hard as, for example, at one stage she and her daughter were evicted. They ended up living in a single room for several weeks. This took place while Mary should have been attending xxx as the academic year began the third week of September ...

(Mary, narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

Mary also reporting getting into difficulty financially as her housing benefits had been drastically reduced unexpectedly as illustrated in the following data extract: 'She is concerned that she will not be able to pay her rent and may have to drop out as she is unable to repay the over payment as well as her rent' (Mary, narrative summary, 14/01/2009). One interpretation is that Mary brought about her own housing issues as she was motivated by a desire to start afresh (Fieldnotes, 16/12/2008) which resulted in her voluntary move to a different part of London. Nonetheless, I suggest she deserves to be respected for her varied professional roles and critical life events before as well as during the start of her university studies. I have briefly touched on Mary's sharing of experiences of Rwandan genocide, her more immediate financial worries and housing challenges in order to explain some of the reasons for her late start in week six of the course. Furthermore, she identified as a recovering alcoholic quite early on in the data collection phase which I later reflect on my interview with Mary in fieldnotes:

Mary seems to have invested a great deal of effort both emotionally and financially in order to start her degree. Mary also talks of genocide in Rwanda and her alcoholism.

(Fieldnotes, 16/12/2008)

As I learnt of Mary's life experiences I was able to understand how preoccupations of, for example, worrying 'continually about her three children whom she does not see or talk to' (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008) and homelessness manifested in class behaviour where Mary did not appear to engage with others:

In fact there were a number of disruptions of this kind, which prevented her from focussing on her studies. ... 'and, as a consequence, '... **although she was physically attending classes she was not really there as she was preoccupied with her housing issues.**

(Narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

I found her extended narratives to display a degree of awareness and reflexivity around her situation. Mann (2001; 2005) defines alienation, with regard to teaching and learning in higher education, as distancing from what learners should be engaged in, which may include feeling held back, inhibited, estranged or isolated from what it is they are supposed to be doing (Mann 2005). Such distancing and isolation was something I noted on several occasions. For instance, during class observation I noted:

...Mary sits at the front with her arms folded, coat on with buttons fastened. Meanwhile, the other younger students chat jovially.

(Fieldnotes, 02/12/2008)

In January, a similar lack of engagement was observed:

Mary does not seem to be taking notes and is listening with arms folded.
(Observation 7, year one)

From my perspective, Mary seemed particularly isolated and I observed little evidence of verbal engagement with the lecturer, her peers or learning behaviour such as note-taking. Thus, although Mary *attended* consistently, it was difficult to conclude there was much evidence of engagement. It was also difficult to determine to what extent the coat wearing was a deliberate block or barrier, as the practice could simply be related to room temperature, or alternatively self-awareness as she may have felt her clothes were less acceptable socially in the room at the time. That said, the coat wearing, accompanied by defensive arm folding does suggest some form of disengagement and alienation was being experienced at that time. These observations are supported by Duff's (2002, p.290) ethnographic study in Canadian classrooms which found that some students remained '... silent, marginal, apparently disconnected and disengaged from peers, curriculum, activities, and discourse in the mainstream...'. Data indicates grave reasons for her disengagement and lack of participation and I suggest it was surprising that she was able to attend university at all in many ways.

Even though I found Mary's narratives were among the most fully developed, other students experienced similar critical life events. Vera reported leaving 'Liberia because of the war' (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008) and Amina recounted how her family left Somalia after her father was kidnapped and 'Her mother couldn't take any more' (Narrative summary, 19/03/2010). I have already indicated that Mona's narratives are indicative of distancing from her family because of a lack of a common language among family members (section 4.2.4). I had been working with Mona for over a year when she offered an alternative, or perhaps additional, explanation for her sense of alienation or divorce from her immediate environment:

She apologises for she asking me to switch off the recorder the week before when she was critical of her supervisor. **She explains that she is anxious and nervous because she was abused.** I ask her if she is referring to an experience at Northcentral, but she says: 'No, before.'
(Fieldnotes, 09/04/2010)

Again, as in previous data examples explored in this chapter, experiences of undergraduate study were influenced heavily by life experiences outside and beyond the setting. Such experiences, I argue, continued to impact on how the group of students I worked with were able to engage and negotiate the university setting.

4.4.2 The everyday practice of non-attendance

Erratic attendance patterns characterised the majority of the classes I observed. For this thesis, non-attendance refers to: first of all, absence or not attending; second, leaving seminars and lectures without comment, and third, being late for classes. For example, reflecting on non-attendance, or absence from class, at the start of an observation one day I wrote: ‘9.38am 10/29 present’ (18/11/2008) as this struck me as low attendance for midway through the autumn term for a first year group. In fact, I did not meet one member of the first year class until January:

Nancy and another female student I do not recognise is sitting at the back. ...
I introduce myself and why I am in her class. She is Florence (pseudonym) and she says that she was asking Nancy who I was. She confirms she received a letter from me before Christmas but has not attended this class although I understand she has been present in other courses. She signs the consent form.
(Observation 9, year one)

Despite lengthy periods of non-attendance for some participants as indicated in the data extract above, I was unaware of any formal consequences being applied for long-term absences of this kind for this participant, but I was aware that the lecturer did not seem to notice that a black African female attended for the first time in over three months: I found this surprising.

Secondly, I also found the practice of entering and leaving the classroom without verbal comment or eye contact unusual given the size of the classes. While there may have been compelling reasons for doing so, it was generally disruptive as the extract below illustrates:

Vera’s mobile phone goes off and she runs out of the class to take a call. As Lecturer talks, Maika [pseudonym] appears outside the door. He beckons to Fred/Mustapha (?) to come. Fred then also leaves the class and this leaving and re-entering becomes disruptive especially given the squeaky [door] hinge.
(Observation 4, year one)

On more than one occasion, I found that the disruption and sense of chaos (Observation 4 and Observation 8, year one), which resulted from non-attendance of this kind, could not be overlooked. Both teaching and learning were affected:

9.53am Nancy’s phone goes off ... and Tracy turns round and frowns at her briefly. Nancy leaves the room and takes the call. Lecturer stumbles vocally as she does this but does not comment.
(Observation 9, year one)

However, I would like to put forward an additional interpretation. Despite the disruption and chaos highlighted in the data, the classroom practices of entering and leaving I witnessed may have been attempts at engaging and working together as class members located in other parts of the university setting sought out their co-presenters by phone or text. What I found poignant was that collaboration of this kind was also made far more challenging by the other forms of non-attendance. Hence, rather than collaboration and preparation occurring *before* seminar presentations were due, this activity seemed to occur simultaneously, affecting all member the classes quite significantly as can be seen from the data extracts above.

Thirdly, the following data example illustrates how non-attendance in terms of lateness disrupted class proceedings as the scheduled seminar presenters did not arrive:

LECTURER A: **‘Where are they⁴?’**
LEILA from Norway responds:
ANOTHER STUDENT:
LECTURER:

I spoke, eh, texted (?) one yesterday and she’s in the library’
[Another 2-3 ss support (the) travel difficulties explanation and why they’re late. Solidarity]
‘Some people think it’s reading week because there’s a reading day in another course’
[Laughter from majority and they look back at me and laugh]
‘Any presenters here yet? **God**’ [under his breath]
(Observation 2, year one)

The example above highlights the lecturer’s sense of frustration, as well as a sense of group solidarity. Another exchange below, this time between Lecturer B and a student called Bemí, also displays some evidence of a sense of group solidarity around the issue of non-attendance as class members provide detailed explanation for absences. Non-attendance does not appear to be problematic, for the more vocal group members at least. This in many ways is surprising given the high levels of investment many participants appear to have made in order to attend the classes themselves:

LECTURER B: **‘So where is everyone?’ [Shaking his head]**
 [Ena explains the travel issues and expense many have which may have caused lateness.]
BEMÍ AGREES: **‘People will be late.’** [Declarative statement]
 (Observation 2, year three)

The final statement, from Bemí, suggests non-attendance in the form of absence and lateness became part of the every day practice for the classes. That is, normal routinised practice which became an integral part of doing seminars and was therefore set to continue. Absent members seem to have been given a legitimate identity by those present on this occasion which contributed to the cohesiveness of

⁴ Underlining indicates word stress.

the group, despite frequent non-attendance. I also argue that non-attendance was legitimised by the institution as there was no obvious penalty, despite class registers being signed and distributed each week. The practice of non-attendance is reflected in attitudes towards punctuality despite considerable investment from the group, reflecting the complex and dynamic and, at times, contradictory nature of social practices and social relations. Nevertheless, despite evidence of solidarity and empathy towards each other's lateness, realised through phrases such as 'travel issues and expense', 'they're diverting buses' and 'some people think it's reading week', the group was also quite fractured. This meant that the group's social arrangements became more challenging for engagement once they were required to work in groups together:

LECTURER B: You do need to talk to each other. Find people you get on with
 and do the work together. Don't worry about plagiarism
 (Observation 1, year three, 05/11/2008)

There was an assumption that the full-time students would be able to work together and talk to each other. I see this as a reasonable expectation, yet key participants confirmed that this did not occur:

She [Mary] was aware the lecturer had changed the presentation topic but the second presenter was not aware of this. She had not been able to meet with her co-presenter before the morning of the presentation.
(Mary, narrative summary, 20 /01/2009)

I have already illustrated that Hamdi confirmed his lack of contact with co-presenters when he agreed to present, before being accused of currying favour: 'I don't really see them' (Observation 6, year one). Mona indicated that working collaboratively would be problematic: 'I don't see anyone else, apart from here' (Observation 1, year three). Clearly the disjointed nature of the classes affected seminar presentations, which I argue were central to academic literacy development and the texts produced by these students. There seems to be a clash of expectations between student's ability to talk and work together collaboratively, a dominant model and way of working among teaching and learning pedagogy (for example, Canterbury Christchurch University website, 2014). The reality was that there was often little contact and much less time for collaboration. Non-attendance in its various forms was a form of disengagement which became part of the groups everyday practice, despite the inevitable impact it had on other members and on matters such as seminar presentation preparation.

4.4.3 Silence and resistance

There were numerous instances where members of the group struggled to be heard by lecturers. However, I have chosen to focus on what I argue are more strategic or oppositional silences. Thinking around the meaning and significance of silences developed as I began to make connections between what was said during interview and what I was able to observe. The next example relates to disengagement from the practices of classroom learning. The observation notes are from a year three

observation the day after Obama's first election victory. The seminar was scheduled to run from 9.30-11.30am and at the start there are five people present. It was teaching week seven of the academic year:

10.05. Another latecomer.
LECTURER B: 'Can we start at 9.30? It's now 10.10?'
MADDIE: 'It was the trains. It wasn't me. I tried my best to get here on time. I've got a headache.'
[Maddie folds her arms as she finishes her explanation. She appears unapologetic and **the exchange has been tense.**]
The lecturer continues. **He seems slightly annoyed** as he explains he only sees them for 2 hours a week.
LECTURER B: 'You need to be here.'
(Observation 1, year three, 05/11/2008)

Maddie did not offer an explanation for her lateness. The lecturer did not ask why the student was late, nor did he enquire how she was, which seemed odd given the smallness of the class. Class relations did not seem positive which also surprised me at the time given my professional relationship with the lecturer, who to me seemed extremely committed. Thesen (2006) theorises 'a silence' as that which remains unsaid. Researching in the South African HE context, Thesen (2006) suggested that non-linguistic modes may serve as communicative resource for members of a diverse audience which seems applicable to Maddie here.

I made contact with Maddie after the class and she came to see me in my office the following week. We talked about her dissertation proposal after which I make the following notes:

... Maddie explains why she was late. She stayed at uni. late to prepare her presentation because she did not want to let the group - this group - down. After this she went to the gym. Because she is staying with family in south London, it takes her two hrs to arrive home. She reaches home at midnight, stays up late to finish off some uni. work for another course. Her boyfriend is arguing, but it is not clear whether with her or someone else. She does not go to bed until 3.30am and then has to rise at 7.00am to commute to Northcentral on the overground and Northern line London from xxx.'
(Fieldnotes, 12/11/2008)

Like James, Maddie's daily commute was a four-hour round trip. At a later date, Maddie explained that the train was stuck in a tunnel inexplicably for 20 minutes. One passenger nearly fainted and another had problems with her eyesight and, consequently, 'She had a headache which worsened during the seminar' (Fieldnotes, 12/11/2008). The previous 12 hours seemed to have been an ordeal for this student. Maddie later validated the fieldnote entry, correcting a minor detail, which suggests some consistency in what had been reported. These two contrasting pieces of data, from the class observation (Observation 1, year 3) and from a later informal conversation (12/11/2008), reveal a

mismatch in expectation and lack of understanding on both parts. The lecturer expected students to arrive on time and be suitably prepared, which is entirely reasonable. It seemed to me that the lecturer also assumed the student *could* have arrived on time had she made the effort. At the same, there appeared to be insufficient recognition that the student did in fact endeavour to do this and that, despite the tense exchange with the lecturer, Maddie was in fact a conscientious student. As a result I suggest that what remained unelaborated and unsaid had significant implications for Maddie's opportunity to discuss and negotiate ideas for her project proposal. Moreover, I argue that the strategic silences were representative of distancing from the process of study and the practices surrounding text production.

What follows is a longer than usual extract which I feel is necessary to show the lecturer's range of questioning and communication strategies employed to extract information from Mona, as well as the silences from the group.

LECTURER B	'Students really, I need to accelerate this process.
DELIBERATELY:	So, Mona, what are you doing ...? ' [silence and shuffling of papers]
LECTURER B:	'Have you got a topic? ... which is..? [silence and shuffling of papers]
	Students are directed to an assignment brief on page 5 of the Handbook. Lecturer B is engaged in talk and text whilst students listen. He then directs question to entire group: Student 2 responds, others remain silent.
LECTURER B:	'Surely globalisation and labour?'
LECTURER B:	'Trafficking is a result of globalisation, isn't it? Lecturer raises a number of questions rhetorically. [He] answers them, [and] ... a minority [of the questions being asked are] open to class at this stage. Question to entire group who are silent:
LECTURER B:	'Do you not find it interesting, that this is an area that is ignored?' [silence]
LECTURER B:	'Anybody got any more ideas?'
	Later on he seems to pick on Mona again:
LECTURER B:	'Mona, can you talk to the group?'
LECTURER B:	Mona, if you are going to say something, can you please talk to the group?' Mona's response is inaudible and lecturer looks annoyed:
LECTURER B:	'No, you need to find a policy area.' After general questions about how they work together, Mona volunteers:
MONA:	'I don't see anyone else, apart from here' (Observation 1, year three, 05/11/2008)

I wrote 'silence' eleven times this during a two-hour observation and I was struck by the general lack of response from the five or so students present. At one point in the observation, I focus on Mona as

the lecturer spoke to her directly more than once, which can be seen from data above. Her silences are most noteworthy, although the lecturer spoke emphatically more than once in an attempt to engage the whole group. Determining why the silences occurred were more complicated to unpack. However, I was fortunate that in a later interview with Mona she offers the following explanation for the silences:

The topics she is studying are interesting, but she feels that she could learn more from the class and did not feel that she can contribute a lot because of the way x is, because of the teaching methods. **If she asks a question, x will ask a question back in return when she is looking for an answer. This put her off asking questions in class. ...'**

(Mona, narrative summary, 19/11/2008)

This is a perceptive comment from Mona as I note from the data extract above the lecturer does in fact respond with questions: 'Surely globalisation and labour? Trafficking is a result of globalisation, isn't it?' At the time of observation, I interpreted the lecturer's frustration as possibly stemming from an assumption that the lack of communicativeness was because the students were bored, which did not seem to be the case for either Maddie or Mona.

It does seem that Mona's silences were an attempt to protect her from humiliation in the classroom setting, an interpretation also supported by Duff's (2002) ethnographic study. However, I suggest that the silences belonging to marginalised students like Mona should be seen as one response to the deficit discourses they encountered. It would be easy to claim the silences were due to the cultural, educational and linguistic backgrounds, implying causality, but this would be an over-simplification which focused on the individual at the expense of the institutional practices and power relations at work. Individuals like Mona, who reflected on how she felt she had changed while she attempted to complete her dissertation, support more complex, tacit reasons for silences relating to diasporic identity:

... she feels more confident. She adds that she never contributed in class or lecturers and seminars because, **as a result of her background**, ...

(Fieldnotes, 17/03/2010)

It seems that Mona made a deliberate choice not to seek help from Faculty experts on this occasion. Successful negotiation of the inevitable challenges of text production which in this instance related to seminar presentations and project proposals does appear to be challenging. I suggest the silences also provide some evidence for the significance of an emerging oppositional identity at this point reflected in Maddie and Mona's lack of elaboration and why I suggest Mona was inaudible even among a small class of five or six. Not all classroom behaviour is necessarily a reaction to authority. Nevertheless, I suggest participants attempted to challenge the authority and power of the lecturer in subtle and

indirect ways, which, nevertheless, had consequences for the amount of guidance with text production sought and received such as the dissertation and final year project proposal.

It is at this point that I wish to make a clearer distinction between, on the one hand, what I observed to be an emergence of an oppositional identity, and, on the other, evidence of critical resistance or what Giroux (2001, p.165) refers to as 'oppositional practices' towards academic culture more generally. For me, the oppositional stance taken by students like Maddie and Mona should not be seen as evidence of either a 'collective identity' (Ogbu 2004, p.3) for the entire group or as evidence for the 'abandonment of Black identity' (Ogbu 2004, p.24) by those engaging in the academy and concerned with what is sometimes known as 'acting white'. Instead I suggest the silences and a lack of elaboration relate to disengagement in as much as participants attempted to reassert their identities as worthy people. That is to say, more than 'late' and more than someone who knows something of value, despite being schooled outside the UK. Thus, rather than *resisting* academic culture, as Ogbu (2004) found in the classic ethnographic study of Black students in the US, there is an attempt to recreate more positive identities as individuals who have invested a great deal in terms of study hours, financial commitment, travelling time and lack of sleep, in order to come to class. In doing so, they attempt to challenge deficit discourses and ascribed identities.

4.4.4 Summing up disengagement

There is evidence that students experienced discrimination and marginalisation before their time at Northcentral, but also as a result of experiences at Northcentral. Disengagement and distance from the process of academic study takes a variety of forms: being absent, leaving classes before they officially ended, as well as through distancing, social isolation and a lack of elaboration or silences.

Referring to the reciprocal exchange between participant identities, life experience and the applied social science curriculum, earlier I noted that participants were aware of their rights as citizens and made pragmatic choices about their own citizenship status, partially influenced as they were studying citizenship at degree level. A similar point can be made here. The Course Guide stated the course examined social policy with the aim of introducing students to the processes responsible for the creation of social exclusion. Students were studying the causes and processes of social exclusion yet, at the same time, reported feeling social excluded as a result of 'background' and other life factors. Evidence for this stems from 'second choice' deficit discourses, non-attendance and silences, as well as more explicit comments from Mona who: '... feels socially excluded because she only sees the lecturer when they are in class and that's it' (Mona, 19/11/2008). It was surprising that, from my

observations at least, there were apparent gaps in application of the more abstract theorising from the course. An awareness of some of the processes of inclusion *outside* the academy was evidenced through, for example, citizenship test taking. That said, I noted many instances where both lecturers attempted, sometimes successfully, to engage the class. Once again, hinting at more complex and subtle forms of social processes, taking place. Indeed, one lecturer may also have felt alienated and disengaged as he referred to ‘being screwed up when discussing concern and stress over redundancy’ (Observation two, year one). There is no doubt that this may have impacted on the lecturer profoundly, yet he was unlikely to have experienced the same material stresses in terms of unexpected withdrawal of financial support and housing issues.

4.5 Chapter summary

The overlap across a number of sub-themes is intentional and shows the textured nature of the day-to-day experiences of participants. The data examples show that attempts at negotiation were acutely bound up with unequal power relations between student and lecturers. In Burr’s words: ‘To define the world or a person in a way that allows you to do the things you want is to exercise power ...’ (1995, p.64). There was also evidence of less direct othering through unfavourable assessment of these individuals as seeking advantage over others as well as being disorganised and ill prepared. Data support the view that some groups of people are constructed as less able. ‘... to think critically, be autonomous, to speak out, and to plan and manage’ (Holliday 2011, p.77), cited frequently as essential ‘graduate’ skills by universities (for example, Canterbury Christchurch University website, 2014). In contrast, there was some evidence of engagement which emerged as strategic, oppositional practices in order to avoid further humiliation. I suggest that marginalisation, stemming from discriminatory practices, however indirect or unintentional, can be considered neo-racist. This is where, according to Spears (1999, p.21), ‘behaviour which indirectly or directly supports the inequality of racial hierarchy’, within the context of my research.

Furthermore, the chapter has shown that participant identities are subtle and complex and continually resist easy categorization. ‘The late ones’ is an example of an identity category ascribed by a lecturer to students whose problems were their own responsibility to rectify. The kids versus the mature students dichotomy in some ways is an illustration of how participants attempted to make sense of the challenges they faced and anxiety they felt. Interestingly, the reference to ‘kids’ was a label used by many participants. It seems that it is not only the more powerful institutional discourses which position students in less favourable ways, but a complex interaction between the two, supporting poststructural notions of identity (Harris and Rampton 2003). Powerful life experiences can be said to contribute to individual identities and the ways in which Northcentral was experienced. Related to the

experiences reported, there were concerns over the differential assessment of those who had a foreign accent' and I gave examples of how perceived discrimination caused 'hurt' and 'pain' (Lippi-Green 1997). The chapter also highlights evidence of 'linguistic insecurity' as a result of subordination and devaluing of individual language use resulting from discrimination surrounding non-standard ways of speaking and writing.

The narratives helped to construct an alternative image of the multilingual, 'non-traditional' undergraduate and the potential resources they have. In addition, Marshall and Case (2010) found that coping strategies developed in a 'disadvantaged' social background could be productively used for successful navigation of the higher education context students enter, thus promoting alternatives to deficit discourses and ascribed identities, such as the emergent oppositional identity demonstrated through silences. This chapter has shown how sustained time in the field provided significant insight into the depth and complexity of the students' experiences. At the same time, it has demonstrated that life challenges were not considered by the institution in obvious or transparent ways. This is problematic for negotiating a constructive relationship with the academy. It is only through understanding and respecting difference that a diverse range of students will be able to participate and engage more successfully.

Growing up in different parts of the post-colonial world, enduring critical life experiences and discriminatory practices within the institutional setting inevitably affects engagement and text production. Chapter four has illustrated how participants' sense of identity was characteristic of a complex and messy process rather than an end state as it was constructing and constructed with the help of identification with local contexts and those more distant contexts and communities outside the UK. I now return to the first research question, how undergraduate social science students change as they negotiate their relationship with the academy. I found that the negotiation of the inevitable challenges of text production for seminar presentations and project proposals appeared to be particularly difficult for some of the participants. A second significant feature of this chapter is that academic literacies, in the sense of situated text production, has not featured significantly as a result of my exploration of participant critical experiences which coincided with my time in the field. That is not to say that writing and the negotiation of academic literacies was not significant, only that additional more powerful themes emerged I had not anticipated when constructing the first research question. Issues around text production were not wholly absent from the data and chapter five tackles the influence of power and identity on the negotiation of academic literacies more directly.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING LITERACY PRACTICES

5.1 Introduction

The second data chapter reflects the second research question more directly: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices? There is, inevitably, some overlap with the first: How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy? I continue to consider the potential implications for participant identities as they engaged in the negotiation of academic literacies, which I previously defined as the associated practices surrounding *student* writing. Building on chapter four, the chapter explores the complexity of participant life experiences and how they impact on student writing and personal knowledge making. Remaining consistent with insider perspectives, I examine how participant background, identity and the processes of migration, intersect with the institutional setting, the curriculum and assignment topics. The chapter is structured according to three themes which emerged as the most significant: 5.2 Negotiating dominant practices; 5.3 Life experiences intersecting with the curriculum; and 5.4 Resources participants bring to the academy. These are followed by a more general summing up section (5.5).

5.2 Negotiating dominant practices

The first theme presents and analyses data which relates more specifically to challenges associated with student writing. More specifically, I take a closer look at some of the taken for granted social practices embedded within the written assignments that participants encountered. This theme is divided into two sections: Competing discourses and the Personal Development Plan (PDP); and The critical practice of giving and receiving feedback.

5.2.1 Competing discourses and the Personal Development Plan (PDP)

In chapter four, I explored the significance of silence in the classroom arguing it indexed complex identity work relating to the diasporic backgrounds of participants and oppositional responses to institutional power. In contrast, I begin with a data example which highlights challenges with academic writing I associate with participants *not being heard* rather than remaining silent. This example focuses on doubts and questions surrounding a Personal Development File, known institutionally as a 'PDP.'

The extended data example is an extract from my final observation session before the Christmas break in which there were six students out of a possible 29 present. The lecturer began to wrap the class up

early, after an hour, due to the time of year and low attendance. There are questions from the group about the PDP and how it relates to an end of year assignment:

LECTURER 'A'
ROUNDING
OFF: 'Thank you, you've given us a gloomy Dickenson Christmas!
[He then moves to the desk at the front to the right as the class
faces him and says that he looks forward to next term.]
'Are there any questions?'

MADOOD:
LECTURER A
INTERRUPTS: **'Regarding the PDP [Personal Development Plan] ...**
'The great PDP... it causes me more grief than the course and it's
nothing to do with my course, it's been grafted by pedagogic
genius...' [mild sarcasm]
'It now seems to be ... an epidemic, reflective learning. We don't
even offer feedback on the PDP.'

MADOOD:
LECTURER A:
NANCY:
LECTURER A: 'What I really want to know is do we have to do it twice...?'
Read the document ... has anyone read the document?'
[Nancy attempts to clarify]
You're meant to give an autobiographical account of your learning.'
[Lecturer asks whether students have any problems with their
learning]

MARY:
MADOOD: 'Yes'
[Lecturer does not hear her as she speaks weakly and quietly]
'Well, yes, actually, ...'
[They talk about motivation and Nancy seems bored]
10.12am Margaret [pseudonym] arrives.
(Observation 6, year one)

The lecturer's physical movement seemed significant at the time as I wrote he 'moves to the desk at the front to the right as the class faces him and says that he looks forward to next term.' Space is never neutral (Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Blommaert 2013). On this occasion movement towards the desk was in fact closer to the door which appeared to signify his desire to leave, despite going through the motions of rounding off the session and offering help and support with: 'Are there any questions?' Despite the direct question to the group, it can be seen from the data above that, the lecturer did not answer the question Madood posed about the PDP: 'What I really want to know is, do we have to do it twice ... ?' I interpret Madood's reference to 'twice' as referring to a formative and a summative assessment for the course which could potentially have been seen as a duplication based on the guidance provided in the Course Guide⁵. Rather than answer the question directly, the lecturer interrupted Madood, circumnavigated the question and talked about *his* concerns with the assignment: 'it causes me more grief than the course.' The comparative marker 'than' suggests he was comparing it, 'the great PDP', to the entire course. However, I suggest an alternative interpretation is that he may not have seen it as an integral part of the course at all.

⁵ Full reference omitted to maintain anonymity.

Data also shows that there seemed to be an assumption that the students who raised the question about the PDP hadn't bothered to read the necessary documentation: 'Read the document ... has anyone read the document?' Yet, as Nancy attempted to clarify the group's concerns, this suggests that she has at least done some reading up on the summative assessment. There seemed to be subtle othering taking place which involved openly asking the group for questions, but then not addressing them. I found no evidence of additional guidance shared or discussed with class participants other than the section of the Course Guide reproduced below during observation or interview. As I saw it, the issue was further confused as while it may have been an accurate reflection of course-related practice to say: 'We don't even offer feedback on the 'PDP', the 'reflective diary entry' was a high stakes assessment constituting '50% of total numeric score':

50 % of total numerical score. A reflective diary entry of 1500 words regarding the student's own part in the production and delivery of the two team presentations (SO) [step one] and (ST). (Learning outcomes; 1-7inclusive). Submit ONE WEEK AFTER (ST) [step two] PRESENTATION.
(Course Guide, year one, p.3)

Although not apparent from the data presented here, as a result of my knowledge of the research setting, I was aware that it was usual practice to provide both written and numeric feedback for summative assessments of this nature. Indeed, evidence for some of the challenges participants encountered with this assignment emerged as significant during an interview with Mary which took place the following term:

Mary is unclear what assignments she has to do or what she should be working on. For instance, she is unclear what she is supposed to write about for the reflective diary, although she can see the relevance of the logbook. **Mary is unsure how to begin work on her PDP and feels that she has not made any progress yet.**
(Mary, narrative summary, 14/01/2009)

Data from the narrative summary above and class observation on the previous page, indicate that some members of the group at least appeared to remain unclear of the relationship between 'a personal development *file*' (Year One Course Guide, p.2), a personal development *plan*, known as a 'PDP', and the written assignment referred to as 'a reflective diary entry' (p.4). The lecturer, on the other hand, seemed to resist the implementation of the PDP on the Applied Social Science course I observed stating: 'it's nothing to do with my course.' (Observation 6, year one). I suggest that these contradictory labels and statements from a variety of sources potentially confused participants further.

The lecturer also seemed to assess those present unfavourably and the initial response to Madood's question ('...do we have to do it twice...?') indicated the lecturer's assessment of the students' level of engagement differed starkly to mine. Lowenthal and White (2011) refer to students as not

necessarily having the language to make themselves heard in a new setting. In contrast, I suggest that Madood, Nancy and Mary did, even though after several weeks of observation I was aware that they each presented themselves differently from each other. From what I know of Mary, after several hours of interview and conversation, oral communication in English was not an issue. Similarly, Madood's challenges of making himself heard were somewhat surprising as I had previously assessed him as an engaged, and even dominant, student as these observation notes indicate:

MADOOD: [There is a virus alert as he (lecturer) attempts to load the ppt. presentation]
'May I...?'
[Madood with the help of Mindis debugs (the computer) and lecture begins.
While they sort out the ICT, lecturer looks at his watch in a rather theatrical manner.
When they finish (with the computer), Madood suggests that the lights are too bright and that it would be better if the lights were dimmed.
Lecturer agrees readily and switches off the front row.]
(Observation 9, year one)

Additionally, earlier in the observation in which the PDP was raised, Madood had completed a presentation during which he was able to field presentation questions with confidence, despite some phonological issues:

LECTURER A: 'Who's not convinced by Wilkinson⁶?'
[Lecturer talks about the psycho-social].
MADOOD: I think it's quite good and important that [the] interview proved ...
[unclear words] there's really...'
[Madood continues and talks at length using the interviewee as proof for Wilkinson's theory. He maintains eye contact with the group.]
(Observation 6, year one)

To return to Madood's question about the PDP, it is possible that the lecturer simply wanted to end the session early as it was the week before the Christmas break. Yet, at the same time as opening the floor for questions, the lecturer to me sounded sarcastic and used what seemed to me to be a dismissive tone as he referred to the assignment as 'the *great* PDP' (Observation 6, year one). Rather than offering his students clarification or assurance, he seemed to verbalise his own frustrations. From my perspective, this was problematic for the group of participants present as they appeared to be aware that it was a compulsory component of the course which they needed to pass in order to gain credit for the degree course. It clearly mattered, in other words.

⁶ The class discuss Wilkinson, R. (1996). *Unhealthy Societies: The affliction of inequality* (pp.211-224), London: Routledge.

5.2.1.1 Analysing Learning Outcomes

The Applied Social Science Course Guide lists the relevant learning outcomes for ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ separately:

LEARNING OUTCOMES – KNOWLEDGE

On completion of this module the successful student will be able to;

Demonstrate in essays, **diary entries** and team-based presentations, **learning** [and] understanding of the following;

1. Selected concepts of welfare and the significance they have in both developing and developed worlds of international capitalism.
2. Some of the main social and political changes over the past two centuries that have, or have not led to the development of “welfare states” in the contemporary world; industrialisation; de-industrialisation; urbanisation; capitalism and nation states.
3. Awareness and some understanding of some key social welfare issues of the 21st Century as they affect Britain and selected cases in the developing world.

LEARNING OUTCOMES – SKILLS

1. Search and select information on a specific social policy topic from a variety of academic sources, including books, journals, and reports but EXCLUDING electronic encyclopaedias and all other sources in which authors are not clearly indicated.
2. Present information – including quantitative information – verbally, written formats including **academic essay writing** and power point presentation techniques.
3. Manage own time in order to successfully complete the assessment requirements of the module including regular and active participation in workshops.
4. Work with a small group of students to achieve stated aims.
5. **Compare and contrast in essay writing** and or presentation forms, different approaches to the knowledge outcomes specified above.
6. Prepare a Personal Development File (see separate instruction for this).
(Course Guide, year one, p.2)

Although meticulous in detail, after careful reading of the learning outcomes I found that the relationship between the PDP and ‘the diary entries’ remained unclear. In the ‘skills’ outcomes section above it can be seen that there is reference to ‘academic essay writing’ and ‘Compare and contrast in essay writing’, but no reference to what the lecturer referred to as an ‘an autobiographical account of your learning’ (Observation 6, year one). There is also reference to ‘diary entries’ in the ‘knowledge’ section of the Learning Outcomes for the course as well as the foregrounding of to ‘demonstrate ... learning’. However, adding to what can be described as an ‘institutional practice of mystery’ (Lillis 2001, p.58), where tacit practices remain hidden, there is no reference to reflection, reflective writing or thinking in the course learning outcomes above. ‘Diary entries’ are written in plural form, but there is no reference to a single ‘reflective diary entry’ which is what is written in the ‘note on the summative assessment’ reproduced below in the same Course Guide. There is reference to a ‘separate instruction’ for the Personal Development File. Yet, the only additional information I found was on a later page of the Course Guide itself:

NOTE SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT = The Reflective Diary Entry of 1500 words.

Each student must complete a personal diary of 1500 words in which they will **describe and reflect upon their own work** whilst preparing their part in a Step Two Presentation.
(Course Guide, year one, p.4)

The lecturer may have been referring to a handout as he instructed the class to: 'Read the document'. However, it remained unclear whether the lecturer was in fact referring to a separate instruction *within* the Course Guide or an additional document distributed much earlier in the semester before my observations began. The participants interviewed did not make reference to a supplementary document at any time during class observation or interview, nor was it clear that it had been received by the participants present, or whether the significance of the document had been understood. It is also possible that the instruction had been omitted as there was a corresponding page providing details of a 'Learning diary' in the corresponding Course Guide (p.34) for third years. I suggest, it is likely that the course-related discourse confused participants and prompted Madood's initial question.

After careful analysis, the sum of the information available did not strike me as sufficient guidance on what participants would need to do to 'describe and reflect upon their own work', what the writing of an autobiographical account might involve, or the relationship between this instance of text production and the group presentations. There did not appear to be any associated reading or guidance on how *to do* reflective thinking and writing. Admittedly, there was brief reference to 'an autobiographical account of your learning' which struck me as a challenging form of academic writing for students new to HE to unpack. It seemed to me that rather than acknowledging that reflective thinking and writing was new to the group, and therefore more likely to be challenging, the real questions from the group were not heard.

Indeed, the lecturer asked participants about problems with '*their* learning' (Class observation six, 16/12/2008), not writing or critical thinking, in doing so framing the 'problem' in terms of motivation, located within the individual learner and 'individual pathology' (Giroux 2001, p.107) rather than institutional practices. Yet, it seems to me that the questions from the group were concerned with learning, but also concerned with uncertainty over what was required for a specific written assignment. Deficit discourses surrounding students and their abilities are evident here. I heard a small group of students ask what I considered to be perceptive questions about how to go about a written assignment and what was required of them. I also found evidence to indicate that the groups' doubts and uncertainties were not solely concerned with individual motivation, despite being framed as such.

It seemed to me that what Madood, Mary and some of the other participants were seeking was dialogue and guidance surrounding how to engage with academic literacy practices new to them. Mcmillan (2000, p.161) found that a lack of dialogue could lead to disappointment especially when students' attempts 'to engage with otherwise unfamiliar academic literary practices' are ignored, and in some cases ridiculed, as the data extract below illustrates:

MINDIS: 'In our opinion, we think it's too much'.
 LECTURER **'It's too much and who are you to challenge my authority?!'**
 'A': [He (lecturer) then explains how to write up the reflective diary]
'I am not budging on the 1500 words and suggest you budge and do a bit more work.'
 (Observation 15, year one)

Mindis voiced concerns about 'the reflective diary entry': '...*'In our opinion, we think it's too much'*. The lecturer appeared unhappy that his authority was being challenged by the group and responded: '...who are you to challenge my authority?!' which resulted in unsuccessful negotiation as he confirmed: 'I am not budging...'. The final observational data example from this section provides further evidence of on-going attempts at negotiating requirements for the written assignment. It was the penultimate teaching week of the year and uncertainty over the reflective diary entry continues:

CAITLIN⁷: 'We're not sure what to write, that's all.'
 'Do we write our mistakes down?'
 [The group is now silent and attentive.]
 LECTURER A: 'There's no right or wrong answer. **It's not an easy task. I've called it a reflective diary but it's a kind of report...** you cannot write in bullet points, need to write in prose.'
 NOOR: 'Can you compare them [the presentations] to each other?'
 LECTURER A: 'Yes, that's a good idea. Yes, of course ... in fact your problem is there aren't sufficient rules ... **it's your problem now.**'
 [The class seem to realise now how the presentation fits in with the reflective diary and how the diary fits in with summative work but it is the penultimate week of the year.]
 (Observation 15, year one)

Caitlin and Noor ask questions and the fact that the group fell 'silent and attentive' suggests the issue was important to all present. The lecturer is supportive: 'It's not an easy task. ... it's a kind of report' and 'Yes, that's a good idea. Yes, of course.' On this occasion the questions and the lecturer's responses had the desired effect of providing the transparency sought by the group but, in the 'penultimate week of the year', I suggest it may have been too late for some.

⁷ Caitlin and Noor (pseudonyms) were observed but not interviewed.

5.2.1.2 Pedagogic Grafting

I now address the lecturer's characterisation of the 'PDP' as having 'been grafted by a pedagogic genius' (Observation 6, year one). It seemed to me that assignment could be described as 'grafted' in the sense that reflective writing as a genre seems to have been applied inappropriately to a course according to the Course Guide as heavily reliant on interrogating social policy and the causes of societal inequality (Course Guide). It would also seem that as a result of input from outside the faculty there was some resistance, even resentment from within it, which resulted in the reflective tasks being described as 'an epidemic' 'grafted' onto the course by a 'pedagogic genius' (Observation 6, year one). In the case of the PDP, power struggles appear to have been multi-dimensional: between the lecturer and undergraduate participants on the one hand, but also between the applied social sciences faculty and those responsible for institutional strategies for teaching and learning on the other.

According to Russell, Lea, Parker, Street and Donahue (2009), institutions are constantly trying to tie down new genres for assessment. For example, under mandate from the government, universities have developed rigid assessment criteria based on those which have been associated with *essay writing* and applying the same criteria uncritically to more personal and *reflective genres of writing*, which were originally conceptualized as formative writing spaces. This practice within HE more generally seems to have influenced the written assignment and learning outcomes under analysis on the applied social science course I observed. Indeed this 'grafting' of one genre onto another is complicated further by the reference to the reflective diary entry later in the academic year 'as a kind of report' (Observation 6, year one). I suggest that, experienced subject specialists are not all equally placed to advise students on newly emerging 'hybrid genres' (Ellis and Lazar 2010) such as formally assessed reflective diary entries. Data also provides some evidence for a lack of timely student writing influenced by dominant institutional practices and the need for students to figure it out themselves. In the lecturer's words: 'It's your problem now' (Observation, 17/03/2009).

'The great PDP' created tensions and uncertainty for the group as participants who attempted to make sense of what was required of them. I argue that doubts did not arise due to problems with learner motivation or lack of reading about the assignment alone. Analysis of 'the PDP' shows how literacy practices are far from neutral and can be obscured by power relations in the academy, a challenge for those new to the academy to unpack. At the same time, there appeared to be evidence of resistance from the lecturer towards institutional power and decision-making and I suggest these tensions were projected onto the small group of learners on this occasion. As a consequence, deficit discourses of students and their abilities appeared to have influenced how they negotiated appropriate practices associated with the reflective summative assignment. So far, my desire to understand participants'

perspectives of literacy practices has revealed competing institutional discourses surrounding the assessment of 'knowledge' and 'skills', as well as contradictory guidelines which seem to have been conflated in one of the compulsory assessments for the course. Questions raised were about the written assignment; yet, they can also be seen as attempts to negotiate tacit understandings of what is involved in 'essay' versus 'reflective' models of reading and writing. These competing discourses influenced class proceedings, guidance on the academic task which I suggest also influenced participants' text production.

5.2.2 The critical practice of giving and receiving feedback

This section focuses on the everyday practice of giving and receiving written feedback comments and grades on student writing and how it was experienced by participants. As several participants commented on the feedback they received, I have been selective in terms of the range of data examples presented.

During interview, Amina reflected on her time at the university, her experiences of text production, the importance of feedback and how it worked for her in practice:

She likes her tutors and all of them have been quite helpful in terms of feedback: some more than others. For example, Amina submits her assignment before the deadline and gets feedback. This is more so for Applied Social Science.

She found F and E are quite helpful. In her first year her two tutors, in her second year, mostly E, and in her third year W and K. K is amazing because her points are constructive and you know exactly what to do rather than receive a million ideas with lots of conflicting feedback and therefore you do not know which part to take. Amina has one-to-ones with K and she takes notes. B is stricter and although Amina knows she a nice person, she has not developed a similar relationship with her. She is not very approachable and a lot of students feel the same. This could be because she has a tight schedule. E emails feedback which she likes as she lives in xxx and cannot come to university every day. **She leaves documents open and rectifies what she needs to.** She prefers E to email her as then she knows that is important as everything she says is so interesting that if they meet face to face she takes a lot of notes. It depends on the lecturer. ...

She asks for feedback on an assignment which is due or for help with a question she is stuck on and really doesn't know what to write.

(Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010)

Amina was positive and stated that 'she likes her tutors.' although the additional phrase 'some more than others' suggests she had found feedback practices to have been variable; that is, from her perspective: 'some [tutors have been more helpful] than others'. Although she does not elaborate a great deal at this point, Amina seems to refer to beneficial formative feedback provided on

assignments which were 'left open' and then revised. It seems clear to me that not only was timely feedback important but that it needed to be the right mode of feedback. Indeed, the adjectives 'helpful', 'nice', 'strict' and 'approachable' used by Amina to describe her lecturers suggest that the practice of seeking and receiving feedback is a socially significant practice. Overall, experiences were reported positively and data shows that gaining feedback from lecturers on writing was about more than written comments on text production.

Mustapha was in the early stages of his degree at the time of data collection and also talked about 'feedback'. In contrast to the instances of largely positive reporting above, at the time of data collection, Mustapha's indicated the experience of receiving feedback had been challenging:

Mustapha already submitted three assignments before the citizenship assignment although he has not received any feedback for Area Studies [pseudonym]. **He is disappointed and unhappy with the feedback he received for Politics although he wasn't surprised as he did not know what to expect when he started the course. In fact, he was shaking a lot when he did his first essay.** Mustapha is also aware that style of writing academic writing in English is very different to French. **He still doesn't know what they [lecturers] are expecting from him and other students, only that they want more and more.** He has found that in general when you begin to think about this/expectations, you end up doing it incorrectly. Mustapha commented that he had observed this **among his colleagues' writing for Politics** who, like him, have received comments that their writing is poor. (Mustapha, narrative summary, 09/12/2008)

The extract would seem to indicate that Mustapha was in the process of de-cyphering what was required of him by a number of lecturers. I found the comment that: 'He still doesn't know what they [lecturers] are expecting from him and other students, only that they want more and more' to be significant as it indicated a degree of uncertainty and challenge surrounding expectations over what was required. The emotional dimension associated with his text production is evident as he commented that he was 'shaking a lot' when he did his first essay and he felt 'disappointed and unhappy' with the feedback he received. He ends with 'his colleagues ..., like him, have received comments that their writing is poor.' Mustapha appeared to identify with his class quite strongly referring to "his colleagues' writing" and experiences of receiving feedback as well as his own. From Mustapha's perspective, there seemed to be a general sense that there were challenges for the *group* as he saw it associated with unpacking what was expected of them. I suggest the extract exemplifies the challenges of negotiating academic literacies more generally. Data analysis highlights not only the importance of individual feedback on writing in the case of Amina, but also how, even though the feedback was based on individual work, the social dimension emerged as significant.

The importance of the social dimension to writing and feedback received is supported by data from Fred's narrative summary. He refers to the class as well as what he had done:

In terms of feedback, **Fred was expecting work to be returned to them to discuss in class.** He feels it is marked in a negative way, in terms of what you can't do, which highlights what is poor and what criteria have not been met. He questioned the lecturer about this because he wanted to know who had done the best so he could read his/her work to pick up what was required. He felt he could not see exactly what he had done wrong and this would help him change and improve it. The lecturer replied that none of them had done any good. (Fred, narrative summary, 13/01/2009)

From the extract above it can be seen how Fred commented on the approach to assignment marking he felt had been adopted: 'He feels it is marked in a negative way, in terms of what you can't do, which highlights what is poor and what criteria has not been met'. As a result 'he felt he could not see exactly what he had done wrong'. One issue that emerged from Fred's narrative was that while he appeared to seek more detail and specific explanation in order to 'see *exactly* what he had done wrong', this level of detail was not forthcoming from his perspective at least and, feedback practices were reported as relatively unhelpful. As a result, I would suggest that the negotiation of classroom feedback practices appeared challenging, even unsatisfactory for this participant. Although there was some diversity of feedback experiences reported, when participants commented on the feedback it was often framed negatively in the sense that what they had done was inadequate or insubstantial; that is, that 'their writing is poor' (Mustapha, 09/12/2008) and that 'none of them had done any good' (Fred, 13/01/2009)

There are similarities between Fred and Mustapha's narratives as both participants stated that they were unclear what to expect in terms of faculty expectations and the processes and practices of receiving feedback. They also reported expecting to be able to discuss work in class in order to gain an enhanced understanding of what was required. This seemed to be a reasonable request and the data points to the value participants attached to feedback they received, a desire for dialogue, and the social dimension to reading and writing at university.

5.2.2.1 Reframing feedback

The next data example focuses on Mona, who was working on a dissertation resubmission at the time of interview. It illustrates further that feedback remained problematic, but also that Mona had begun to develop a sense of ‘what the problem was’ from her perspective:

Mona says her feedback was really bad and she is aware that she definitely has to improve. The whole assignment was poorly done. She says that the feedback stated this was because English was not her first language, but she feels she had a problem understanding the question and Mona accepts this may be an issue and why she got poor grades. She said to ‘S’ [lecturer who marked her work] that the problem was not her English as she has been doing other assignments and has been getting good grades. She told her the problem might be that she misunderstood the question.
(Mona, narrative summary, 24/03/2010)

The general tenor of Mona’s comments resonates with Fred and Mustapha’s comments about the feedback they received. However, in contrast to the previous two participants, Mona’s comment that ‘her feedback was really bad’ refers to the quality of her *own* work rather than the quality of feedback, or classroom practices surrounding feedback more generally. Her explanation, which to me seems quite plausible, was that her ‘problem’ with the assignment was less likely to be one of language alone: ‘...the problem was not her English ...’, because ‘she had been getting good grades’ for ‘other assignments’ in other subjects. It can be seen that while she did not appear to dispute the fact that her assignment was ‘poorly done’, she seemed to question the nature of the feedback itself. Interestingly, the problem with her writing is reframed as ‘a problem understanding the question’ rather than a problem with English alone. Mona appears to have thought carefully about the significance of the feedback she received and her assessment of her own work reminded me of Hermerschmidt who found that ‘... students who do not get their essays “right” get constructed as having a language problem’ (1999, p.9) and judged accordingly to be ‘linguistically incompetent’. (p.9). The lecturer concerned may have correctly interpreted the problem with Mona’s writing as linguistic, yet this seems unlikely to have been the sole issue given Mona’s complex linguistic and educational background (Narrative summary, 19/11/2008) discussed in the previous chapter. Overall, I found Mona’s responses to her work and feedback received during interview measured as well as supported by comments from other participants (Amina 19/03/2010 and Mary 14/01/2009) who commented on the challenges of understanding essay type questions.

Even though Mona reframes the feedback received, the data examples above (section 5.2.2 and 5.2.2.1) highlight a re-emergence of deficit discourses surrounding participants’ abilities to write and get ‘good grades’. Analysis shows that discourses surrounding individuals with ‘language problems’

and learning problems are persistent for the group of participants. That said, it must be acknowledged that negative comments may have been understood and remembered more readily. I am not claiming that language use was not an influence on text production, it always is, rather that participants did not report it as the *only* issue for them. Like Hermerschmidt (1999), I found challenges faced by students to be complex and to relate to institutional practices and power relations as much as individual deficit.

5.2.2.2 Codeswitching, crossing and coping with feedback

In the final example in which I explore the critical practice of giving and receiving feedback, I link classroom behaviour relating to the effects of feedback processes and practices. During an observation, the lecturer set a reading task. However, rather than participate, a small group of students discussed the feedback in terms of numeric grades they received from a lecturer on a different course:

The class read quietly.
10.00 am Mustapha arrives.
Lecturer and I chat at the back of the class
while students read and discuss the article.
Vera and Leila discuss essay grades.]

LEILA: **‘She can’t speak English, the lecturer.’**
[Vera says she got ‘a 16’⁸ for an essay]

VERA: ‘Can you speak French?’

TASHA: ‘Can you speak French?’
[They joke about French *in* French, that is to
say switching codes and talk about a French-
speaking lecturer’s marking.
Caitlin has yet to collect her grade and says
she is scared and hence the jokes about
speaking in French.]
(Observation 15, year one)

Vera and Leila discussed the essay grades they received and ‘Vera says she got “a 16” for an essay’ which is the minimum pass grade. The butt of the joke, on this occasion, was a lecturer from a different class. Leila seemed to accuse the lecturer who provided the disappointing feedback and grade of not being able to speak English: ‘She can’t speak English, the lecturer.’ What I found striking was that participation in the joke was dependent on being able to speak and understand French: ‘They joke about French *in* French ...’. Vera and Tasha then took up Leila’s indirect criticism of the lecturer’s feedback and grading by asking each other whether they spoke French in French, as well as in English with an L2 accent: ‘Can you speak French?’, they asked each other for rhetorical effect as well as I suggest to evoke the second language identity of the lecturer. Other class participants code-switched from English to French which had the effect of intensifying the joke. The question initiated by Vera (‘Can you speak French?’) was not a neutral one.

⁸ The minimum pass grade.

I found this to be a fascinating example of classroom discourse practices not least because of the diversity and number of students who switched to French: Vera, originally from Liberia (Narrative 09/12/ 2008), Tasha, unknown, Caitlin, 'white, UK' (Observation 16/12/2008), Mindis from Latvia (Observation 10/02/2009) and Leila from Norway (Observation 18/11/2008 and 02/12/2008). A group of multilingual speakers who in some cases received feedback that they had language issues and that their writing was poor appeared to accuse one of their lecturers, a French language speaker, of having language problems. The discussion of feedback on writing occurred at an unpredictable moment as Vera and other class members moved away from their usual language code into a less familiar one used by a second language speaking lecturer. I was aware of the lecturer's language background as I had met her before entering the field. This instance of linguistic crossing seemed more than coincidence and instead I suggest may reflect institutional power relations which in turn affect how the group navigated literacy practices. Despite Leila's initial comment ('She can't speak English, the lecturer'), the small group only felt able to criticise indirectly. Rampton (2005) found that crossing of this kind was not uncommon in urban environments defining it as 'the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker doesn't normally 'belong' to (Rampton 2005, p.28) and is not uncommon in superdiverse environments (Creese and Blackledge 2015; Harris 2006). Crossing from one code to another was used as a tool for fostering group identity as well as minimising anxiety associated with negative feedback received. I argue my observations reflect some of the effects of context and how the linguistic and cultural diversity of the group intersected with participant experiences of receiving feedback.

5.2.3 Summing up negotiating dominant practices

Tensions and confusion arose as a reflective approach to academic writing and learning appeared to have been implemented on a course which, based on data analysed, did not have a tradition of reflective genres of writing. Data analysis from the course-related documentation appears to support this assessment. The application of one dominant model of writing onto another resulted in a hybridised text type that the lecturer appeared to resist. Initial resistance resulted in a key written assignment being described as grafted onto the course rather than having attained the status of being integral to its epistemology. I argue that the implementation of models of writing at an institutional level affected participants' ability to negotiate what was required at a more local level. At the same time, participants' attempts at negotiation highlighted a desire for dialogue to overcome uncertainty associated with text production. Unfortunately, the desire for dialogue was often ignored, and the 'problem' was framed as individual rather than institutional. From participants' perspectives, it would seem that feedback had a tendency to articulate what participants needed to do to improve or pass rather than engender dialogue. For instance, participants reported that they were left knowing what

they had done was unacceptable as a result of written comments, but less clear what to do to challenge practices they found were unhelpful to them. The final example suggests that participants lacked the power to contest or challenge the evaluation of their work *directly* which resulted in the crossing from English into French, something which I had not previously observed, in order to temper the anxiety associated with submitting written work and the potential negative assessment of their writing. Overall, I have also presented data examples which highlight the significance of the academic practices of giving and receiving feedback from lecturers. This section also highlights how, for many of the participants I worked with, the practice of the giving and receiving feedback was influenced by unequal power relations as well as key to how academic tasks and texts were understood.

5.3 Life experiences intersecting with the curriculum

I continue by picking up a theme which first emerged in the literature review and in chapter four. Here I explore the relevance of some of the curriculum topics from the course I observed to participant life experiences, identities and diasporic connections, this time applying my thinking to text production and personal knowledge making more directly. I present four examples in total to illustrate the complexity of the group and how the individuals within it were not all the same: Work-based discrimination; The special case of politics; Links between social exclusion and knowledge-making; and Lone parenthood.

5.3.1 Work-based discrimination

Several participants reported experiences of discrimination in the workplace before and during their time at Northcentral. I begin with Mona who talked at length during interview in response to the question: ‘Why Northcentral?’ In this data example, Mona reported on her experiences of working in the health and social care sector:

She wanted to go to university and so instead she did level 2 and 3 in Care and an **A1 Assessors course** and completed the course successfully. ...
Mona has an Assessor’s qualification for care work and remembers when she went for an interview at xxx College. The job was for a **NVQ Assessor. There was one other candidate who was a lecturer and Mona was disappointed as she was greeted by the interviewer with ‘So, who is the carer? She realised that she would not get the job** and that perhaps the college thought that it was too big a leap even though she would do the job very well. **Now, she feels that she is exploited in her workplace as she has qualifications and because of this, they give her extra responsibilities.**
(Mona, narrative summary, 19/11/2008)

The data shows that Mona talked in some detail about what she perceived to be discriminatory recruitment practices when applying for a job as an NVQ assessor at a college in greater London. Data also shows how she felt that the question ‘Who is the carer?’ captured some pre-judgment over

her suitability for the position. Even though the 'other candidate ... was a lecturer', Mona must have fulfilled some essential criteria for interview selection in the first place. Furthermore, Mona was careful to state that she had the appropriate qualifications for the position as she had successfully completed an 'A1 Assessors course'. I am not suggesting the reason Mona was unsuccessful was because of direct gender or racial discrimination, particularly as the other candidate was reportedly adequately qualified. Nevertheless, the ascribed identity as 'carer' sits uncomfortably with someone applying for a role involving the assessing of other carers. A sense of role exploitation in the workplace was foregrounded as Mona commented that as a consequence of her assessor qualifications she was 'exploited' and given 'extra responsibilities'. I found that a sense of exploitation emerged powerfully from Mona's experiences and the experiences of other students too.

Fred reported that he left work in the hospitality industry before attending Northcentral because he felt exploited:

Fred also felt that he was looked down upon as a black person and spent some of his time training white, less experienced people who after six months became managers earning more money than him elsewhere. Fred felt that he was the one doing the hard work and that they didn't have a background in hotel and catering like him. Fred feels that this was an example of nepotism. That is to say they went to similar schools and were looking after their own. Fred worked in three hotels and then left as he felt he was really being used.
(Fred, narrative summary, 13/01/2009)

From Fred's narrative it can be seen that experiences of work-based discrimination was significant as he felt that 'he was looked down upon as a black person'. Reference to 'nepotism' also suggests that he may have felt excluded from the culture of the workplace as a result of his black' identity, or possibly because he presented as socially or culturally different from others in that context. Indeed his experiences reminded me that being black is about more than physical appearance, which has been reported elsewhere (Ademayo 2009, Block 2010; Gilroy 2002). Like Mona, Fred felt that 'he was the one doing the hard work' and left employment in the hotel and catering industry as 'he felt he was really being used.'

Next, I outline some of Mr N's experiences of work-based discrimination which share striking similarities with Fred's. The data which follows is pertinent to my thesis aims as experiences of negotiating academic literacies influenced Mr N's choice of dissertation topic:

Mr N began his first job working for a dairy company ... which employed around 3000 people. **Many of them were from Eastern Europe. The employers decided that Mr N should take on a supervisory role** working with employees for whom English was a language barrier. They needed to fill out forms and Mr N was there to help them as he spoke English, French, and Portuguese. He acted as a translator to help the company and they gave him a good position, rather than being a machine operator. Mr N was more educated than the white English people he was training as he had been to university in his country. He was team leader and he had a team to manage but he also

realised the company was using him. The money was good but when there was problem, for example, a machine breaking down, he had to help his team members and stay away with the machine until the problem had been sorted out. The money was good, but what he did not like was the racism. He had been working there for seven years and he trained up people who became managers. When there was a problem he was wonderful, but he felt like he was doing the job of someone on more money. He decided it was better to go back to school, to university. (Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

Data highlights what appeared to be troubling work experiences in a multilingual, multicultural dairy for this participant, echoing Fred's experiences in the hospitality industry. Mr N reported that: 'what he did not like was the racism' and being discriminated against. Also similar to Fred's account of work-based discrimination, Mr N referred to his role of training other employees who became managers, a privilege he states he was not awarded, despite in his words being: '... more educated than the white English people he was training'. I found there to be a strong sense of discrimination and experiences of disadvantage emerging from the data. Yet, at the same, time there is a sense that Mr N othered the Polish workers: '*They* came to work hard and *they* have now left. The Polish work 12-hour shifts which is why *they* were preferred by management.' In contrast, later in the interview he later adds that:

...the British did not accept such long hours of overtime. Before this, many who worked there were asylum-seekers, and so he has chosen the topic [EU enlargement] to explain the impact.

(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

Positioning is interesting at this point as Mr N appeared to identify more closely with 'the British [who] did not accept such long hours of overtime'. At the same time he also appeared to identify with the asylum seekers with origins outside the EU. I suggest the migrant workers who 'came' from the newly enlarged EU and 'left' were positioned as other, in a way that asylum seekers were not. This last point reflects the complexity of the multiple identities constructed, but also the instability of participants' identities as a result on this occasion of the culturally rich, yet discriminatory work environment. The complexity of diasporic identities and implications for knowledge making are taken up in the final section of this chapter.

What is significant for the negotiation of academic literacies is that Mr N, like several other participants (Mona, Maisha and Kate) used their experiences as the basis for their dissertation projects. In short, racism and discriminatory workplace practices influenced his choice of dissertation topic:

He selected his dissertation topic because of his experience at the dairy. Firstly, there were a lot of Polish people and, since Enlargement, the whites were preferred over the blacks as they were not seen as foreigners like before as they are part of the EU, and prefer to work hard.

(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

I discovered that Mr N's dissertation addressed the impact of EU enlargement policy which was not only relevant to the course aims and curriculum, but also linked significantly to his own highly personal experiences of work-based discrimination. Baker argues that 'an ethnically diverse workplace, by itself, does not constitute a change in the structural power relations or how that power is culturally significant' (1999, p.116). In spite of working in a culturally and linguistically diverse place of work, I suggest Mr N's choice of dissertation topic reflects how: '... experiences of racism and dis-advantage are still intense for many people with minority ethnic backgrounds' (Harris, Leung and Rampton 2002, p.35).

Indeed, both Mr N and Fred who were interviewed at length on separate occasions commented on the exploitation and race-based disadvantage they experienced and how they believed their career advancement was stymied because of a 'black' as opposed to 'white' 'English' identity. More specifically, work-based experiences illustrate that although 'black' identity was significant, additional categories such as professional identity were also foregrounded, once again highlighting participants' multiple identities. I argue that what is significant for this thesis is that experiences of discriminatory work practices prior to Northcentral influenced student writing in terms of the direction and emphasis of dissertation topic once at university, illustrating how life experiences intersected with the curriculum. Experiences and practices such as these and the complex way in which they intersect with the applied social science curriculum is in essence what I refer to it as a reciprocal exchange contributing to knowledge making.

5.3.2 The special case of politics

This example continues to build on the theme of the relevance of the curriculum for participants as I unpack the particular challenges the academic study of politics presented. Even though I observed applied social science rather politics classes, the latter emerged as significant during data analysis. Politics as a disciplinary area was constructed as problematic or challenging more so than other degree pathways by a number of key participants. Vera, for instance, had to 'redo' a politics assignment (narrative, 27/01/2009). Mustapha was 'disappointed and unhappy with the feedback he received for politics although he wasn't surprised' (09/12/2008) and Mary reported that she felt unable to communicate with the politics lecturers (09/12/2008). Expressions of doubt or disappointment are part of the every day practice of being a university student, yet the number of comments about politics was striking. In order to explore possible reasons why, I begin by presenting two data examples.

Firstly, I revisit Northcentral's website for prospective students:

The course would appeal to sixth formers with a range of knowledge and mature professionals interested in current affairs. An A level in Politics is not required (Northcentral University website, 2010).

It can be seen from this extract that institutional publicity appeals to both traditional and non-traditional students accessing higher education. Furthermore, a lack of academic qualifications such as 'A' levels on entry was presented as unproblematic for a target audience comprising both 'sixth-formers' and 'mature professionals'. The implication from the wording is that an interest in current affairs and life experiences outside mainstream education would compensate for a lack of formal academic qualifications. The second data example originates from an extended interview during which Mary compared her knowledge and experience of politics with some of the other curriculum areas:

Politics put Mary off the year before because she has no political background - nothing - which is why she is reading a lot now and it is very, very interesting. Last year, politics was a threat as there was no way Mary could see herself passing because she has no knowledge. This is different to the things she is doing in citizenship or Area studies, which are straightforward. ... Before she wasn't interested in outside politics and, although she had been here for ten years, did not want to and would not vote. Now, however, she will definitely vote.

(Mary, narrative summary, 12/10/2009)

The extract from Mary's narrative is interesting for a number of reasons, not least as the challenges she articulated contrasted starkly with the university's online marketing for the degree course included above. Mary referred to politics as 'a threat' which I interpret as relating to challenges of text production and her academic success and progression in her first year. At the time of interview, 'there was no way Mary could see herself passing' which contrasted starkly with the more public institutional position on politics recruitment.

Next, I focus on Mary's assertion that: 'she has no political background - nothing'. It seemed that Mary framed her knowledge and life experiences negatively. Nevertheless, having '*no* political background' seemed less likely given Mary's field work in Rwanda before coming to the UK (Narrative, 09/12/2008). I suggest past experiences can be said to have been influenced, at least to some extent, by political decision-making. Yet, data presented so far suggests that neither Mary nor Mr N saw their life experiences as a resource to be drawn on for academic advantage. Nombo (2006) argues different capital, or what I refer to as resources, should be recognised in order to assist the enrichment of student experiences. It also seems to me that while institutional publicity appeared to recognise the value of informal knowledge in the form of qualifications as well as experience, this was not in fact how politics was experienced by the key participants interviewed: 'it [politics] was a threat.'

Next I explore, how tension between life experiences on the one hand and the construction of academic knowledge on the other leads onto a discussion of ‘outside politics’. The underlining in the data extract above indicates that I had marked the phrase ‘outside politics’ for discussion.

Unfortunately, as there is no reference to it in my fieldnotes, I infer that other more pressing points for discussion with Mary were taken up in subsequent meetings. At first, I assumed it was a colloquial expression used by Mary, possibly influenced by her wide language repertoire (narrative summary, 09/12/2008). However, the fact that Mary was studying politics at undergraduate level offers the possibility that her use of the term was a deliberate choice of subject-specific terminology. For this reason, I interpret the term cautiously as referencing participation in more formal political activity, such as voting. Indeed, Stephenson and Papadopolous (2006), writing on the importance of experience for political change, refer to ‘outside politics’ as ‘forms of overt public and political engagement’ (2006, p.434) and how everyday experiences, what I refer to as practices, can be used to inform political activity. I argue that the term ‘outside politics’ may have been deployed quite deliberately by someone who had undergone the process of migration and, as a result, now felt more able to engage in the political process of her ‘new’ nation state. Mary explains:

For ten years, she did not want to and would not vote. Now, however, she will do it [vote].
(Mary, narrative summary, 12/10/2009)

It remains a challenge to say categorically whether Mary was referring to such a heavily theorised terms or using a more colloquial one from her idiolect. However, I would like to suggest that on this occasion language use reflects some awareness and thinking around dominant discourses associated with her degree curriculum. The phrase struck me as a sophisticated use of subject-specific terminology and, as a result, I conclude cautiously that, despite the challenges with writing expressed by Mary (12/10/2009), there is some evidence for the use of highly situated academic language.

This section explores the reciprocal exchange between life experiences, on the one hand, and the curriculum, on the other. I argue throughout the thesis that this reciprocal link emerges as significant for the negotiation of academic literacies. My final example centres on an analysis of the Tony Blair legacy, a formative assignment, the group were asked to complete early on in their programme. Fred commented that he had ‘to evaluate the Tony Blair’ speech, Mustapha stated that he was working on ‘the Tony Blair legacy’ (09/12/2008) and Vera informed me that she ‘had to redo the politics one on the Tony Blair speech’ (27/01/2009). Mary also referred to an essay which required students to evaluate Blair’s ten year leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party:

They [lecturers] talk about Tony Blair. They would like us to talk about the legacy of him.
Read, read the website. I haven’t even visited it. I’ve just read the handbook and bought his biography. And there I am [rapid speech]. **I didn’t even bother about Tony Blair in the past because I was busy drinking** [quiet laughter].
(Fieldnotes, 09/12/2008)

Data illustrates that while she attempted to engage in appropriate literacy practices, such as reading course-related texts, she was finding the process of academic text production challenging. The number of references made to politics and this assignment in particular suggests that it was considered problematic by a number of participants. Even though the assignment was formative in function, rather than contributing towards final marks for the course, there seemed to be tensions between the diagnostic function of the ‘low stakes’ academic writing tasks participants chose to discuss, and the ways in which these tasks they reported. This contradiction was not dissimilar to the practices surrounding the group presentations which emerged as significant in the previous chapter and the discussion of the PDP (section 5.2.1). It seems to me that learning outcomes for so called low stakes writing without numeric scores or credits attached were often perceived as ‘high stakes’ (Elbow 1997; Lillis and Scott 2007) for the individuals involved.

This section has focussed on some of the challenges and complexity surrounding how politics intersected with participant life experiences. There seemed to be tensions between the experiences and perceptions of academic text production and the idealised institutional discourses which indicated that an interest in current affairs would be sufficient for highly situated reading, writing and knowledge making. In contrast, data from narrative summaries suggests that this was not how the study of politics was experienced. Through the process of data analysis, key challenges for participants emerged stemming from the complex ways prior knowledge, experience and background intersected with the curriculum. One challenge to be negotiated and overcome related to the lack of knowledge of ‘outside politics’ which in turn affected participants’ approaches to political analysis and subsequent text production of the Blair legacy. I suggest a lack of engagement in political activity in the UK had the potential to affect not only text production, but also influenced how a perceived lack of knowledge of, or first hand experiences of, British politics coloured how participants viewed opportunities for academic success.

5.3.3 Reciprocal links between social exclusion and knowledge making

Social exclusion was touched on in the previous chapter (sections 4.2.4 and 4.4.3) where I argued that there were discourses of inequalities surrounding classroom participation and engagement. Here I illustrate how, during classroom observation, some members of the group observed made connections between the texts they read and their own experiences of exclusion, providing evidence for a reciprocal link, or exchange, between the two. What follows is a slightly extended data example from a seminar observation of class three in the Autumn term of their final year. There were approximately ten attendees on this occasion:

LECTURER B: 'Can we have a quick discussion about immigration and its importance for analysis?'
 [More (students) respond!]
 The master of the means of production will make more profit.
 Importing labour = **you don't need to invest in your own citizens = strong argument against immigration.** See section II on **Reich** and section on '**symbolic analysts**'

MAISHA: Student with glasses (Maisha?) picks up on the 'we' as referring to the more wealthy among us. [All students speak with 'African' accents. None sound like London born ethnic minorities]

KATE: 'This kind of, of reminds me of the uni., the way they've created a them and us, the way they [the university] kept 'them' [students] out of your [teaching staff] offices ... it just seems, like, kind of, impersonal.'

...

[Brief friendly discussion lecturer, Kate, Maisha and one male at front on right about **exclusion**.
 Text about excluding immigrants, but the group relates it to university excluding students and keeping them away from staff].
 (Observation 1, year three)

The data extract selected focuses on a seminar discussion of a book chapter by Reich (1991) from the Course Reader. Reich (1991, p.283) predicted that '... economic inequalities will increase in the labour market due to new, highly skilled 'symbolic analysts' which the lecturer makes reference to in the class observation extract above. What proved important for the direction of the seminar discussion is that Reich questions why:

The four-fifths of the population whose economic future is growing more precarious has not vociferously contested the disengagement of the one-fifth whose economic future is becoming even brighter (Reich 1991, p.282).

As I listened to the seminar proceedings, I noted a connection between the group of students observed and Reich's (1991) thesis with regard to immigration and its effects on the labour markets. The direction of the discussion at this point seemed significant given that I noted: 'None sound[ed] like London born ethnic minorities' (Observation 1, year three). This may seem like an unnecessary point to note, yet despite the cultural diversity of Northcentral Campus, it was still relatively unusual for an entire class to be made up of individuals from London's 'migrant' communities. It also seemed to me that, as a consequence of this cultural diversity, the lecturer appeared to engender debate on the widening income gap and insecurities surrounding *migration* and reduced opportunities for employment with a group of *migrants*. For instance, one point made by the lecturer was that, according to Reich (1991), migrant labour has a detrimental effect on the economic position of the domestic labour market: 'Importing labour = you don't need to invest in your own citizens = strong argument against immigration' (Observation 1, year three). Interestingly, from my perspective, the participants present subverted this thesis even though, or perhaps because of it, with the exception of Kate, all had migrated to the UK. In Kate's words:

‘This kind of, of reminds me of the uni., the way they’ve created a them and us, the way they [the university] kept ‘them’ [students] out of your [teaching staff] offices.’
(Kate, narrative summary, 23/03/2010)

My own notes seemed to be supported by Kate’s observations as I wrote:

‘The text was about excluding immigrants, but the group relate it to university excluding’ students and keeping them away from staff’ (Observation 1, year three).

I see this change in direction as an illustration of how assumptions made about the potential ways in which a group of individuals might respond to a seminar reading were challenged. It seemed to me, as an outsider, that the lecturer may have presupposed that a discussion and the potential impact of migration on the labour market would be taken up, thus inadvertently restricting opportunities for knowledge making. This did not occur, on this occasion at least. Instead members of the seminar group (‘Kate, Maisha and one male’) applied Reich’s thesis to their own experiences of exclusion on the university campus, asserting themselves as knowledge makers. Blommaert (2013) associates diversity with unpredictability which he sees as a ‘knowledge issue’ in the sense that diversity can cause ‘...us to perpetually revise and update what we know about societies’ (p.6) or indeed much smaller groups or cultures.

This example of classroom discourse practices is significant as it shows diversity within the group not only in terms of levels of engagement at a particular moment, but a degree of unpredictability in terms of how members of the class, a largely migrant group, responded to more theoretical discussions of exclusion. One consequence of my seminar observation and engagement with Reich’s thesis was confirmation of how personal knowledge making cannot nor should not be predicted without sustained engagement with the individuals concerned. Data illustrates that from an academic literacies perspective, not only was meaning dependent on context but on participants’ reshaping of the texts they encountered. I argue classroom practices are significant for knowledge making and, at the same time, relevant to literacy as practices of this kind involve doing things with texts. In this instance, participants were able to apply a seminar reading to an area of their lived experiences they found meaningful, and in doing so provided a tangible alternative to being constructed in unfavourable ways.

5.3.4 Lone parenthood

This example follows on from the last to illustrate further the ways in which life experiences influenced the nature of curriculum topics selected and, as result, text production. Lone parenthood was a topic within the undergraduate curriculum which emerged as significant for a number of participants. Vera reported that her ex-husband and daughter were in Norway (Narrative summary, 09/12/2008) at the start of her degree course. Mary stated that she was 'a single Mum' (Narrative summary, 12/10/2009) while Kate was brought up in a single-parent household (Narrative summary, 23/03/2010). Kate's narrative illustrates that her trajectory through university was not without its challenges:

Kate has started uni. before and this is her final attempt. ... **she restarted once but has deferred and then come back to her studies.** In 2003 she completed 6 month of a nursing programme but fell pregnant with her son. **She then returned to do xxx, but then had a second break when she had her daughter.** On her return, **the programme had changed to applied social science** which is what she is doing now.

(Kate, narrative summary, 23/03/2010)

In addition, during interview, she revealed that 'Her son has autism and does not sleep well' (Kate, 23/02/10). Thus, despite being the only participant who reported being born in the UK, data shows that Kate was a non-traditional student with an equally rich background and set of life experiences. Kate talked about her childhood experiences of being brought up in a single parent household, her own experiences of motherhood and how she felt they related to the course she was studying. The extract reproduced below is highly relevant to the development of the theme lone parenthood as a resource for knowledge making:

Kate's dissertation is on lone parenthood and its constructs surrounding lone parenthood. Her mother was a lone parent and she is now able to draw on her experiences into her dissertation that she had during her upbringing. **Kate has fond memories of having a lone parent, which provide an additional angle to the social constructs because most of them [her memories of having a lone parent] are positive.** This enables her to broaden her view. Sometimes her life experience makes her cackle to herself when she is reading something about lone parenthood as she can now see how much of a general statement it is and not at all representative of all single-parents. Kate can envisage her own upbringing and use it to her advantage. It helps her to take the texts with a pinch of salt and then seek to find things/evidence which support her understandings and experiences of growing up in a single-parent household. It makes her more determined to disprove some of the negative stigmas attached to it.

(Kate, narrative summary, 23/03/2010)

The extract is longer than some of the earlier data extracts as Kate responded in detail to open questions about her life experiences, knowledge making and literacy practices. Data illustrates that Kate felt her background and upbringing was a resource that she had been able to draw on positively during her time at Northcentral. In her words: 'She can envisage her own upbringing and use it to her

advantage.’ Data illustrates further how ideas from her course, as well as her own life experiences, were used for personal knowledge making: ‘She has fond memories of having a lone parent which provide an additional angle to the social constructs because most of them are positive.’ At the same time, she reported taking the texts she read with a ‘pinch of salt’. It is scepticism of this kind which relates to the course learning outcomes, one of which is stated as the interrogation of: ‘ideas and evidence in order to develop a critical perspective to the subject area’ (Course Guide, year three, p.3)⁹. Kate drew on her life experiences to ‘provide an additional angle to the social constructs because most of them [her memories of having a lone parent] are positive’ as well as ‘to disprove some of the negative stigmas attached to it [lone parenthood]’ (Narrative summary, 23/03/2010). As a result, despite the ‘negative stigmas’ attached to her childhood circumstances and the inevitable impact of her own parenthood, Kate was able to draw on the experiences and relate them to her critical reading and writing and knowledge making practices for academic advantage.

Later on in the same interview, Kate expanded on why she chose lone parenthood as a topic for her dissertation and the importance of the personal dimension to her writing:

Kate feels that **anything you write has to evoke some kind of emotion in order to do it well**. If you are writing about something you are not keen on, you will not be able to write well and no one will feel your emotion from what they are reading. **This is what draws the reader in** so Kate tries to make everything she writes about of **interest to her**. **For her, for example, she has mixed emotions over the issue of single-parenthood: fond memories, but also anger over the way in which single parents are demonised**. She feels it is really important to take a stand and **prove people wrong**. Kate is aware that there are probably plenty of people for whom single parenting evokes similar emotions, **so she tends to write the way she feels** at the time.

(Kate, narrative summary, 23/03/2010)

For Kate, these life experiences influenced not only what she wrote in terms of topic area, but how she developed approaches and practices associate with writing: ‘Writing the way she feels’ about issues ‘of interest to her’ and the need ‘to evoke some kind of emotion in order to do it well’. She reported that the approach of drawing on what was of interest to her ‘... enabled her to broaden her view’ and our discussions she was able to demonstrate awareness of disciplinary knowledge and skills. As a consequence, through her writing, I suggest that Kate was able to negotiate a more positive identity for lone parents based on her own experiences and desire to ‘prove people wrong.’ During the same interview, Kate commented that her mother ‘and all her [mother’s] sisters all worked in the same shoe warehouse in Holloway [pseudonym]’, thus providing further evidence of how Kate’s experiences intersected with the curriculum; but, in addition, how her own upbringing and social identity was used for academic advantage. It seems to me that, for Kate, writing was an act of identity as it involved:

⁹ Full reference omitted to maintain anonymity.

'reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody' (Ivanic 1998, p.32). Being brought up in a single parent household meant that she found that she had many of the resources to challenge the stigmatisation which contributed positively to her dissertation writing. This second data extract illustrates how dissertation choices were closely bound to life experiences in complex ways further supporting the view that writing is a socially significant practice.

5.3.5 Summing up life experiences intersecting with the curriculum

The theme explored different ways in which life experiences intersected with the applied social science curriculum, work-based discrimination, politics, social exclusion and lone parenthood, which I argue influenced how a range of texts from seminar readings dissertations were viewed and tackled. The theme also provides some evidence for a reciprocal exchange between the curriculum content and participants' diasporic connections.

I introduced this second theme with an examination of data highlighting instances of work-based discrimination and exploitation reported by three participants. Racial discrimination and a sense of othering and disadvantage reportedly stemming from participants black identity in a culturally complex work environment emerged as significant. Narratives provide evidence for how challenging life experiences of this kind as well as the effects of wider context, such as EU enlargement, influenced text production in the form of the dissertation topic selected. With regard to politics as a disciplinary area, analysis highlighted ways in which a number of participants articulated that politics was particularly challenging. This was, in part, because of life experiences prior to university study which did not allow for full participation in political activity. Mary, for instance, acknowledged that for many years she was 'outside politics', drawing on personal resources for knowledge making even though text production remained challenging. In-depth analysis also highlighted potential challenges for an institution appealing to non-traditional students who may not necessarily possess degree-specific qualifications or indeed experiences of academic text production on arrival. I also illustrated how the group of undergraduates I worked with made connections between the texts they read and their own experiences of exclusion relevant to the context in which they were located at the time. In doing so, I argue they subverted seminar proceedings in a way that was more meaningful to them. Finally, Kate's childhood experiences of lone parenthood were used for academic advantage in order to develop a more sceptical dimension to her thinking and the more successful negotiation of academic literacies, providing evidence for the reshaping of ideas around texts.

5.4 The resources participants bring to the academy

This next theme extends the latter as I continue to link participants' life experiences with the curriculum and knowledge making practices, evoking a reciprocal, dynamic exchange between them. There is also a deliberate focus on the resources students bring to the academy, further challenging a deficit approach to students and their abilities. Rather than focus on knowledge making *in* student writing, I focus on processes and practices surrounding personal knowledge making evidenced through the data analysed. There are two sections in total: Living amongst the people you study; and Poverty as a resource for knowledge making.

5.4.1 Living amongst the people you study

This example begins with a focus on one key participants' reporting of experiences surrounding a local field trip for an Area Studies, which I claim provides evidence for a critical stance towards research practices and the construction of meanings. During an extended interview, Amina talked about a field report assignment which seemed significant to her and her cohort at the time of data collection:

The day before the interview [with me] the group went to Manor Park [pseudonym] for a field trip to take notes and pictures of immigrants. **A lot of her classmates are immigrants and wondered what the point was and they felt that they could just look at Northcentral Campus. ... Some of the group felt uncomfortable about it, but would never voice their concerns to their lecturers.** However, afterwards **some quite liked it and taking pictures of ethnic minorities and immigrants was not necessarily what it seemed.** Those that went, and who were from ethnic minority backgrounds, found it beneficial. Amina explained that initially they were to take photographs but they did not have the necessary ethics forms completed, and so they took notes instead. **Amina did not go as she was preparing for her presentation.**

(Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010)

Amina described the field trip for her Areas Studies course as one consisting of 'taking pictures of ethnic minorities and immigrants' which served as preparation for a written field report the group were undertaking at the time of data collection. It seemed to me that the group were being asked to apply ethnographic methods of going into a culture or environment and looking in order to make the familiar strange. The narrative also seemed to indicate that the group may have felt disempowered by the prospect of note-taking and photographing people who they felt were just like them. Indeed, Amina reported that some of the class: 'wondered what the point was'. Yet, at the same time, they 'would never voice their concerns to their lecturers' and significantly appeared to lack the resources to do so. It is likely that Amina was experiencing pressures of academic work and deadlines, but I suggest the field task, as it appeared to be experienced by Amina and those she identified with, caused some discomfort. I also wondered to what extent it was Amina who felt unable to voice her concerns and instead chose to stay away. It seems to me that some resistance was felt by the group, *including*

Amina, which may have occurred as members of the group identified as 'immigrants' and with those 'from ethnic minority backgrounds' more closely than they identified with the university faculty responsible for the course.

There is a certain amount of conjecture as Amina did not participate in the task. Yet the assessment was clearly significant to her, not only because it was a summative piece of work that needed to be passed, but also as this participant elaborated upon the values and challenges it seemed to evoke in such detail. The unease seemed to stem from the nature of the field activity the group were expected to engage in, the localised context of this activity, but also due to the identities of participants involved. Césaire, citing Gobineau, stated: 'It is the West that studies the ethnography of the Others, not the Others who study the ethnography of the West' (Césaire, 2000, p.71). Amina was firmly located in 'the West' as a UK resident, yet I see the quote as relevant to the conflicting identities some members of the group may have experienced as well as evidence of the dynamic nature of diasporic identities. I also see Césaire's (2000) quote illuminating how the university students may have identified with those they perceived to be the object of study more readily, that is, the Other. As a result, I argue one explanation for the resistance and othering emerging from the data was that the approach to field methods appeared to clash with the groups' sense of cultural identification.

An additional interpretation is that the task may have caused some participants to challenge what they knew about the diverse north London neighbourhood as Amina stated that: '... afterwards some quite liked it, and taking pictures of ethnic minorities and immigrants was not necessarily what it seemed.' Yet, Amina's use of 'was not necessarily what it seemed' to me still indicates a sense of unease and distance on Amina's part. As a consequence, there is some evidence that Amina adopted a critical even oppositional stance, which emerged in the literature review and the previous chapter (4.4 Disengagement and Distance). This time it appeared to be directed towards the research practices and tacit values which underpin them. According to Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004, p.159), being critical means that: '... one may find that one is not in agreement with the way one is expected or supposed to think about something'. It is possible that what Amina shared with other students was a sense of discomfort with the field task which seemed to have been experienced differently from the way in which it was likely to have been conceived by faculty. Therefore, even though Amina did not participate fully, she can be said to have engaged in what was involved and potentially what was at stake in the production of the field report. van Pletzen's (2006) study of university students in South Africa found that some students felt they lacked the power to challenge reading material that conflicted with their own sense of identity, even though the cultural representations were problematic. Similarly, Amina's background, identity and personal circumstances at the time appear to have shaped her understandings of the field report activity.

5.4.1.1 Benefits of living amongst those you study

As highlighted in the previous example, there is evidence to support the view that Amina identified closely with ‘ethnic minorities and immigrants’. The next example takes the notion of close identification with London’s ethnic minorities and immigrants further as Amina acknowledges the benefits of actually living among the people she was studying:

It is quite interesting to live among people and to know why their situations are like they are. She feels that this ability to relate makes her academic work easier although she acknowledges there are points she may not see if you live among the people you study. In a way it is easier than if she came from a privileged background and was reading about it theoretically. (Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010)

Amina reflected on how what she has learnt academically has been enhanced not only by her experiences of her ‘living among’ residents within her culturally diverse London neighbourhood, but also her social identification as being less than privileged: ‘In a way it is easier than if she came from a privileged background and was reading about it theoretically’. She acknowledges: ‘there are points she may not see’, which I suggest highlights Amina’s critical awareness of the social world she inhabits, central for the reshaping of ideas. It seems that she assessed her lived experiences and social identity as potential resources for the negotiation of academic literacies which she found enhanced her ability ‘to relate’ to some of the social phenomena under investigation on the programme. Data reveals that Amina felt that she had additional resources to draw on for effective knowledge making practices which ‘make[s] her academic work easier.’

During the same interview, I asked Amina about the topics under discussion in her classes and she reflected on both her background and personal circumstances as a resource for her academic studies:

Sometimes she can relate to the topics such as migration as this was the process her family went through, although **it is not as complex as some of the stories she has heard about...** but **she can still relate to it** [migration]. **When she talks about social policy and housing she lives in an area which is predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities and when she looks at it, she can relate.**

(Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010)

Data suggests that, for Amina, living in culturally diverse London contributed towards her disciplinary understandings: ‘When she talks about social policy and housing she lives in an area which is predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities and *when she looks at it, she can relate.*’ This statement would also seem to support my argument that Amina’s social and cultural identification appear to have made a positive contribution to her knowledge making.

An ability to relate to and reflect upon the processes of migration, as well as living amongst the objects of analysis seemed to have advantages which were articulated by Mary as well as Amina. For instance, Mary explained that she was able to relate to some subject areas more than others:

She has had first-hand experience of poverty and development. She has been an asylum-seeker, she is a single Mum, **so she can relate to it.**
(Mary, narrative summary, 12/10/2009)

I am not claiming the narratives are a 'true' reproduction of the interview conducted as meanings are constantly being constructed and reconstructed. Yet, what is striking is that almost identical phrases 'so she can relate to it' (Mary, 12/10/2009) and 'she can relate to it' (Amina 19/03/2010) appear in both Mary and Amina's narratives which I see as indicative of a sense of shared experience and perspectives. Amina saw her contact and identification with 'ethnic minorities as advantageous. In a similar way, Mary reported her first hand experiences of poverty, migration and asylum as an advantage for knowledge making on the programme. Interestingly, Amina appears to take the position further and sees her background as not only an advantage for knowledge making activity, but also potentially an advantage over someone who 'came from a privileged background'. Despite this position, she was careful to acknowledge that her situation: '... is not as complex as some of the stories she has heard about' with reference to her family's move to the UK from Somalia, via Kenya (Amina, narrative summary, 19/03/2010), which I suggest echoes Amina's claims that academic work was made easier.

Maisha, another key participant observed and interviewed, also seems to support the view that background and identity can be utilised as an academic resource:

For area studies, she is lucky as a mature student and being born in Africa as some of the things she is learning she has seen in reality, and so she is lucky that way. The new version that she is learning comes from the West, but she is very much aware of what happens on the ground.
(Maisha, narrative summary, 01/04/2010)

Maisha reported that: 'she is lucky as a mature student and being born in Africa as some of the things she is learning she has seen in reality'. Like Amina, Mary and Kate, it would seem that past experiences were viewed as an academic resource for knowledge making. Maisha continues: 'it's probably more challenging for the young students who don't have the experience and they have to think of it' (Maisha, narrative summary, 01/04/2010).

Analysis reveals diversity among the group as participants' experiences of poverty and social disadvantage were experienced differently. Kate (5.2.4 Lone parenthood) and Amina locate their experiences of living among the socially less privileged in London which they report as advantageous for academic literacy practices. Amina, Maisha and Mary, however, refer to their first hand knowledge and experiences of poverty, migration and asylum illustrating how diasporic identities, life experiences and the university curriculum intersect in complex and not always uniform ways. Not only did participants appear to be aware of and acknowledge discursively the links between their own

identities and experiences, but they saw them as an advantage over students who may have come from 'traditional' backgrounds or indeed younger students 'who don't have the experience' (Maisha, 01/04/2010). Here I suggest an alternative to the 'diversity as deficit' (Harris and Rampton 2006) discourses surrounding non-traditional students from a variety of backgrounds, and their ability to write and think, is emerging.

5.4.2 Perspectives on poverty

This example builds on the previous as several participants articulated a closeness and an ability to relate to the disciplinary content they encountered. Experiences of poverty in diverse settings in Africa was a common thread running through a number of narratives as well as through observational data analysed. As a consequence, I examine data highlighting the personal relevance of poverty for several key participants.

Mr N, for instance, reported that:

If he is in this country it is because he has worked hard which is why he obtained a bursary to come and study. **He comes from a poor family**, ... [and] ... He tells his children he will go back. He tells his daughter that people are suffering in Africa.

(Mr N, narrative summary, 18/03/2010)

Fred, on the other hand, came from a more affluent family and admitted that, as a child, he had looked upon the poor less favourably and referred to them as:

"chokora" [Rubbish scavenger], a derogatory name for the poor. He remembered that when he was young he used to fight with them as they as they were poor and he was middle class. (Fred, narrative summary, 13/01/2009)

After spending several years in the UK, Fred was confronted with poverty when he returned to Kenya as an adult: '...where he saw a lot of poverty. He found that people congregated outside the family house because they had problems. ... This is what he remembers ...' (Narrative, 13/01/2009). There were additional references to poverty too. Mary expressed: 'a desire to go back home to Rwanda to fight poverty' (Narrative, 20/01/2009) and, finally, Mustapha expressed a desire to '...travel to another part of the world to tackle poverty' (Narrative, 09/12/2008). These shorter data extracts highlight a range of experiences of poverty as well as diversity among the group as participants talked about the world they had experienced and knew. Mr N appeared to have experienced poverty first hand, whereas Fred was confronted with the poverty of others around him as an adult. Mary and Mustapha, offer a different perspective expressed through a desire to tackle poverty by travelling 'back home' as well as to other parts of the world.

What I argue are important individual perspectives on poverty, and poverty in Africa in particular, are further supported by observational data. I observed a seminar (Observation 1, year six) during which the class engaged in talk around text on the state of the world's welfare by Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs (1997). The lecturer explained that the seminar paper under discussion argued for education as a means for countering poverty. More specifically and after closer reading, although I found this to be an accurate statement, I discovered that the authors painted a bleak picture of sub-Saharan Africa in comparison to other world regions. To give two examples, Deacon et al. (1997) state the region is hindered by 'unfavourable climatic conditions' (p.33) and a table depicting performance relating to global Gross National Product refers to it as simply 'poor' (p.37) without elaboration.

Vera identified as African: 'Africans like myself who leave Africa for a better life... we move to Europe for our children' (Observation 5, year one), and I noticed that the constant reference to Africa as 'poor' in monolithic terms appeared problematic for her. Data reveals that, in contrast to some of the views of other members of her class, Vera was adamant that Africa is not poor:

Vera corrects [the class] '**Everyone keeps saying Africa is poor. It is not poor.** [underlining signifies emphasis]' **She goes on to talk about resources and corruption.** Other students disagree (Mindis, Niha and others), however, and they counter [Vera] with the claim that they mean economically poor. (Observation 5, year one)

The data extract provides evidence to show that Vera challenged a commonly held view of Africa and Africans as essentially poor and little else which was presented through a number of course-related texts, such as the seminar reading, and what seems to be a view held by other members of the class. Instead Vera offers a rather more complex analysis of the situation as: 'She goes on to talk about resources and corruption.' I later interview Vera who affirms her position for a second time:

As she is leaves my office, I thank her for agreeing to be interviewed and I acknowledge that questions about back home may be difficult. She agrees and comments that **she and other students in the class are like her and have migrated for various reasons.** She also refers to a comment she made the previous week in class. She does not like it when other younger students say that Africa is poor. It is not poor. **Its situation is due to poor management - but it is not poor, she reiterates.** She also thanks me for the opportunity to talk and adds that she is learning through talking about her situation and experiences. (Fieldnotes, 09/12/2008)

While Vera appeared to identify with the: 'other students in the class [who] are *like her* and have migrated for various reasons', she seemed troubled by the position held by some of her peers, the lecturer and the text under discussion. Through her struggles to challenge dominant understandings of 'Africa,' I suggest a sense of African identification which is associated with some form of deficiency,

such as poverty, loss and exclusion, begins to assert itself as a potential resource for knowledge making as individuals like Vera engage with course-related texts.

The data exemplifies key participants' experiences of poverty as well as strong ties with a sense of back home, commonly associated with diaspora. Indeed, Maisha articulated the importance of her ties with the 'Third World' well:

Maisha feels it [working with deprived people in the First and Third World] is more or less the same, but feels that she could relate more to Area Studies **because she could go out to the Third World and work and give back to society what they have given her.**
(Maisha, narrative summary, 01/04/2010)

Although Maisha's degree study was motivated by an interest in social work and social care in the UK (Narrative, 01/04/2010), the extract above shows a closeness with the 'Third World' and a desire to 'give back to society what they have given her.' Maisha appears to reframe what she sees as Western practices while drawing on her diasporic background. There is also some evidence that Maisha may have taken up a more critical epistemological position (Lewis and Ketter 2011) which is in opposition to dominant thinking in her disciplinary area. Maisha continues:

The new version that she is learning comes from the West, but she is very much aware of what happens on the ground. She knows about poverty, the mechanisms of it and how it manifests itself but now she is learning more.
(Maisha, narrative summary, 01/04/2010)

I suggest the claims present in the data extract above creates distance from the West as well as supporting her desire to 'go out to the Third World' as, like some of the other key participants 'she is very much aware of what happens on the ground'. It could be argued that Maisha was simply replicating disciplinary knowledge presented during her Area Studies course as she refers to the mechanisms of poverty. However, I would argue this is less likely given her diasporic background and life experiences. This last point presents data which I suggest highlights a range of different stances towards poverty reported by participants which result from a range of prior experiences and a sense of diasporic connectedness and engagement with course-related texts. What I found to be noteworthy was that although poverty and a desire to effect change in different contexts remained a common theme for a number of participants, there was considerable diversity among the group.

5.4.2.1 Subverting preconceptions

The previous chapter explored complex deficit identities of participants which I argued were both ascribed and self-ascribed (4.3 Complex identities). However, in this section, I approach the complexity of participant identities from a different angle. Whilst I have made strenuous attempts to avoid essentialising or absolutising culture (Gilroy 2002), as well as acknowledging my own inevitable ethnocentrism, I felt that reference to ‘Africa’ and ‘Africans’ across a number of participants, across time and across research sites was significant for how meanings were constructed, and therefore worthy of more in-depth analysis.

The next example illustrates further how participants talked freely about poverty, migration and their own experiences in relation to texts read and shared in class and therefore central to the negotiation of academic literacies. In one class observation, I noticed a diverse group of students discuss a class presentation on Lalor’s (1999) article on Ethiopian street children. During the talk around text activity, there was intense classroom discussion and dissent among the group:

JAMES
QUESTIONS
PRESENTERS:
PRESENTER:
[Overlap]
JAMES:
‘So, what you’re saying is modernity is causing, ...so everyone, children who go on [the] street, is in effect ...what you’re saying is we should all go back to being a third world country?’
‘No. That’s not what we are saying...’
‘Oh. Ok, I just wanted to be clear ...’
[The presenter (of African origin) talks about the experiences of African migrants who end up cleaning in hotels. The Africans around the class laugh.]
(Observation 4, year one)

What struck me about the data extract above is that there appears to be evidence of negotiation of meaning in relation to the text but also in relation to the group. James challenged the presenters: ‘...what you’re saying is we should all go back to being a third world country?’ but then seemed to accept the presenters’ explanation quite readily: ‘Oh. Okay. I just wanted to be clear ...’. Next, one of the presenters appeared to link Lalor’s (1999) text on the exploitation of street children to his or her own experiences of hotel work in the UK: ‘The presenter (of African origin) talks about the experiences of African migrants who end up cleaning in hotels.’ However, rather than detract from the groups’ engagement and knowledge making, the point appears to resonate with the group as I noted later that: ‘Students continue to laugh’ (Observation 6, year one). It seems that the discussion of poverty and extremes of income inequalities are highly relevant to the groups sense of shared experiences realised through humour (‘The Africans around the class laugh’) but importantly through

disagreement and negotiation of meaning: ‘No, that's not what we're saying ...’ as a point from James was rebutted. Later on in the observation I wrote that:

One speaker says: ‘I've actually experienced this, and I spoke to them [street children].’
(Observation 6, year one)

The admission from my perspective suggests that, although the day to day negotiation of knowledge can be an intensely personal experience, the influence of the group remained significant. Gee (1992) argues that how we think is located in socially constructed practices, rather than the individual, and the previous data example illustrates how discourse practices surrounding a seminar presentation assisted the construction of knowledge. The example also offers some support for my earlier analyses where I argued poverty, deprivation and exclusion were socially and personally relevant to participants.

Continuing with a focus on knowledge making practices surrounding poverty, the final example centres on an email communication with Lecturer B. I had been a teacher-researcher for eleven months when I contacted Lecturer B by email over a series of seminars that were due to run that semester. I enquire: And how is xxx this year?’

xxx is really good because I knew them all in year one and they were very nice then. Totally different from last year: they talk and are enthusiastic. **And being nearly all African I have asked them to start investigating all the processes that cause poverty in the UK but which, like enclaves, are forgotten.**
(Email, 16/10/2009)

The lecturer's enthusiasm and positive regard for the group was evident: ‘I knew them all in year one and they were very nice then’. Interestingly, the lecturer was in fact referring to the group who I refer to as class three (see Table 3.4) for the purpose of my own data gathering which included four key participants (Mr N, Maisha, Kate and Amina). However, the statement: ‘And being nearly all African’ was unexpected in spite of my knowing that several participants had already identified as African or with Africa in some way during my time in the field (Vera, 09/12/2008; Mustapha 09/12/2008; Mary 12/01/2009; & Mr N 18/03/2008). Initially, I felt that the use of the phrase (‘And being nearly all African ...’) reflected some prejudgment over the group which I felt may restrict opportunity for a dynamic learning experience later on in the academic year. An example of what I mean at this point might be less opportunity for participants to engage in effective negotiation surrounding the two written summative assessments for the course, a critical review and a policy analysis project (Course Guide, pp.4-5).

At the same time, I remained optimistic that there may have been an intention to subvert unfavourable characterisations of Africans which earlier analysis has shown was important to participants such as Vera. One reason for my optimism was because I was aware that the lecturer was a specialist in social inclusion with relevant publications cited in the Course Guide. As a consequence, I was more persuaded that he was aware of less favourable characterisations of migrant communities. However, on reflection a more curriculum-oriented, and contextually driven, interpretation is likely as there seemed to be a desire to encourage students to draw on their own experiences of poverty in order to once again enhance disciplinary understandings from the start of the academic year. Thus, rather than seeking to *confront* unfavourable representations, or myths surrounding the continent (Keita 2014), the lecturer may have been referring to what he had already found out as, he ‘...knew them all in year one’. To put it slightly differently, it seems to me that diasporic connections were being drawn on as means of interrogating ‘all the processes that cause poverty in the *UK* which, like enclaves, are forgotten’ (Email, 16/10/2009). Indeed, this second interpretation can be matched with the course learning outcomes, one of which is to demonstrate ‘a critical ability to discover the flaws within the conventional wisdom’ (Course Guide, p.3) and second to engender critical thinking around poverty in the UK through the analysis of ‘some of the central processes that reproduce social exclusion in urban areas’ (Course Guide, p.3). Still, my concern is that these ‘Africa-centred’ discourses further feed into the ascribed deficit identities, illustrated in the previous chapter (Section 4.2). Approaching the curriculum in this way, though well-motivated, may continue to influence the ways in which students on the course engaged with lecturers and the curriculum, particularly if they are viewed as African first and foremost and somehow different to faculty or the more traditionally represented groups in HE.

That said, there is some evidence that this approach of drawing on the intellectual resource participants possessed caused some reshaping and reframing of ideas, although I acknowledge it is more difficult to determine to what extent this was a result of an active approach to developing understanding ‘some of the processes that reproduce’ poverty in Britain. An example is the comments Mary made while preparing a presentation on a chapter from Rowntree’s (1902) study of English town life:

Mary found it interesting that poverty issues focussed on York and **she expressed surprise that there were poor people and homelessness in the city**. She commented that poverty is a social issue everywhere.
(Mary, narrative summary, 14/01/2009)

Mary’s surprise that there was still poverty in England indicates some reshaping of ideas in relation to the curriculum. Mustapha, however, took a different view of poverty as ‘... he feels it [poverty] is

more of a social problem elsewhere than here in the UK (Narrative, 09/12/2008). Thus, despite being characterised as ‘nearly all African’ perspectives are diverse, and data from this thesis would seem to indicate that Africa-centred discourses are both multiple and complex.

This section presents a number of different perspectives on poverty which I argue help to construct a view of participants as complex individuals who are able to articulate a more critical approach towards the curriculum, and the texts they encountered. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that some participants challenged dominant thinking in the field. Lea’s (1999) study of non-traditional students is relevant as Lea found that learners adopt two broad approaches to learning and text production, one which replicates knowledge and another which challenges it: ‘The problem for many [mature] students is that merely reproducing academic knowledge can feel invalidating and constraining as well as in conflict with other more familiar “ways of knowing”’ (p.107). While Lea argues both strategies are restricting, I suggest that data analysed for this thesis presents some evidence of a challenge to the taken for granted understandings of Africa and poverty on the degree programme. This section illustrates that the group of participants I worked with had a variety of life experiences before their time at Northcentral and as a result developed ways of knowing which intersected with the curriculum through seminar texts and diasporic identities in different ways. I argue, therefore, that this reciprocal relationship between curriculum content, identity and diaspora can be viewed as a resource for knowledge making, which in some cases contributed to participants’ own text production.

5.4.3 Summing up the resources participants bring to the academy

This final theme presents evidence for how participants constructed disciplinary knowledge critically. I began with the example of the field report activity which illustrated not only the complexity of the Northcentral student profile, but also how participants felt they connected to the London environment. I also illustrated how social scientific methods employed on the programme were not experienced uniformly or necessarily in the way intended by faculty. Participants felt their sense of self as well as what they ‘knew’ sometimes conflicted with faculty and other participants on the programme with whom they appeared to identify. There is overlap with the previous chapter (4.4 Disengagement and Distance) as it seems to me that power relations influenced engagement as, rather than challenge or criticise faculty directly, participants chose to stay away.

Data analysed also explored how participants were able to construct meanings through prior knowledge and experiences of the world. For some participants, there were benefits of identifying and living among the less privileged reported and doing so enhanced the ability to relate to curriculum

topics which emerged as significant for disciplinary understandings. However, in contrast to an earlier theme in the chapter (5.2 Negotiating dominant practices), I have argued that life experiences and the ways in which some participants ‘know’ and see the world are viewed not only as a leverage for knowledge making but an advantage over younger, less experienced students. There is evidence for a reciprocal exchange between reading texts theoretically, background and life experiences which contribute towards disciplinary understandings and, significantly, what participants felt they could utilise as resources for text production.

This theme highlights how, although a number of participants reported first hand experiences of poverty in diverse settings, it was experienced differently. For example, constructions of Africa as ‘poor’ in essentialist terms were challenged by one participant in particular which I argue contributed towards the reshaping of disciplinary knowledge. Africa-centred perspectives on poverty remained ‘contradictory, contested and fluid’ (Cooper and Morrell, 2014, p.2) in the sense that there was evidence of how, for instance, ‘Africa’ is positioned in relation to ‘the West’, both highly contested constructs. For this reason, I argue that critical engagement with course-related texts, can contribute towards individual knowledge making, but also sustained critical engagement which offers participants the potential to challenge what they felt were less than favourable cultural representations. This final theme presents data illustrating some of the practices and processes which help to construct and reshape commonly held assumptions about Africa and Africans and the implication for knowledge making.

5.5 Chapter summary

Throughout this chapter analysis moves away from dominant literacy practices influencing participants’ own text production towards discussions of knowledge making. I began with analysis of a range of data which helped to foreground literacy practices surrounding dominant models of academic writing. For instance, tensions and confusion arose as a reflective approach to academic writing and learning appeared to have been implemented on the course I observed which, based on data analysed, did not appear to have a tradition of reflective genres of writing. As a consequence, I argue that the implementation of dominant models of writing at an institutional level affected participants’ ability to negotiate what was required of them at a more local level. Participants’ attempts at negotiation highlighted a desire for dialogue in order to overcome uncertainty associated with text production. Analysis also highlighted how attempts at fostering dialogue and negotiation were sometimes unsuccessful, with ‘problems’ with writing and learning framed as individual rather than institutional. Data also confirmed that the feedback gained on written assignments was important for participants, and, when discussed, was generally framed as problematic. For instance a number of

participants articulated questions about what was expected of them, but were not always successful in gaining appropriate and timely guidance over what was an example of high stakes autobiographical writing (section 5.2).

What is common across the data examples is that participants tended to construct themselves as ‘poor’ as they unpacked the feedback they received, which I suggest reflects gaps and lacks in institutional practices, as much as individual deficiency. Data also suggests that participants lacked the power to contest or challenge the evaluation of their work directly. As a result, this chapter highlights how, for the participants I worked with, the practice of the giving and receiving feedback was influenced by unequal power relations, yet at the same time was key to how academic tasks and texts were understood. Feedback practices do seem to be bound up with values and beliefs (Gee 1987; 1990) and notions of what is acceptable (van Pletzen 2006) writing. I am, therefore, able to characterise my analysis as exemplifying how discourses surrounding the practices of feedback and student writing ‘problems’ as related to the workings of institutional power which in turn affect how feedback on written assignments was experienced and understood.

The second theme (5.4 Life experiences intersecting with curriculum) explored different ways in which prior experiences influenced and were influenced by salient topics from the applied social science curriculum. I introduced the theme with an examination of data highlighting instances of work-based discrimination and exploitation reported by three participants. Discrimination and a sense of othering and disadvantage reportedly stemming from participants’ black identity in a culturally complex work environment emerged as significant. Narratives provide evidence for how challenging life experiences of this kind, were intersected by wider socio-political context. Analysis also illustrated that work-based discrimination and exploitation influenced not only the timing of access to HE, the choice of institution or the programme selected as I argued in the previous chapter, but also the nature of texts and topics selected. I argue engagement with texts influenced how a range of texts from seminar readings to dissertations were viewed and tackled. The theme also provides some evidence for a reciprocal link between the curriculum content and participants’ diasporic connections which is also taken up in the latter part of this chapter (5.3 The resources participant bring to the academy).

Politics as a disciplinary area was constructed as problematic more so than other degree pathways by a number of key participants. There seemed to be tensions between academic text production and the idealised institutional discourses which indicated that an interest in current affairs would be sufficient

for highly situated reading, writing and knowledge making. In contrast, data analysis indicates that this was not always how the study of politics was experienced, which affected not only text production, but how a perceived lack of knowledge of British politics coloured participants' views of their opportunities for academic success. In-depth analysis also highlighted potential challenges for an institution appealing to non-traditional students who may not necessarily possess degree-specific qualifications or indeed experiences of academic text production on arrival.

I also illustrated how a group of undergraduates made connections between the texts they read and their own experiences of social exclusion relevant to the context in which they were located at the time. In doing so, I argue, the class subverted seminar proceedings in a way that was more meaningful to them. For instance, talk surrounding a text on social exclusion and the potential impact of migration was taken up and then subverted, illustrating that rich experiences outside the university classroom were drawn on for academic advantage for several participants. This provided one example of how knowledge was subverted through knowledge making practices and through a prioritising of participants own self-interests. Additionally, experiences of lone parenthood were used for academic advantage in order to develop a more critical dimension to academic writing. For instance, being brought up in single parent household meant one participant found she had the resources to challenge stigmatisation which they felt contributed positively to dissertation writing. Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that personal experiences and diasporic connections were seen as resources to be drawn on to support personal knowledge making in certain curriculum areas, such as development and domestic social policy. Thus, for some members of the group, diasporic connections, lone parenthood and diverse culturally and socially diverse London neighbourhoods were drawn on as a *resource* for negotiating academic literacies in the academy.

The final theme (5.4 Resources participants bring to the academy) extends the latter as I continue to link participants' life experiences with the curriculum and to knowledge making practices. I began with an example of a field report activity which illustrated not only the complexity of the Northcentral student profile, but also how participants felt they connected to the London environment. Participants felt their sense of self as well as what they 'knew' sometimes conflicted with faculty and other participants on the programme with whom they appeared to identify. Data analysis also explored how participants were able to construct meanings through prior knowledge and experiences of the world. Some participants reported there were benefits of identifying and living among the less privileged, and in doing so enhanced their ability to relate to the curriculum topics which emerged as significant for disciplinary understandings. Building on previous themes, I have argued that life experiences and the ways in which some of the non-traditional undergraduates 'know' and see the world is viewed not

only as a leverage for knowledge making but an advantage over younger, less experienced students. There seems to be evidence for a reciprocal exchange between reading and talking about texts, on the one hand, and background and life experiences, on the other, which contribute towards disciplinary understandings and, significantly, what aspects of participants' own life histories they felt they could utilise as resources.

Once again, analysis revealed the complexity of participants' identities. For instance, some identified positively as immigrants and ethnic minorities, which also became a source of discomfort and unease as participants engaged in fieldwork preparation. Similarly, as noted earlier in the chapter, Mr N identified with the British and at the same time as an asylum seeker with origins outside the UK at the same time as expressing distance from other migrants groups. What the data points to is a sense of multiple, dynamic identities which intersected with the curriculum as well as the social, cultural and political complexity of Britain at the time of data collection. The importance of diasporic connections has been a recurrent theme reemerging at various points throughout this thesis. Through this research project I have uncovered a sense of connectedness to Africa which on the one hand is associated with poverty, loss and exclusion for some participants, but which also asserts itself as a potential resource for participants on the programme. However, I need to stress that rather than Africa presenting as a unified geopolitical identity, something rigid and unchanging, I see it as exceedingly complex following Zeleza (2009). Indeed, during the process of data analysis, I found that participant diasporic identities interacted with the curriculum and academic tasks in complex ways. For instance, some critiqued Western perspectives on African poverty, while others, quite legitimately, adopted them more readily. For this reason, I argue that critical engagement with a number of course-related texts and course-related practices can contribute towards individual knowledge making and literacy development. At the same time, sustained critical engagement with the curriculum, faculty and other members of the group also offers the potential for individuals to challenge less than favourable cultural representations of Africa, which was important for a number of participants interviewed.

To sum up briefly, practices influencing participants' own reading writing and knowledge provide some evidence for the reshaping of ideas around texts, but also provide evidence for some of the challenges participants encountered when attempting to unpack tacit practices. Negotiation was not always successful, in other words. I argue that diasporic connections can be seen as a potential resource for knowledge making which, although not related to participants' text production directly, is of relevance to this thesis, and in particular how power relations and participant identities influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices. One challenge is how to deploy these resources for the development of academically and personally relevant writing practices which may have relevance for a greater number of undergraduates, explored in the final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: A RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE - IDENTITY, KNOWLEDGE MAKING AND THE CURRICULUM

6.1 An introduction to the discussion of key findings

I have argued throughout this thesis that the Northcentral context is one of great complexity. This chapter discusses the major themes which emerged from the ethnographic study and is followed by a final implications chapter. The title of the chapter references a reoccurring theme throughout the thesis which is the notion of a complex and dynamic relationship between poststructural notions of identity, students as knowledge makers and the applied social science curriculum. Keita (2014) describes the 'reciprocal diffusion' of knowledge moving from Europe to Africa and from Africa to Europe as quite separate phenomena. In contrast I see the flow of ideas and identities to be in constant flux. As a result, throughout the thesis, I refer to this complexity as a reciprocal *exchange*. More specifically, while the group of students I worked with was assessed in a number of unfavourable ways, they also displayed a range of resources for knowledge making stemming from a reciprocal exchange between diasporic identities and the applied social science curriculum.

The chapter is divided into five sections: 6.2 Subtle and complex forms of othering; 6.3 Students negotiating the challenges of text production; 6.4 Life experiences contributing to knowledge making; 6.5 My thinking on identity and diasporic connections; 6.6 Change, reshaping and revisiting the research questions; and 6.7 Chapter summary. I acknowledge there is inevitable overlap across the sections and themes dictated by the open nature of this ethnographic study. I begin by addressing some of the factors influencing how students negotiated academic literacy practices, that is, reading, writing and knowledge making, with fellow university students and faculty. I move on to a discussion of dominant literacy practices and my thinking on power and identity as I align my discussion of findings more closely to the second research question (How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?)

6.2 Subtle and complex forms of othering

A comprehensive review of the literature indicated that the experience of HE was not always smooth for non-traditional students for a variety of reasons often associated with increased cultural and linguistic diversity (Harris and Thorp 1999; Lillis 2001; Lowenthal and White 2011; Read et al. 2001; Read et al. 2003; Rose 1990; Thesen 2006). Nonetheless, the powerful reoccurring theme of othering was something I had not anticipated. First of all, a sense of othering, discrimination and disadvantage reportedly stemming from participants' black identity in a culturally complex work environment occurring before enrolment at Northcentral emerged as significant.

Some participants reported instances of direct discrimination resulting in curtailed job prospects and a sense of differential treatment outside the Northcentral setting. These practices influenced not only the timing of access to HE, the choice of institution and the programme, but also the direction and nature of dissertation topics and other written assignment topics selected. There was also a reporting of perceived discrimination surrounding non-standard ways of speaking and writing. For example, a sense of othering stemming from challenges of expressing oneself in English as well as complex identity issues associated with speaking English with an accent as explored extensively by Lippi Green (1997). Within the university setting, there were reports of discriminatory practices centering on academic integrity and unsympathetic treatment by staff which appeared to disadvantage some students. Discourses surrounding speaking and writing 'proper' English with an 'acceptable' accent emerged as highly significant for several participants during a study in which I found there were few generalisations I found I could make. These powerful discourses resulted in individuals with non-standard accents and language backgrounds perceived as somehow less desirable. Experiences in the setting inevitably had some influence on text production and influenced the way in which they were able to engage with and negotiate the university context.

In the example of The sterile zone (section 3.7.1), othering appeared to take on a spatial dimension as participants drew attention to the ways in which students were barred from certain physical spaces in the university. This example also tells us something about how students were viewed in problematic terms, as well as how the identities of who people were, was closely linked to the physical spaces they were permitted to access. Physical space, as well as time, became an important dimension to context and has been informed by poststructural and postmodern thinking, as found by Benwell and Stokoe (2006) in their exploration of place space and identity construction. I argue this spatial othering also affected the discursive spaces students were permitted to enter, which in turn affected negotiation of appropriate text production quite significantly. This claim was supported by participants who articulated a physical, but also social distance which did not match their expectations or past experiences of studying.

Despite changes to student populations, Canagarajah (2002) argued issues of power and difference remain and that power is deployed more subtly. Related to this position, I also found evidence of indirect othering through unfavourable assessment of these individuals as seeking advantage over others as well as being disorganised and ill prepared. In contrast, Holliday (2013, p.21) argued 'cultural belief in the Other is the perception that the culture of *any* teacher or student to be a

resource,' a view I support. My findings are supported by research in a culturally complex urban university environment. For instance, Read et al. (2003) found that some students were disadvantaged by an institutional culture which placed them in a position of other. It seems that even though culturally, linguistically and socially diverse groups of students were and are still welcomed into HE, institutional practices do not always fully support successful participation (Lillis 1999; 2001), or may even work against it.

I take this position further arguing that due to the complex linguistic, cultural and ethnic background of the participants I observed, othering, however indirect or unintentional, can be considered neo-racist. This new or neo-racism, according to Spears (1999), is behaviour which supports the inequalities of racial hierarchy either directly or indirectly. Even though I did not set out to focus on race, or any other specific identity category for that matter, I have illustrated how visible markers of difference such as race, gender and 'non-Western' dress are bound up with the workings of power and difference (Aykaç 2008; Delanty et al. 2008; Kubota 2003). Repeated othering suggests that these particular students were viewed as problematic with significant consequences for how they were able to negotiate a constructive relationship with the academy. What I also found significant was that the participants often perceived themselves as outsiders on the periphery and different to 'the ones born here' (Mr N, narrative summary, 18/02/2010) in the UK. This was a result of real life circumstances, a sense of being less than privileged as well as complex multilingual backgrounds echoing the complex forms of othering reported.

6.3 Students negotiating the challenges of text production

6.3.1 Hybrid genres

Time in the field also resulted in the foregrounding of certain practices surrounding dominant models of academic writing. For instance, tensions and confusion arose as a reflective approach to academic writing and learning appeared to have been implemented on the applied social science course which, based on data analysed, did not appear to have a tradition of critical thinking or reflective genres of writing. As a consequence, I argue that the implementation of dominant models of writing at an institutional level affected participants' ability to negotiate what was required of them at a more local level.

Russell et al. (2009) assert there are currently two influential models of academic writing present in higher education. The first is regarded as a personal act of knowledge making which for this thesis was reflected in discourses surrounding the reflective diary entries and autobiographical accounts.

The second model of writing (Russell et al. 2009) sees writing as a demonstration of the acquisition of institutional, subject or disciplinary knowledge. I found that confusion arose for participants as the autobiographical piece of writing was a hybrid version of both approaches yet this was not necessarily clear or fully understood by participants. Indeed, Stierer (2000) and Lazar and Ellis (2010) state that complex and hybrid genres are not always recognised and Lazar and Ellis (2010) continue that new genres are not always as established as sometimes thought, often reflecting cultural and epistemological differences across academic specialisms. While autobiographical writing was privileged in the sense that it was the required form for a high stakes summative assignment, questions articulated by the group were not always addressed by faculty, resulting in failed negotiation. It seems that the Applied Social Science programme had adopted and adapted new genres without necessarily communicating their significance to students and faculty. This oversight added to the challenges of negotiating academic literacy practices.

As a consequence, many participants found tacit expectations were difficult to unearth and this thesis has further challenged some of the taken for granted and often neat dichotomies such as presentation *skills* and collaborative learning *skills*, on the one hand, versus a demonstration of disciplinary *knowledge* on the other. Thus, even though the discussion and analysis of participants own texts was less central to the direction of the thesis than I had originally anticipated, dominant models of what constituted good or acceptable writing remained important, supporting the situated nature of literacy. Indeed, I found that the local and highly contextualised approach to reading and writing in the form of the nature of texts students were required to produce, shows how writing on university courses is deeply embedded within disciplinary epistemologies as well as institutional practices. This is one reason for the largely deficit discourses and othering I observed surrounding the complex relationship between an individual reflective diary entry, collaborative presentations and summative assignments for the course.

6.3.2 Uncertainty over formative and assessment and feedback practices

Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis and Swann (2003) in a publication designed to help university teachers explain simply that, unlike summative assessments, formative assessments are designed to help student improve their own writing and are not normally graded. Formative writing for diagnostic purposes and associated feedback was valued on the degree programme. Yet, despite some assignments being labelled as formative and therefore low stakes by faculty, they were experienced differently by participants. Indeed, analysis led me to question the pedagogic benefits of the label 'formative' and its purely diagnostic function as, from my perspective, some of the tasks categorized in this way were as challenging and anxiety provoking as those labelled summative.

Sustained time in the field, therefore, challenged the usefulness of such dichotomous labels despite their aim of making writing and assessment practices more transparent.

The giving and receiving of feedback emerged, perhaps less surprisingly, as a dominant literacy practice important to participants. I found that the feedback gained on written assignments was important for participants, and, when discussed, was generally framed as problematic. I also noticed participants seemed to lack the power to contest or challenge the assessment of their work directly. As a result, chapter five highlights how the practice of giving and receiving feedback was influenced by unequal power relations, yet at the same time was key to how academic tasks and texts were understood. Thus, I contend my research complements thinking in academic literacies research which recognises that feedback practices are likely to be bound up with values and beliefs (Gee 1987; 1990; Lea 1999) and notions of what is acceptable (Thesen and van Pletzen 2006; Street 1995). Street (1995) was influential, in part, as he advocated an overtly critical approach to socially situated reading and writing practices which marked power relations surrounding 'good' or 'acceptable' writing explicitly. In line with this approach, I characterise my analysis as exemplifying how discourses surrounding the practices of feedback and student writing 'problems' as relating to the workings of institutional power, which in turn affect how feedback on written assignments was experienced and understood. With reference to the workings of discourse, Gee (2008) wrote that powerful discourses can be less empowering for those individuals from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.

6.3.3 Institutional lacks and gaps

A number of researchers (for example, Bowl 2003; Gee 2000a; Preece 2006; Read et al. 2001; Tomic 2006) have suggested that there are tensions between the expectations of the institution and the range of cultural backgrounds from which students have come. An alternative to a deficit approach to students and their abilities is a 'gap' framed in terms of 'faculty expectations and students interpretations of what is involved in student writing and in terms of institutional rather than an individual approach' (Street 2004, pp.13-14). In my view, the metaphor is not always successful in not stigmatising the non-traditional newcomer. My reading of what has been referred to as a skill, knowledge and sometimes awareness 'gap' is that it has, at times, been presented euphemistically as something which students new to universities lack and need to acquire: gaps therefore become lacks.

Rather than gaps between students and tutors' understandings and expectations, I found evidence of a distance between institutional practices surrounding assessment practices in particular. Sustained time in the field demonstrated that life challenges were not considered by the institution in obvious or

transparent ways which was generally problematic for participants attempting to negotiate a constructive relationship with the academy. The thesis also reveals the significance of unequal power relations as attempts at negotiation highlighted a desire for dialogue (Lillis 1999) in order to overcome uncertainty associated with text production. For instance, I have illustrated how attempts at fostering dialogue and negotiation were sometimes unsuccessful, with ‘problems’ with writing and learning framed as individual rather than institutional. What is common across the data analysed is that participants tended to construct themselves as ‘poor’ as they unpacked the feedback they received, which I suggest reflects gaps and lacks in institutional practices, as much as individual deficiency or ‘pathology’ (Giroux, 2001). I argue it is only through understanding and respecting difference that all students will be able to participate and engage more successfully. Indeed, negotiating a constructive relationship with the academy remained a challenge for some as problems were constructed as lying with individual study habits in terms of poor collaboration, learning problems and deficient language use as opposed to those practices dominated by the institution. As a consequence of the tensions between the individual and the academy, I observed that distance, and even alienation (Mann 2001; 2005), from the process of academic study took a variety of forms: being absent, leaving classes before they officially ended, a lack of elaboration or silence and crossing into a different language.

6.3.4 Oppositional practices: challenging deficit discourses and ascribed identities

Closely tied to the unfavourable positioning of some participants as having *individual* problems coupled with my perceived lack of dialogue, were observations of distance and silence. My analysis showed that there was a range of different responses and strategies adopted by participants which I referred to earlier as oppositional practices and identities. However, in contrast to what Giroux (2001, p.165) refers to as ‘oppositional practices’ towards academic culture in general terms, the oppositional stance taken up by participants should not be seen as evidence of either an essential group or ‘collective identity’ (Ogbu 2004). Instead I see instances of silence as relating to, for example, distance felt which was also influenced by a desire to reassert more positive and legitimate identities, often in contrast to those ascribed to them. That is to say, more than ‘late’ or ‘black’ and more than someone who knows something of value, despite being schooled outside the UK. Thus, rather than *resisting* academic culture, there was evidence of attempts to create and negotiate more positive identities as individuals who invested a great deal in terms of study hours, financial commitment, travelling time and lack of sleep in order to come to class. In doing so, they attempt to challenge deficit discourses and ascribed identities.

Indeed, some forms of oppositional practice were used for academic advantage. Linguistic crossing (Rampton 2005) from English to French and back again, which I suggest reflected the workings of

power as a small group of relatively powerless students felt unable to criticise or enter into dialogue with a lecturer overtly. A second example is distance and abstinence from the seminars while participants were in many cases working hard outside the university setting, in public libraries or at home, out of sight. Such practices highlight how participants' engagement contributed towards their literacy practices whilst at university, but also helped to counter deficit discourses surrounding literacy and a lack of criticality of the Other. Indeed, I noted through sustained observations and in-depth interview, some of the effects of context on the negotiation of academic literacies as well as how the linguistic and cultural diversity of the group intersected with the university context. Analysis also showed that attempts at negotiation were acutely bound up with unequal power relations between students and lecturers resulting in essential labels ascribed to students by faculty but also by each other, reflecting the complex workings of power. In summary, I found evidence of oppositional stances which were at the same time subtle and complex, and which went some way towards countering deficit discourses and reshaping ascribed identities.

6.4 Life experiences contributing to knowledge making

There was also evidence to indicate that personal experiences and identities can, and I propose should, be seen as resources to be drawn on in order to support personal knowledge making in certain curriculum areas, such as area studies and domestic social policy. Thus, despite the sometimes less than positive identities ascribed to participants ('late', 'a kid', having language and learning problems, gaining unfair advantage and poor), I found that there was evidence in the ability of the Other. Kate's positive reporting of experiences of text production and taking a critical stance against deficit discourses surrounding lone parenthood is an example of this as she reported being able to draw on and apply her own experiences of lone parenthood to her academic reading and writing practices. Thus knowledge making practices emerge as significant, as does a sense of a reciprocal, or dynamic, exchange between life experiences on the one hand and the curriculum on the other.

It may seem an obvious point to state that the seminar reading texts on poverty and social exclusion students encountered on a weekly basis (for example, Deacon et al. 1997; Lalor 1997; Reich 1991, Rowntree 1902; and Wilkinson 1996) influenced participants disciplinary understandings. Indeed, this perspective is supported by the learning outcomes for the course which refer to not only 'academic essay writing' and 'compare and contrast in essay writing' but also to different approaches to knowledge (Course Guide, year one, p.2). However, one dimension to this thesis that I had not previously considered in detail was the central role the seminar reading texts would play in my analytic understandings. On reflection this may have been due to an unwarranted preoccupation with text production which at times I had set apart from reading and knowledge making and in doing so

skewed my understanding of 'what's involved' (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p.9) in academic literacies. To put it another way, during the process of analysis in and on action, and through my own readings and interpretations of the core seminar texts, I was able to distance myself from what I now consider to be familiar, everyday practices and perspectives on academic literacies in a university culture in which I was embedded, following Rampton's (2007) guidance to novice researchers. Seminar texts were significant in their role in the construction of knowledge on the programme as I observed and listened to participants make sense of and reshape the texts discussed. Some members of the group observed made connections between the texts they read and their own experiences of social exclusion and poverty in the UK as well as in distant contexts. These findings tie in with other doctoral research which found that more resilient learners were able to challenge authoritative texts encountered as well as challenge authoritative readings of themselves (Hoult 2009).

In addition, the field trip report for areas studies provides a complex, yet illuminating, example of how life experiences and identity contributed to knowledge making. The field trip report as a genre, although complementing knowledge construction in the field of area studies, seemed to indicate that experiences of taking notes in a London neighbourhood were shaped by participants' identification in addition to dominant practices within the academy. The form the field report took on this occasion was pre-determined by faculty, which is to be expected, yet the research activity itself took place beyond the academy. Perceptions of distance from faculty were coupled with apparent identification with the 'ethnic minorities' under observation, while a sense of belonging to the institution was not referred to. It was also a further example of subtle othering, as the discomfort reported illustrated the complexity of the 'non-traditional' student profile, potential distance from field methods but also how participants felt they were connected to the London environment. It seemed that participants felt their sense of self, as well as what they 'knew', sometimes conflicted with faculty and other participants on the programme with whom they appeared to identify.

Participation in the field research activity was reported as problematic which I suggest reflects the complex and not always comfortable identity work going on as a result of close identification with London's visible ethnic minorities. Knowledge making practices which appear to work against black students specifically have been referred to as 'epistemological racism' (Cooper and Morrell 2013, p.180). The term has been theorised as a tacit and unintentional form of discrimination where knowledge about researching the world is restricted and thus works against minority or non-traditional participants in HE. This interpretation also resonates with some of the experiences of participants who, I suggest, may have seen themselves as 'culturally black' (Sutcliffe 1989), encompassing visible markers of difference as well as culture and identity; thus contributing towards a more nuanced understanding of the student experience in culturally diverse settings. Although some research

practices may work against black students, with regard to this study, this perspective is somewhat misleading as some participants saw their diasporic identities as a distinct advantage. For instance, some participants reported there were benefits of identifying and living among the less privileged, which they felt enhanced their ability to relate to the curriculum topics such as migration, social exclusion and social policy. It would seem that cultural and ethnic identification can benefit, as well as potentially hinder, disciplinary understandings and dominant epistemologies. It is for this reason that I argue not only do identities and life experiences intersect with the curriculum being studied quite strongly, but that there is also evidence for a reciprocal link between them.

6.5 My thinking on identity and diasporic connections

6.5.1 Poststructural identities

There seems to be evidence for powerful institutional discourses which position students in less favourable ways, but also a complex interaction between the two, supporting poststructural notions of identity (Harris and Rampton 2003) and the complexity of context. I have illustrated how participants' sense of identity was characterised by a complex and messy process rather than an end state as it was constructing and constructed with the help of identification with local contexts and more distant contexts and communities outside the UK. Furthermore, I have shown that participant identities were subtle and complex and continually resisted easy categorisation. For example, Mr N identified as British and at the same moment identified with asylum seekers, while appearing to position European migrant workers as the Other. These multiple and unstable identity categories proved salient to my findings but also relevant to other work in applied linguistics which sees identity as a continual state of flux, according to the social and cultural contexts they inhabit (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Blommaert 2010; Cameron and Block, 2002; Gee 2000b; Harris and Rampton 2003; Omoniyi and White 2006). Thus, this thesis provides support for the view that in a globalised, interconnected and rapidly changing world, the notion of a unified and stable, core identity cannot be sustained.

6.5.2 African identification

Throughout this thesis one reoccurring theme was the importance of African identification for the group of participants. I have already stated that the academic study of politics, and one written assignment in particular, was reported as challenging at the start of they year as it was constructed as a threat through lack of exposure to 'local' British-based political activity. In contrast, a number of participants reported some affiliation with the study of poverty and development as a result of a variety of life experiences and connections with Africa they could relate to. I remain mindful that reference to a group as 'African' provides the scope to reduce the potential of its individual members

to one shared essential characteristic, despite their diverse social backgrounds, religions, nation states, linguistic repertoire and life histories. However, what emerged from observing and talking to participants was the voluntary foregrounding of African identification in a post-colonial environment. This emphasis struck me as a potentially important part of the group's shared history, identities and experiences. Offering further support for poststructuralist and postmodern thinking on identity, I interpret African identification to mean multiple and unfinished ways of representing one's own identities. It also conveys a sense of 'group' among members as well as to those outside the group, and as such it is more than a physical space. Its complexity is characterized by Zeleza (2009):

... Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries - geographical, historical, and cultural - have shifted according to prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power... (Zeleza 2009, pp.33-34).

Zeleza's point seems to be that, even though identities '... undergo constant transformation' (Hall 1990, p.225), they come from somewhere and, I argue that, that somewhere was important for participants.

I do not mean to suggest at any point that participants deployed the term to reflect their ethnic identity as fixed, instead there was a sense that participants aligned themselves with members of the group through the use of 'African' or 'Africa' in doing so constructing and reshaping identities of importance to them. As a result, some participants encountered disciplinary texts which challenged what they knew as well as their sense of who they were. For this reason, although academic knowledge is created within the academy, I suggest for this thesis it is also constructed with the help of identities and social identification which lie elsewhere, often outside the UK. Thus, the thesis offers further evidence for poststructuralist conceptions of identities as hybrid and dynamic (Omoniyi 2006). The same can be said of culture and a number of theorists and researchers now see culture as far from homogeneous. Instead it is seen as something negotiated, and contested and constitutive (Atkinson 1999; Block and Cameron 2002; Hall 1990; 1997; Holliday 1999; LeCompte 2002) which I find to be an informative position from which to reflect on the significance of Africa and African identification.

6.5.3 Diasporic connections as a resource for knowledge making

Zeleza (2009) also wrote that diaspora involves a sense of culture, which is often characterised by marginalisation and a sense of belonging to a nation or place that is different to those referred to as the majority, traditional or mainstream. One interesting phenomenon this thesis has uncovered is that a sense of connectedness to Africa commonly associated with poverty, loss and social exclusion, began

to assert itself in complex ways as a potential resource for participants on the programme. For instance, some critiqued Western perspectives on African poverty, while others, quite legitimately, adopted them. It is for this reason that I have argued academic literacy *events* are local but, as with the field report activity, citizenship essays, text-based discussion of poverty and social exclusion, textual meanings often have origins elsewhere which evoke the idea of diaspora. What emerges quite strongly, then, is a reciprocal exchange between participant life experiences intersecting with the curriculum and knowledge making practices. Indeed, a reciprocal exchange is one way of characterising the shifting identities of participants as they move from the university setting to wider context and back again. It is for this reason that I suggest this thesis extends existing poststructural understandings of identity at work which appears to take place between the individual and real and *imagined* group located beyond the physical setting.

Data generated from this thesis shows that this flux, or to-ing and fro-ing, between the local, global and back again can operate both positively and negatively in relation to the negotiation of academic literacies. I argue these processes are heavily contingent on the disciplinary interests of participants, their life experiences and diasporic connections. For instance, in chapter four I noted how a number of participants were aware of their rights as citizens and made pragmatic choices about their own citizenship status at the same time as studying citizenship, while remaining committed to their first nations states. For others, this meant text production was disrupted and formal university study interrupted. Not only did participants appear to be aware of and acknowledge discursively the links between their own identities and experiences, but also they saw them as an advantage over students who may have come from 'traditional' or 'privileged' younger backgrounds. What also became apparent was that lived experiences associated with poverty social exclusion, migration and income inequality were central to knowledge making on the degree programme. Added to this, instability surrounding participants' identities, cultural identification and 'the status of knowledge' (Lyotard 1979, p.3) further evokes postmodern perspectives on a world becoming increasingly complex and superdiverse.

What the data points to is a sense of multiple, dynamic, diasporic identities which intersected with the curriculum as well as the social, cultural and political complexity of Britain resulting in a reciprocal exchange between identity, the curriculum and knowledge making. It is for this reason that sustained critical engagement with the curriculum, faculty and members of the group offered the potential for individuals to challenge some of the less than favourable cultural representations of Africa they encountered. For other members of the group, diasporic connections, lone parenthood and familiarity with culturally and socially diverse London neighbourhoods were drawn on as a *resource* for the

negotiation of academic literacies. This knowledge resource was constructed through the reporting of the benefits of identifying and living among the less privileged and in turn further enhanced the ability to relate to the curriculum topics which emerged as significant for disciplinary understandings. Finally, this reciprocal exchange points to students as active agents in the construction of disciplinary knowledge as well as more individual knowledge making as they made connections between text, diasporic background and identity.

6.6 Revisiting the research questions

I first introduced the two research questions in the introductory chapter (section 1.6), and I now return to them in order to sum up my key findings and direction of this thesis:

Research question 1: How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

Research question 2: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

As already stated in section 1.6, the research questions reflect a desire to explore situated academic literacy practices from a student writer's perspective and, at the same time, they reflect a desire to understand participants' identities and unearth salient issues and events which emerge through the ethnographic research process itself, in doing so moving away from text-based academic literacy research orientations. A further aim was to provide insight into what transformation might look like over time and across contexts, which relates to the constructionist view that meanings are subject to change and interpretation.

The longitudinal element remained important while the significance of negotiation, power and identity increased during the research process. To recap briefly, a change in focus occurred through the ethnographic research process necessitating revisions to the research questions. The questions above foreground the workings of power and identity in the negotiation of academic literacy practices and reflect what the thesis offers in terms of understandings of how dominant conventions and practices support and constrain knowledge making.

Research question 1: How do undergraduate social science students negotiate their relationship with the academy?

From the outset, I stated that one motivating factor for the thesis was to challenge the dominance of an essentialist deficit model of students and their abilities which focuses on gaps and the lacks non-traditional students may possess. This ethnographic study has confirmed that an over-simplistic view of communication in the academy, or students and their abilities, is neither justified, nor sustainable in

a dynamic educational context where widening access, participation and retention issues remain. The non-traditional students I worked with were viewed at times as problematic and assessed in a range of unfavourable ways which meant negotiation of literacy practices, engagement and participation was restricted. Additionally, othering within and beyond the institutional setting affected how participants were able to engage with the academy and their experiences of understanding practices associated with academic text production.

A further key finding was that participant identities did not appear static. In line with recent poststructuralist and postmodern thinking, I found that change could be characterised as being in constant flux, yet remains difficult to pin down. As a consequence of the complexity of context, identity and diasporic connections, I found some evidence for change and shaping which occurred prior to as well as during university enrolment as participants found the texts they encountered had deep resonance with life experiences. At the same time, I gathered little persuasive evidence to indicate that change, reshaping or repositioning occurred as a result of *direct* engagement with texts in the physical setting alone; my interviewing and extended conversations with participants; or as a result of my entering the culture and looking. However, and more in keeping with recent postmodern thinking, change appeared to occur during the process of diasporic identification which, following Benwell and Stokoe (2006), represents the identities of those moving between cultures.

Research question 2: How do power and identity influence the negotiation of academic literacy practices?

The second research question was formulated with an intention to explore ways in which participants negotiated academic literacy practices. Through my teacher-researcher role, as well as a result of extensive readings, I became interested in how power and identity have the potential to shape equality, access and participation in institutions and according to Rex and Green (2010) influence academic and social knowledge construction. The question was also formulated with an intention to explore ways in which participants developed an awareness of academic literacy practices. In other words, I was interested in how power, identity and discourses, plus other contextual factors, potentially shaped access to and participation in institutions; and how varied and complex practices influenced text production and knowledge making.

As already stated, changes to identity seem to be experienced by participants in terms of the flux between identities situated in London and communities real and imagined, as theorised extensively by Anderson (1983). Therefore, with reference to the research questions, it is more difficult to conclude

with certainty the extent to which the shaping or changes to identities which emerged were a result of attempts at negotiating literacy practices whilst at university. Marshall (2009) found that multilingual students were ascribed a 'deficit "remedial ESL" identity' (2009, p.41) which they adopted during the process of becoming a legitimate university student. I found, instead, that rather than taking on new identities along a trajectory of learning, re-shaping seemed to be a product of the complex and messy context students found themselves in. Evidence of reshaping and change remained heavily contingent on life experiences before university and critical experiences and events outside the university setting. There was evidence of participants' critical perspectives with regard to dominant deficit discourses surrounding lone parenthood and access to welfare, for instance. There was also, however, less evidence that these positions were solely or even partially a result of the development of academic discourse or engagement with course related texts. This uncertainty is perhaps one of the challenges of adopting a writer, rather than a text-oriented approach to academic literacies research.

What is clearer is that life experiences before and beyond the university setting revealed significant if incomplete changes. Returning to the notion of a reciprocal exchange, there was a sense that change and reshaping remained 'work in progress' through engagement with the bureaucratic and legal changes to identity as a consequence of the asylum process, as much as through engagement with the applied social science curriculum and academic discourse practices. Thus, rather than changes to identity during my time in the field, which in a sense is what I anticipated, this analysis reflects significant changes to identity which occurred *before*, during and *beyond* the research setting.

6.7 Chapter summary

The successful negotiation of the challenges of academic literacy practices appeared to be particularly difficult for some participants. Some of the challenges which emerged stemmed from identities being ascribed by others which I found were not always fully recognised or welcomed; such as, being 'late', 'a kid' or someone with poor English. In addition, I suggest tensions between dominant texts types, not only highlighted confusion and inconsistencies over knowledge making and dominant genres, but also influenced the nature of student writing in terms of what participants were expected to do remained unclear.

I also found evidence of critical social practices, such as the every day practice of non-attendance which influenced student engagement as well as the negotiation of academic literacies, in ways I had not previously anticipated. This last point resonates with Collin and Blot (2003) who suggests literacy can be extended to areas which have little or no connection to text. For these students, it seems that

expressions of social identity and geopolitical identification were constructed through and constructed through their relationship with disciplinary content, but also through an often contentious relationship with academic writing and dominant academic genres. Rather than revealing a great deal about the processes and practices of students' own text production, this thesis has revealed something of the power involved in social practices and institutional relations. The thesis also highlights the significance of diasporic connections and identities for more individual knowledge making and disciplinary knowledge construction.

The complexity of background among London's visible minorities was also apparent. I found that participants' diasporic identities interacted with the curriculum and academic tasks in complex ways. For instance, there seemed to be evidence for a reciprocal exchange between reading and talking about texts, on the one hand, and background and life experiences, on the other. This interdependent relationship contributes towards disciplinary understandings and, significantly, what aspects of participants' own life histories were utilised as resources for their academic literacy development. I have argued that life experiences and the ways in which some of the non-traditional undergraduates 'know' and see the world is viewed not only as a leverage for knowledge making but an advantage over younger, less experienced students. There is also some evidence to suggest that life experiences contributed positively to the development of knowledge making as well as having a negative effect on text production. Thus, while the group of students I worked with were assessed in a number of unfavourable ways, they displayed a range of resources for knowledge making stemming from a reciprocal exchange between diasporic identities and the applied social science curriculum.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I discussed my research findings with emphasis on theoretical constructs such as othering, knowledge making, diaspora and identity as well as poststructural and postmodern views of the social world in an attempt to unearth the complexity of context and insider perspectives. In contrast, this chapter discusses some of the main implications of my research findings for practice and reflects on my approach to the research methodology (7.3). This is followed by a concluding comments section (7.4).

7.2 Implications of research findings

The primary aim of this thesis was to foreground the experiences of a small group of non-traditional students and to explore changes to identity as they negotiate academic literacy practices. My intention was not to make explicit recommendation for academic practice, EAP or writing instruction.

However, according to Burr (1995, p.162):

The goal [of research] becomes a pragmatic and political one, a search not for truth but for any usefulness that the researcher's "reading" of a phenomenon might have in bringing about change for those who need it.

Burr's comments point to the potential usefulness of research findings for change, and as a result I have made the following recommendations based on my ethnographic experiences.

7.2.1 There is a need to challenge deficit discourses and othering experienced

I have argued that diversity and difference should be viewed as a resource rather than in deficit terms. With regard to subtle and complex forms of othering and participants' desire for dialogue in particular, I have argued that there is a need for greater responsiveness. This might include responding to the needs of students who enter HE with a varied linguistic, cultural and educational identities and constantly evolving literacies, more sensitively than this thesis has indicated may sometimes take place.

Discourses surrounding under represented groups of students in the academy have a tendency to construct students in terms of a lack of preparedness for university and gaps in expectations between faculty and newcomers. Scepticism towards students' abilities and willingness to adapt to university life and faculty expectations needs to be challenged and it is important that universities are not let off

the hook in terms of where the burden of responsibility lies. Instead, complexity and difference can be looked upon as a resource, thus suspending disbelief in the abilities of the Other. One way of achieving this would be to acknowledge more openly that despite, or perhaps because of ever increasing diversity, neo-racism and old racism do exist (Aykaç 2008; Delanty et al, 2008); and what some of the effects of direct and indirect discrimination might look like in terms of engagement, participation and retention for black students. Further, with reference to utilising the resources students bring to the academy, a further means of challenging deficit discourses would be to recognise what undergraduates know and the potential contribution to the academy they make.

7.2.2 Problematising identity categories

I was struck by the range of social classes and diasporic backgrounds participants reported. Some identified as middle class while others identified as working class. For others, there were references to social background as less than privileged, at the same time as identifying as middle class. As a result, the complexity and range of experiences masked by the label 'non-traditional' could be given greater institutional exposure. The rich insider perspectives exposed in this study suggest that the discourses associated with being mature, black and working class are only partially helpful in terms of how we attend to the needs of a diverse student body. As Read et al. (2003, p.262) point out: 'not all mature students are working class, nor are all black students working class'. The quote further signals the complexity of experience and knowledge is masked by the term 'non-traditional'. One implication of findings is that identity categories in common use in HE discourses ought to be problematised and not taken for granted.

A number of writers have previously problematised identity categories (Block 2010; Brandt and Clinton 2002; Harris and Thorp 1999; Miles et al., 2013; Thesen and van Pletzen 2006). For instance, Thesen (1997) found gaps between conventional categories and those students used to describe their own identities, arguing that developing identity categories needed to be a 'joint process with students. I could have referred to participants as 'novice writers' 'migrants' or 'social scientists' but these terms were not volunteered, while, as already noted, 'African' and affiliations with 'Africa' through the process of diasporic identification were used on a number of occasions by a number of different participants. While I argue an 'objective' approach is not possible, I also wanted to avoid my own pre-judgments of what students might be like; in other words, to avoid essentialising and stereotyping. Students from a range of cultural linguistic and social and backgrounds deserve to be treated with respect and one way of respecting difference is to unpack essential labels ascribed to others, but also to involve students in developing more emically-driven identity categories for public or institutional use. Additionally, according to Brandt and Clinton (2002), dichotomous labelling, even though the

practice has moved away from the literate-non-literate divide, continues to influence the ways in which literacy is thought about and talked about. It seems to me that we need to problematise the identity categories used in universities, the effect they may have on student engagement as well as academic literacies development.

7.2.3 Students need more curriculum space to contribute

Van Pletzen (2006) argued for the importance of a curriculum space in which students can contribute prior knowledge. This study has shown that diasporic connections and strong identification with life beyond the more immediate university context remained significant for participants. One way to promote a perceived safe place to contribute might be to draw on life experiences, identities and linguistic repertoire more systematically in assessment practices, and in doing so acknowledging the value and potential contribution of a post-colonial student body. For instance, writers could be encouraged to include reflection on, not only what was learnt over an academic year, but also how life experiences and identities impacted on this, drawing on, for example, ‘Africa-centred knowledges’ (see Cooper and Morrell 2014), in doing so referencing the priorities of the group I worked with. An alternative learning outcome for the course might require students to reflect on how identities and prior experiences influence collaborative learning or oral presenting more explicitly; that is, in addition to focussed reflection on presentation skills and compare and contrast essays (see Course Guide, p.3). This would seem appropriate for the programme and the assessment structure. It is possible that an approach of this kind, implemented sensitively with genre-specific guidelines and assessment criteria, might also go some way to challenging the decontextualised views of literacy which Street (1984; 1999) has argued can be viewed as problematic rather than as a resource. This approach might also go some way to shifting perspectives, attitudes and behaviour, however small the change. Indeed, some students may welcome more space to contribute and challenge at an epistemological level particularly if they recognise that personal and past experiences are valorised and have the potential contribute to learning.

Insider knowledge gained from this emically driven ethnographic exploration in itself will not prevent the challenges of negotiating a new academic culture or cultures, disciplinary differences or ways of knowing. Yet, universities could respond in future by attempting to know the student body and where they have come from the outset, even though at times this may be unsettling. Significantly, participation has to mean more than physical access and attendance and must include possibilities for productive dialogue with faculty for all students. Approaches of this kind which offer more visible and sustained attempts at programme and at the institutional level may influence engagement positively.

7.2.4 Academic writing provision needs to reflect the complexity of the institution it serves

I introduced this thesis by explaining that I chose to observe students in ‘mainstream’ degree lectures and seminars rather than other forms of academic support classes and seminars. This approach to the research strategy was intended to help me to understand the student experience better, but also to understand what the implications for academic literacies might be. I agree with White and Lowenthal (2011) who argue that the importance of academic literacies at university is sometimes overlooked as a core component for full participation. I would like to return to the issue of how best to address academic literacies development in the academy, and what this provision might mean for the many students with diverse diasporic connections.

One solution towards the challenges of text production would be to insist that ‘non-traditional’ students seek help from language support units and academic writing centres as *individuals* with responsibility for all kinds of academic text production and learning problems located within the individual. However, I remain uncomfortable with this as a monolithic intervention at an institutional level as it can feed into deficit discourses of the ‘non-western’, ‘non traditional’ other while institutional practices remain untouched. Indeed, there may be the perception that while the student population is dynamic and increasingly diverse, the academy has remained static. According to Soliday (2002), this feeds into the view that it is the students alone, with their varying language and literacy needs, who have changed. Yet, academic communities of practice are no more fixed or homogeneous than any other. It is for this reason I argue a mandatory, separatist approach to reading and writing at university for students, post-enrolment, perpetuates deficit discourses surrounding students and their abilities.

However, rather than individual or institutional responsibilities being mutually exclusive, I would advocate a shared responsibility for developing academically literate practices. One way to achieve this might be to embed the development of reading and writing practices within specific degree programmes (Bernaschina and Smith, 2012; Lazar and Ellis 2010), supported by more traditional forms of generic academic language and writing support. In this way, responsibility for student literacies is shared: firstly, between programmes with specialist knowledge of discipline-specific epistemologies and genres; secondly, between English language and writing development units with specialist knowledge underpinned by applied linguistics and EFL/EAP pedagogies; and, thirdly, with individuals negotiating and exploring the sometimes unsaid literacy practices they encounter. In this way, although writing and language development is likely to remain a site of struggle for most individuals, an increase in visible, shared responsibility for academic text production may reduce feelings of stigmatisation associated with the so called remediation work of language support units.

Finally, a more discipline and contextually sensitive approach has the potential to create opportunities and discursive spaces within the university curriculum in order for a range of students' experiences to be valorised through writing and assessment practices.

7.2.5 Faculty awareness raising and continued professional development

My recommendations have clear implications for staff development. I wrote at the start of this thesis that it was important for me as a lecturer in EAP to better understand the influence of the linguistic, cultural and social diversity of students accessing and participating in the university and what this diversity might mean for the negotiation of academic literacies. Similar recommendations can be made to the majority of university teachers, even though their application may be disruptive for everyday teaching and research. The final implication section from this study addresses the need to re-examine university teacher development along side individual literacy development.

7.2.6 Variation in linguistic repertoires can be better understood

I have already stated that recognising the significance of diasporic background and experience is one way to understanding the complexity of students in urban universities like Northcentral.

Reaser and Adger (2010) highlight the importance of sociolinguistic knowledge, and its relationship with wider contexts for teacher preparation and curriculum courses. It is important that the complex linguistic repertoires of a diverse range of students are better understood in order that feedback practices on written work become as responsive as possible. Related to this, I see sociolinguistic awareness as important for understanding something of the contexts from which students have come. I also see it as significant for the ways in which linguistic repertoire may impact on academic text production. Here I include less privileged 'native' varieties of English, as well as more and less privileged non-native varieties. Faculty involved in making judgments over students' text production may respond more appropriately and more frequently with sensitive awareness raising and training on student *linguistic* diversity. This might include some awareness raising of the potential influences of postcolonial varieties of English in relation to university assessment practices as well the impact of language planning and policy on individual linguistic repertoires. Vera's childhood education and use of pidgin as well as Mona's complex family history and linguistic arrangements are two useful cases in point.

7.2.7 Awareness of new and hybrid genres of writing

My research findings also suggest that even though faculty may have considerable awareness in terms of their disciplinary specialisms and associated written genres, reflective forms of writing may not have a strong tradition across all academic fields. As stated previously, Lazar and Ellis (2010) highlight that newly emerging hybrid genres can place additional demands on lecturers. The sharing and discussion of different genres, and I would add their relationship with knowledge making, could be a useful starting point. Stierer's (2000) meta-analysis of genres is a relevant resource in this regard. Knowledge of dominant genres and models of writing could be shared among, for instance, Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education educators in addition to applied linguistics researchers and writing practitioners. At the same time, there is a need to emphasise that writing assessment practices, the genres and dominant models of writing have never been static. Research in this area could be used to inform pedagogic decision-making as well as text-based pedagogy and research.

7.3 Reflections on my approach to the research methodology

At various points throughout this thesis I have offered commentary on the research strategy (see sections 2.9.1 and 3.5) and the importance of ethical and empowering research (see section 3.8). The aim of this penultimate section is to reflect on the ethnographic methodology adopted and the extent and ways in which it was successful and limiting with regard to my research aims of exploring student experiences of university study and the negotiation of academic literacy practices. I also comment on future research directions which may complement and build on the contribution to knowledge this thesis has made.

7.3.1 Influences of my teacher researcher role

One aim of this ethnographic research project was to give a voice to non-traditional undergraduates who would otherwise have had little chance of expressing their own life histories, identities and experiences of academic literacies whilst at university. The rich nature of the data emerging from class observation and interview, the two main data collection tools, I suggest illustrates a high degree of openness, trust and disclosure from key participants during my time in the field. In this regard my claims of engaging in an empowering research project, as advocated by Cameron et al, (1992), during which I attempted to maintain analytical distance whilst engaging with participants, has been strengthened as the majority volunteered a greater volume of information and more significant information than I had anticipated. I also acknowledge that as teacher-researcher I was in a position of relative power within the setting both in relation to participants and the direction of the research strategy. Nevertheless, as I drew on Cameron et al.'s (1992) empowering research model quite

heavily in the construction of the research strategy, one useful point of reflection is to what extent this was achieved.

As previously noted, I initially considered the lack of student texts presented for discussion to be problematic for this thesis and somehow 'caused' by my inexperience. As a consequence, I reflected on the fact that there was significant disclosure on the processes and practices of academic writing, as well as other professional and personal issues, which contrasted with the limited instances of student writing volunteered for research purposes. These tensions in the data collection strategy raised questions about my teacher-researcher role and the sometimes contradictory ways in which I was viewed by others. I was treated as a member of the group during observation as I was given handouts, included in classroom humour and used as a sounding board: but there were restrictions. Writing is critical for identity construction (Ivanič 1998), and I argue that there was a great deal at stake for participants. This may explain why, although I was trusted with personal and indeed powerful experiences of discrimination and asylum, the actual texts accompanying the talk recorded during interview were not forthcoming, despite my sustained efforts.

One approach to collecting student writing I adopted was to work intensively with one or two key participants, such as Vera and Mary, in the hope that texts would be volunteered or emerge naturally during the cyclical interview process. There is some evidence to support my failed endeavours, reported earlier in section 3.7, such as Mary's reluctance to show her work publicly (Mary, narrative summary 20/01/2009) plus additional occasions where participants agreed to send work for review which, unfortunately, was not forthcoming (Field note entry, 10/11/2009). As I became increasingly aware that this element of the data collection strategy was not developing in ways I had anticipated, the approach I employed later on in the academic year was to make more direct requests for student writing as I constructed research tutorials: 'Please bring two copies of your draft along.' (Fieldnote entry 3/03/2009). I was aware that '... the group have a number of imminent deadlines looming and this may be my final opportunity to gather data of this kind' (Fieldnote entry 3/03/2009).

I now accept it may have been difficult for participants to show their writing to someone they saw as an English or academic writing specialist. Reticence of this kind was not something I had anticipated while devising the research strategy and it seems to illustrate one way in which my professional role, coupled with my assumptions about sharing drafts, unwittingly affected the scope and shape of data collection. I return to the issue of the lack of data from the talk around text interviews in section 7.3.3. In the meantime, I suggest the reservation I detected on more than one occasion shows how power shifted away from me as teacher-researcher towards participants in the Foucauldian sense. Ashwin (2009) wrote that it is important to think about how these unexpected and unpredictable processes

reflect on research outcomes. On reflection I conclude these tendencies influenced the nature and direction of the thesis quite significantly.

7.3.2 The interconnectedness of the data collection methods

As previously noted (section 3.6), the overarching methodological approach provided a sense of interconnectedness stemming from the overlapping and longitudinal data collection methods implemented across various sites. Perhaps unsurprisingly, data gathering and analysis was both complex and time consuming, and as a consequence, I acknowledge the research process itself may have been shorter had I restricted opportunity and scope for data collection across the research sites and data sources. At the same time, I argue quite strenuously that the ethnographic research strategy I developed was successful as the data and related research themes were rich. Data chapter four's 'An ascribed "late" identity and the impact of untapped resources' (4.3.2), is an effective illustrative example in this regard.

Class observations helped me to foreground particular curriculum themes, power relations and social practices impacting on the negotiation of academic literacies. The class observation notes and fieldnotes created assisted systematic cross-referencing and thematic development across and between participants, across classes as well as across time significantly. I also noticed tensions between the curriculum, assessments, reported life experiences, and participants' knowledge-making practices. As a result, I was much better positioned to develop an insider perspective than had I not observed and interviewed participants in the setting. I was also able to note interaction, attempts at negotiation, and importantly unsuccessful negotiation, of for instance the PDP writing assessment and seminar presentations groups that I would not have been aware of had I only interviewed or carried out critical reading of course-related documentation. At this stage in the thesis it may seem an obvious point to note that the key participants interviewed were also members of the classes observed. At the same time such overlap illustrates how the mixed methods approach adopted provided the opportunity for data to be collected which shed light on multiple perspectives on participants as well as providing opportunity for cross-referencing.

The interview strategy contributed to more informed understanding of what I have argued is a dynamic interface between the individual, the group of undergraduates, their diasporic connections and applied social science disciplinary knowledge. What was often volunteered during interview helped me to gain a sense of the identities of participants being observed as well as helped me to see the class proceedings more lucidly, an example of which is Mona's silences, critically discussed in section 4.4.3. A further dimension to the research strategy which I felt contributed significantly

towards my understanding of identity and power influencing academic literacy and other social practices, was that of the narrative summaries co-constructed with participants who were amenable to the process (see section 3.6.4.2). Reference to Mustapha's (narrative summary 09/12/2008) and Mona's (narrative summary 19/11/2008) upbringing and their respective parents' embassy work and travel *within* Africa as well as *to* Europe reminded me of the diversity of diasporic backgrounds within the group. These references to participant background and sense of who they were challenged my own preconceptions and judgements over references in literature reviewed to, for instance, the *working class* backgrounds of non-traditional diverse learners in some of the literature reviewed, see Bowls (2003), for example.

I must also acknowledge that, perhaps inevitably, not all narratives were validated and my challenges with this part of the research strategy seemed to be encumbered by the practice of non-attendance and sense of disengagement I noted during observation and later developed as a theme in section 4.4. That said, ten out of eleven key participants returned on more than one occasion and three (Mona, Mary, and Vera) on more than two occasions. On reflection, the participant validation process contributed positively to the research outcomes when participants returned for further discussions for research purposes. The cycle of interview and validation provided an opportunity for feedback on the student experience of academic literacy practices, and also provided feedback and reflection on how my teacher-researcher role was perceived from the participants' point of view. Further, what I saw initially as a threat to the data collection strategy, that is the lack of student writing, became a useful means of exploring concerns about academic literacies and text production in particular. In the words of Miles et al. (2013, p.307): 'The more emic the study, the more useful early feedback is likely to be'. I do not wish to claim that the participants had full or equal ownership over the narratives constructed, yet I do wish to assert that the process of gaining agreement provided alternative perspectives on what had been said during interview and observation in addition to what I had noted. I found that the validation and co-creation of the narrative summaries helped me to construct an alternative image of the multilingual, non-traditional undergraduate and the resources they possess.

Institutional documentation in the form of course guides became more significant for my own, analysis and knowledge making than I had anticipated which illustrates the benefits of an approach which purposefully adopted a relatively low amount of control. My critical readings of a variety of course-related texts, including course guides and assessment briefs, remained secondary to the observations and interviews. Even so they still helped me to make sense of tacit institutional practices, hybrid genres of academic writing and aspects of the student experience reported as significant in ways I had not anticipated. Notable examples are tensions between the formative and summative function of written coursework assessments and, in stark contrast, first hand experiences of homelessness. One additional form of text which became the focal point of my analysis was the

weekly seminar readings. Two examples which stand out are reading and knowledge making around Sinclair's (1985) *The Jungle* and Reich's thesis on migration and social exclusion which fed into my thinking around notions of reciprocal exchange between diaspora, identity and knowledge making. Looking back, my critical readings of the seminar texts represents one highly tangible way in which I became embedded within the research setting, not only physically as I observed seminars and classes, but also epistemologically as I engaged with some of the same texts on social exclusion as the participants I observed. This sense of shared experience within the group I assisted my own knowledge making for this thesis.

So far, this review section has demonstrated how the overlapping data collection methods created opportunity for an ethical research strategy which provided scope for understanding the experiences of participants, and how, during my time in the field, they attempted to negotiate academic literacy practices. Despite the positive tone of these reflections and my acknowledgement of the usefulness of a range of methods and a range of texts which fed productively into the analytical process, one aspect of the methodology relating specifically to the talk around text interview strategy (section 3.6.4) remained underdeveloped. I attempt to fill the gap in terms of possible future research next.

7.3.3 Plugging the gaps: the need for future research

In the introductory chapter I explained that this thesis was intentionally oriented towards an exploration of undergraduate experiences of university study (section 1.7) in order to build on writer-oriented academic literacies research (Lillis 2008; 2009). I found that one strength of the methodological approach was the unearthing of emic perspectives which developed my thinking around identity, diaspora, knowledge making and the student experience quite significantly. After further reflection I acknowledge that a thesis which claims to approach literacies from a critical social practices point of view (see section 2.8), emphasising as I have done behaviours shaped by social situations and wider cultural contexts, would be strengthened through closer analytic attention to text production. An additional focus on the texts produced by undergraduates may help to reduce the distance between the academic texts produced, the context of writing and, for this thesis, the co-constructed narrative summaries. An approach of this kind would go some way to acknowledge, if not fully satisfy, one of the challenges of ethnographic approaches to literacies research. A challenge, according to Blommaert (2007), is that research of this kind often takes into account broader contexts, yet fails to return to the more local. This thesis has shed light on a range of social practices *influencing* text production, yet falls short of increasing understandings of '... regularly occurring ways of doing things with texts' (1995, p.21) specifically. Further exploration of the practices of knowledge making, text construction and the values attached to them, through a more detailed exploration of student text production, could contribute to an understanding of non-traditional

students' negotiation of academic literacy practices. An approach to research which considers both student text and context might mean that the negotiation of academic literacies within situated academic contexts can be evidenced even more persuasively.

An additional direction for research which builds on my findings and, at the same time, contributes to how academic literacies might be understood could interrogate participants as knowers as well as writers. Future research which utilises talk around institutional texts, such as 'the PDP' with specific reference to this thesis, in addition to other ethnographic methods might provide alternative perspectives on the processes and practices involved in knowledge making more directly. I maintain that research in this vein may have the potential to draw together what goes on at the intersection between power, identity, knowledge making *and* writing. Cooper and Thesen (2014, p.178) state that 'writing is essential to the making of new knowledge'. Future research might meld themes from the current thesis while complementing ethnographic approaches to academic literacies in order to constructively and productively articulate the academic resources participants possess.

My final point moves away from ethnographic literacies research specifically at the same time as referencing my own research conclusions outlined in chapter six. Fricker's (2007; 2012) ideas around silence and institutional prejudice would be a useful resource to enhance understandings of individuals who seemingly possess a 'credibility deficit' (2007, p.20), echoing the classroom experiences of several participants in this study. I would, therefore, like to engage in future research which builds on the traditions of academic literacies research in the UK, South Africa and elsewhere, whilst remaining mindful of the key findings of this thesis. However, what I suggest is needed most of all is research which continues to challenge deficit and essentialist views of diverse learners and their academic abilities by building on students prior knowledge and 'ways of knowing' in what Zamel and Spack (1998, p.xi) refer to as an 'ongoing process of negotiating academic literacies'.

7.4 Concluding comments

This thesis explores the experiences of university students with African diasporic connections, an under-researched group in UK HE. Building on ethnographic approaches to academic literacies research the thesis has constructed an alternative image of the multilingual, 'non-traditional' undergraduate and the potential resources they have. The thesis is also concerned with the broader and less distinct phenomena of globalisation and migration and their impact on current understandings of contemporary UK HE, who our students are and the influence of power and identity on the negotiation of academic literacies. Findings evoke a reciprocal exchange between disciplinary understandings, knowledge making and poststructural conceptions of identity. More specifically, while the students I worked with were assessed in a number of unfavourable ways, in doing so

foregrounding power relations, they displayed a range of resources for knowledge making stemming from a complex exchange between diasporic identities and the applied social science curriculum.

This thesis offers a complex reading of the student experience and an enhanced understanding of a group of undergraduates as knowledge makers, the rich resources they bring to the academy and how, at times, they are essentialised and positioned by others as they negotiate what is required of them. Contextually sensitive approaches to literacy view the social practices of reading, writing and knowledge making as valuable, but do not as yet have a fully developed tradition of drawing on global, postmodern or diasporic perspectives to enhance empirical understandings. I cannot claim that this thesis is unique in this regard but, at the time of writing, I was not aware of a great deal of research in the field of transformative academic literacies or applied linguistics which attempts to bring these two areas together in this way. The thesis makes a contribution to knowledge and understandings of the scope of academic literacies research, what it means to be a non-traditional learner in HE and critical perspectives in higher education in the contemporary world.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix One

Class One Observation Schedule

Site one							
Year One Observations							
	Ob. 1.1	Ob. 1.2	Ob. 1.3	Ob. 1.4	Ob. 1.5:	Ob. 1.6:	Ob. 1.7
	lecture room	seminar room	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room	seminar room	lecture room
Date:	11/11/08	11/11/08	18/11/08	25/11/08	02/12/08	02/12/08	09/12.08
Duration:	9.30-10.30	10.30-11.30	9.30-11.30	09.30-09.35	0930-1030	11.30-12.30	9.30-11.30
Key participant attendance Pseudonyms	Vera Other names unknown	Hamdi Mary Other names unknown	Mary	Session cancelled	Fred James Mary Mustapha Vera	Vera	Fred James Mary Mustapha Vera
	Ob. 1.8	Ob. 1.9	Ob. 1.10	Ob. 1.11	Ob. 1.12	Ob. 1.13	Ob. 1.14
	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room	lecture room
Date:	16/12/08	13/01 09	20/01/09	27/01/09	10/02/09	Ob. 13	Ob. 14
Duration:	09.30-11.30	09.30-10.30	10.30-11.30	10.30-11.10	9.30 1030	03/03/09 9.30-10.30 Mary	17/03/09 0930-11.30 Vera Mary Mustapha
Key participant attendance	James Mary Mustapha Nancy	Fred James Mary Mustapha Vera	Fred James Mary Mustapha	James	Fred James Mustapha Vera	Mary	Vera Mary Mustapha

Appendix Two

Sample class observation notes

Class observation one: year one, 11/11/2008

10 students

Pleasant room, ground floor xxx Building.

Chatty, jovial atmosphere among some members before class begins.

Discussions over group presentations for following week. Interaction involving younger members, it would seem 6-8 students.

Lecturer begins. 'I'll explain today, from now on the programme starts to go into a different pattern. Next week we don't have to meet at this time.'

'[Laughter as seminar at 10.30 not 9.30]

'We don't have any more lecturers after (here?) [Unclear]

Question from student who is unsure at this stage 'Oh, why?'

Lecturer 'Well, that's the way it's structured.'

Lecturer goes on to explain university structures and how he and colleagues have added in 2 additional lecturers after Xmas: 'It's not a normal lecture pattern but that's something that's been imposed by management if you like.'

[Separation/dislocation of self from management & university structures partly as he is p/t/.

'Okay...'

[Lecturer prepares AV equipment.]

'We're going to do health inequalities'

Latecomer 9.37am

[Lecture format with ppt overheads. All students facing Lecturer seated at single desks.

'I'm just going to start talking'

[Reflection: perhaps a good point at which to start observing as lecture format changing]

'...how rich counties still engender inequalities... poor people, bluntly, live less long than rich people... I find this staggering'

[Clear assertion of own viewpoint]

Goes on to provide egs from US 'like a bolder'

Lecturer continues to lecture without ppt as had some difficulty getting system up and running. Students have handout. Lecturer talks and they seem to listen

'I've got it on the handout, I may's well read a bit of it now'

Lecturer proceeds to read quote from ppt handout.

9.40am: Latecomer apologies 'sorry'

Now 12/29 students.

9.41am: another latecomer. Door squeaks loudly and intrusively each time it is opened. 'I'd like us in this, and later in the workshop to talk about this'

Reads & quotes definition of health.

Students seem younger and or two of these who were present in the previous week who seemed 21+ do not seem to be present.

Male & 11 females present. [1 Asian; 2 Asian/Arabic; 4 black & others white but difficult to determine as I look around the room].

[Referring to the problem of health inequalities:]

Drags with it like a bolder & Lecturer repeats drags 2-3 times]

I am sitting at back of class. Students can't see me but know I am there as they pas me a handout at the start.

'There's another dimension to all this and you'll get this next term.'

'Some people disagree with Wilkinson, don't think I'm giving you something that is categoric'

9.52am One of male students yawns. Lecturer animated and stimulating & students listen. Little note-taking going on but students clearly interested

...

Lecturer jokes about own smoking habit (in relation to topic of health) and one or 2 students laughs.

You're going to find that's our biggest problem a social scientists' cause effect.

[Burden of equality = subject specific language.

Interaction: 'what's it called?'

St 1 '*Supersize me*'

[That's a strong e.g. of capitalism and health my paraphrase]

M 'you don't fool around with these guys'

St 2: 'head scalp? [Unclear] male laughs

'There's a global war on the drugs by the good old USA'

[Lecturer makes links between capitalism and health]

Lecturer 'there's another area of research which should really scare the pants off everyone'

Lecturer talks about influenza pandemic of 1918.]

[There is also noise at the back of the classroom in corridor & 8 students distracted]

Reading from ppt slide handout 'so why we go on to [unclear] social inequalities and health in a rich society' [reads from ppt slide handout].

Lecturer talks about Acheson report 1980. 'Sorry my grammar's terrible in this handout' as he reads.]

[1-2 students laugh politely and quietly. Lecturer later makes ref to ethnography as methods used for study for research reviewed for seminar presentation.

'Let's look at some figures. We're now looking at the lower box on p 3' 'so you can see from the stats. That people live different lengths'

'...it's quite spectacular'.

[A security /estates man peers into class and looks around.]

Lecturer 'Here's our censor. Do you think he's recording what I say? Is he the one I told to go away?'

[Laughter from maj. of group as 'security' person counts the no. of students]

[Eastern European young white male the only person who glances behind and to the right at me during lecture]

Reflective notes: on the whole Lecturer's talk characterised by content delivery and instructional language, but also some other forms of non-spontaneous talk as Lecturer reads & quotes from handout with lang such as 'and the really do]. Reads & then comments & evaluates - argumentation but intellectual activity not made explicit or linked to expectations of them remains tacit]

to return to proceedings of day: Lecturer continues to make links between poverty and lack of health

[Language of discipline: auspices of US hegemonic power]

for the presentation

Student: 'Could we be excused quickly to do last minute preparation for the presentation?'

Lecturer: No. [firmly] because we have plenty of time'

Next as M struggles with technology 3-5 students mainly female, mainly black. Spreads to a quiet discussion of entire right side of class. Friendly, supportive atmosphere.

Some silence & a pause.

10.10am 13 students. Male student looks behind at me again.

10.11am Lecturer continues 'one of your articles the K[unclear] article talks about globalisation article'

[My reflection. It is at this point that I realize I can use empty classroom when there is no seminar discussion. I discuss this with M at the end of session today & he is happy for me to do so. Indeed, at the end of 2nd week as he is wrapping up he says that Victoria needs students to interview but still no no-one comes.

Lecturer repeats thesis of the day: 'The problem is we come from a country which still carries enormous inequalities in health.'

...I recognize that others want get off and get this presentation done he says this as while reading from ppt which summarises Wilkinson (1996).

'You are being given an opportunity to talk about stats and causal relationships in social science... you haven't read the book, I'm not asking you to, it's quite a nice book actually.'

Lecturer's 1st use of rhetorical questioning technique:

'What does he mean about the de-socialising effect of markets?... I'll tell you what it means, but I want you to talk about it in the workshop '

[?? another rhetorical question:

'Don't you believe it. It doesn't work like that...this is what I want you to find out.

[Lecturer reads some more]

'That's important, go and have a look at it' 'there are a lot of qs that presenters are going to have to address.'

'Who's doing the presentation? ... Because you'll need to... [unclear]

Lecturer breaks early for preparation time and break time]

St responds 'It's pretty close, it's nearly done'

10.45am break over. 9 students present but presenters not there.

Lecturer talks to 1-2 students about 'psycho-social. I'll suggest some reading.

St. 'Shall I text them to see where they are?'

Students share mobile phone numbers, some do at least.

Lecturer 'Good idea!' [Laughter]

[I take the op to gather one more form. Other students chat socially and one or two snack]

'...Did anyone else look at the article from today on Nicaraguan families?'

[No-one looked at it seemingly]

'These things are difficult to do and challenging for 1st year students'

[Lecturer justifies why the Wilkinson text]

'I'm getting rather distressed about this situation'

Student 'they haven't answered my text'

Student: 'Can I go to the toilet?'

[laughter]

Lecturer decisively: 'So what we do is start.'

Lecturer asks for title and student reads it out.

955am 4ss preparing for presentation.

[One student recognizes me from w-shop and we exchange smiles, another of the presenters is Vera who I have quite a bit of contact with over the next few weeks also ref to step 1 and step 2 presentation on the course. I am unclear of meaning or significance but students all seem to be clear].

'I'm going to get off and so you the presentations. OK are you ready?'

A mature student begins to talk and raises some questions, mainly reading rapidly from screen.

St 2 has a slower pace.

St 1 interrupts in order to correct sequencing'.

[Reflection: during the break, Lecturer comes to me at the back of the class to offer me a handout. I explain I already have one (offered to me by one of the students). He then continues to explain the format of session. I volunteer a positive & truthful comment about class atmosphere. I do this at this

point to counter his apology & poss. discomfort detected over the erratic nature of course delivery. I also ask whether my presence might be off-putting for presenters. He agrees it might and I/he [?] agree to ask them about my presence. This does not happen on this occasion as the presenters return late and due to my observe role I feel unwilling /unable to interrupt the class in any way. At this point I feel slightly uncomfortable about note-taking as they can see me and I am aware of their nervousness.]

[As they read from screen Lecturer also notetakes. ¾ L2 speakers, one with phonological issues, Vera.

Last student has difficulty reading from screen and stumbles over some words and misreads a few others too. I see one student shake her head. Others appear to be listening but some fidgeting going on too.

Overall students share reading of presentation delivery.]

Lecturer ‘that’s a very comprehensive response to the q. I hope everyone got a lot out of it and key points were made very well.’

‘A step 2 presentation allows you to take this presentation and expand out [i.e., with use of other sources] Lecturer also compliments use of the visual.

Lecturer is very positive:’ you’re well on the way. This is a platform for you to build on.

‘You’ve accomplished development in this one, which is a good start’

Reflection: what is my role if I feel students may be dyslexic. Pronunciation & phonological issues affect understandability in my view. Presentation descriptive, and not analytic yet.

‘Oh, one thing you need to [unclear] and reduce the amount of text’

[Issue of ac discourse and subject –specificity; some students reading words possibly not understood or felt comfortable with although stumbling could be lack of rehearsal and /or exposure.]

[Lecturer provides advice on optimum amount of text’]

‘Any other feedback? Come on. I would appreciate it, if you engage.’

Students

A positive comment is made and students engage and discuss them e.g., ‘I always like the fact that

1-2 students nodding and appear visibly interested

M: ‘I think what we should do now is try and take this discussion a bit further ...,’

[Students have to pack up and relocate to a seminar as opposed to lecture room in another building which has been allocated by timetabling centrally.]

[I also notice Block - Ganistan SE15-SE20 graffiti written on many desks]

[We wait outside the new classroom for incumbent class to finish. I take the opp to speak to presenters and a few other to reassure them I do not have to be present if they prefer]

Lecturer ‘We are not getting much support today’ [reference to lack of projector screen]

‘[The seminar begins to discuss to be added from course reader [Rodgers p.396 fig 1 TBA).

There is laughter & hilarity associated with/surrounding one of male students unsure who he is at this stage but late learn it is Eastern European. Same student explains graph and others interject.

I was unable to hear exact words exactly but Lecturer comments on this students name and how unpronounceable it is. Lecturer makes light of the fact that he has not attempted to pronounce the man's name and missed it off the list rather than attempt to do so. How does the student feel about this?

Lecturer: 'Where are we?

'Sorry, the triangles are male and the circles are female...'

'This is a standard method to do it' [ref to layout of Rodgers p.396 Figure 1]

Lecturer: 'Oh you need it, oh dear' [a response to students comments] students then explains and describes figures on households groups. There is some discussion but tables are in rows. 2-3 younger females look round at me as I'm sitting in the same position as in the 1st class back row to the right, this time by window.

There seems to be more interaction now. Lecturer asks a range of questions and different students respond with responses from at least ½ class. Some remain silent, however, but a minority. At times there appears to be instances of IRF exchanges in place. E, g., Lecturer: what about gender?

St: response.

Lecturer: extends response from students.

There is also a move from rhetorical to actual questions. Students respond extensively and F either challenges or changes this.

Reflection: how much are non-UK based students with less knowledge disadvantaged? C.f. comments from xxx.

All talk is a bout Rodgers seminar paper which for me is problematic as it is all talk around a text.]

Lecturer 'So, what happened to that household?

[There is some movement on from IRF framework as more than one students respond.

Soundproofing an issue as there is much talk and noise from class in next room, back of class separate by wooded partition only.

An extended response from one student:

Lecturer A: 'This is good, this is really good. Can you hear at the back? I'm teasing out the fact that...'

Isabel substitutes 'more for themselves' Lecturer corrects with ref to the lit and offers 'each to their own'

11.45am discussion now dominated by presentation with one or two others reading and note-taking.

[There is continual ref to step 1 and step 2 presentations]

[Lecturer's eye contact not universal as whole class addressed]

[Discussion of sexual orientation, race and prostitution. One or 2 students look shocked/surprised/disgusted. While one or two others laugh and giggle a bit. I catch another students eye and she smiles.]

'And another thing that caught my attention was that ...' [Extended response from one]

[There is note-taking, nodding. Listening, contributing verbally]

'Has anyone in the class read it? Read it. Read these things! [Jokingly]

Lecturer: 'Can I encourage everyone to be a browser? In this thing [course reader] is a collection of ... think this is a theme... there are some themes.... It's about methods...'

Lecturer returns to compliments about presentations. Lecturer: 'Next week's group. I recognize that it's challenging ... but I still think there is something you can talk about.'

Lecturer: is it working?'

St' ...like now, I hope you consider that I get very nervous...

Lecturer: The reason you're doing this in your `1st term is that you've got 2 terms to do it. Another question? No, no, a well-balanced thing.... You haven't said anything?'

St: 'I'm observing! [Laughter]

The lesson ends with chatting and lecturer expand explains format for course a third time. Lecturer answers questions from students and others arrange a meeting to study together 'We've decided we did need to come in...'

Lecturer and 3 late arrivals. He comments on the difficulties of getting them into the presentation format and appropriate tasks. He introduces the step 1 and step 2 format for presentations.

Lecturer: 'you haven't got a step 2'

St 'no, we had a step 2 in week 2'

2 more students re-enter the room. 'We've already done this already, sir.' St claims.

At the same time in the room. At the end of lesson 2 students ask about meeting (Hamdi & possibly Mary). I explain I will use the room we're in as the 3hr format has changed.

Once all students leave I have a brief discussion with Lecturer. Discussion with Lecturer about use of 2nd room. H is fine about this and characteristically supportive He also says that they were a good group and how he 'felt proud' of their performance in discussions and lecture, with ref to me observing for 1st time.

Class observation two: year three, 04/11/2008

As I arrive Ena present plus caretaker loading room up with chairs from Quad. I ask them to stop explaining room booked throughout term. They stop.

Two more ss. arrive and Lecturer B.

[09.40am 3 ss present at 9. I enquire over 2 more consent forms]

Lecturer B **'So where is everyone?'** shaking his head.

Ena explains the travel issues and expense many have which may have caused lateness.

Bemi agrees 'People will be late.' [Declarative statement]

Lecturer B: 'So, can you do your project? [Ref to the proceedings for the morning I interpret]

St: 1 I didn't know that?

St 2: What? You want us to talk about... or...our projects?

St: 3: I didn't know that!

St: Oh!

St: What? You want...

[Overlapping talk]

Lecturer B: 'I want to hear how you've constructed your ideas'

[Brief pause, but no responses forthcoming. Lecturer B proceeds to talk about link between poverty, poetry and reports on the papers as there is ref to literature reading relating to social exclusion for course.

No response from students.

Appendix Three

Project Information and sample consent forms

Dear lecturer,

I am conducting a research project for my MPhil/PhD study in applied linguistics which aims to contribute to an understanding of the relationship between language, identity and literacy practices within a university setting.

Following ethnographic principles and approaches to research into literacy, multiple data collection methods will be employed. More specifically, this means that I intend to:

conduct group discussions and individual interviews with participants which will be recorded with permission;

use email correspondence as a means of developing dialogue with participants;

observe selected lectures and seminars after which fieldnotes will be produced.

To this end, I am seeking permission to attend lectures and seminars for courses xxx and xxx during the academic year 2008/9 in order to carry out observations of literacy events. For the purpose of this study literacy events are occasions when a piece of writing is central to social interaction.

Some of the field observations may be used as research data and reproduced in writing at a later stage. However, courses will be referred to as Applied Social Science year one and Applied Social Science year three only and names or any other personal information will not be disclosed. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study which can be identified with specific courses, staff or students will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with permission or as required by law.

If you consent to my attendance in lectures and seminars for xxx and to fieldnotes being taken, please:

Sign the consent slip at the back of this letter

Return the signed consent slip to me in the envelope provided

Keep a copy of this letter.

Best wishes,

Victoria Odeniyi

Consent slip

I understand the nature of the research project outlined above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participation in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed name of course lecturer

Signature of course lecturer

Date

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation.

For more information, please contact me on ext. xxx or v.odeniya@nc.ac.uk

Student letter of invitation and course observation consent forms

Invitation to participate in a research project

Dear student,

I am writing to you to invite you to take part in a research project I am conducting and to ask for permission to attend one of your classes.

Who is carrying out the research?

My name is Victoria Odeniyi and I work for xxx which is part of Learning Resources. I coordinate xxx for Applied Social Science students and work closely with staff and students under-taking the level three xxx course (xxx). For the last ten years, I have worked with many mature students with rich and varied backgrounds in order to develop areas of their academic writing for essays and dissertations. Many of these students enter university with rich life experiences and a range of qualifications, as well as more the more traditional 'A' levels.

Why I am conducting the project

1 - I believe that good writing at university is more than correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. I am, therefore, interested in learning more about language, literacy and communication at university.

2- In addition, I am hoping that the project will contribute to an understanding of what students do to become successful graduates.

3 - I hope that information provided will inform and improve the work xxx provides across the University in future years.

In seeking students to participate, I am contacting those who are:

enrolled on the BA Honours xxx Programme

over 21

are a home student based in the UK.

If you feel you fit these criteria, I would like to invite you to participate in the project. Participation is entirely voluntary.

What's involved?

1 – I would like to observe one of your classes and have written to you separately about this.

2 - I would like to invite you to take part in some group discussions and individual interviews which will be recorded with your permission. These will continue until the end of the academic year next summer.

3 – I would also like to use email to communicate with you and, with your permission, may use some of the messages as research data.

4 - This is also an opportunity for you to meet with other social science students on a regular basis who may share similar interests.

5 – You can talk through experiences with someone who knows xxx Campus and has worked at Xxx University for thirteen years.

Interested?

Please contact me by phone on 0209 111 xxx or 07707 xxx or email: v.odenyi@nc.ac.uk for an informal chat.

Thank you for reading this letter. I am very enthusiastic about the project and hope that you will consider participating. However, you are under no obligation to participate, or indeed respond to the letter.

Best wishes,

xxx course observation consent

Dear student,

I am writing to you to tell you about a research project I am conducting and to ask for permission to attend one of your classes.

Who I am

My name is Victoria Odeniyi and I work for xxx. For the last ten years, I have worked with many students in order to develop areas of their academic writing for essays, dissertations and other assignments. Many of these students have entered university with rich life experiences and a range of qualifications, as well as more traditional 'A' levels.

About the project

I am conducting a research project for my MPhil/PhD studies. The project aims to contribute to an understanding of student experiences at university with a special focus on written and spoken forms of communication.

Why I am conducting the project

- 1 - I believe that good writing at university is more than correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. I am, therefore, interested in learning more about language, literacy and communication at university.
- 2- In addition, I am hoping that the project will contribute to an understanding of what students do to become successful graduates.
- 3 - I hope that information provided will inform and improve the work xxx provides across the University in future years.

What's involved

One important part of the project involves me observing and taking notes in one first year and one second year course. I would like to do this because I am interested in communication in a range of university settings.

Before I can do this, however, I need written permission from all students attending the course. With your permission, I will sit in on course xxx and take notes. The notes will be written up and some of the notes will be used as data for my research project. I will allow any student to see the notes at the end of each session if they wish. If you or anyone else is unhappy with what is written down at any time, I can delete it from my records permanently.

Consent is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw your permission or consent at any time by contacting me. However, by giving permission, the project may help contribute towards knowledge of the student experience at xxx University.

Ways in which findings can be disseminated

Notes will be used as data for my research project. Specific sections of the notes may be quoted and repeated in conference presentations and in research documents.

How I will protect your identity

Your name, student number or any other personal information will never be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used.

Course codes will not be disclosed. Class observations will be referred to by date and as, for example, 'the first year social science course'.

A pseudonym for xxx University will be used in formal documents that are to be read by people outside the university.

If you are happy for me to observe communication patterns in courses xxx, and for some of the information being used in a research project, please:

Sign the consent form at the back of this letter

Return it to me in the envelope provided.

Keep a copy of the form and this letter.

Thank you for reading this letter. I am very enthusiastic about the project and hope that you will give your permission. However, you are under no obligation to do so, or indeed respond to the letter. For more information or an informal chat, please do contact me.

Best wishes,

Consent form

I understand the nature of the course observations outlined above. Any questions I have, have been answered and I agree to course observations taking place.

I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed name _____

Student number _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation.

Victoria.

For more information or an informal chat, please contact me on 0209 111 xxx, 07707 xxx or v.odenyi@nc.ac.uk

Student letter of invitation and parallel session consent forms

Invitation to participate in a research project

Dear student,

I am writing to you to invite you to take part in a research project I am conducting.

2 - I would like to invite you to take part in some group discussions and individual interviews which will be recorded with your permission. These will continue until the end of the academic year next summer.

3 – I would also like to use email to communicate with you and, with your permission, may use some of the messages as research data.

4 - This is also an opportunity for you to meet with other social science students on a regular basis who may share similar interests.

5 – You can talk through experiences with someone who knows xxx Campus and has worked at xxx University for thirteen years.

Interested?

Please contact me by phone on 0209 111 xxx or 07707 xxx or email: v.odeniya@nc.ac.uk for an informal chat.

Thank you for reading this letter. I am very enthusiastic about the project and hope that you will consider participating. However, you are under no obligation to participate, or indeed respond to the letter.

Best wishes,

Consent form for xxx parallel sessions

I understand the nature of the project outlined above and any questions I have, have been answered. I have been given a copy of this form. I am happy to participate in research interviews and group discussions and for some of the information being used in a research project:

Printed name _____

Student number _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Preferred form of contact (e.g. email address or phone number)

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation.

Victoria.

Appendix four

Sample narrative summaries

Narrative summary: 'James' from group two (11/11/2008)

James is studying a BA in International Politics but is unsure of the title of each course. He started in mid-October in learning week 3. He lives with his father but does not talk to him much about unit life. J commutes up to 4 hours each day to come to 'unit' and, as a consequence, it can be difficult for him to arrive on time for a 9.30 lecture. He would have to leave home at around 7.30am to do so. He also works and recruits for the Army Cadet Force. These responsibilities end late. He missed the lecture today for this reason.

J has noticed that the amount of information you have to absorb in lectures is very different to A levels. As the lecturers are constantly talking, there isn't really the time to think about what they are saying and you just have to write it down. At unit he is told new and different stuff. Nevertheless, he feels that the lecturers speak as if reading from a script so that when questions are raised, they are not always able to respond as if they were seeing things from his point of view. At the same time, I do not deny the inevitable issues of power and status and the influence or the creation of texts. There is a sense that the lecturers just want to do what they have to do and get out. During A levels, teachers would help out more – they wanted you to pass and succeed and so if there were any questions or queries they would respond to it straight away, clear it up and then move on. There was more one-to-one tutoring. Despite this, he is learning a lot and is being taught a lot of new skills and from the lectures you can see how knowledgeable the lecturers are about their subject.

J has noticed that the first years seem to have formed smaller groups and he feels that everyone seems segregated. They appear to have developed their own circles, or families, through for example Fresher's week when you don't have to do a lot of work. They formed small groups, which means that he doesn't always get the most out of his learning. As a consequence, you don't always have the opportunity to work to the best of your ability as you're not working together. As a consequence, when J does go to unit it feels like a drag, as he doesn't really know anyone. **He doesn't really enjoy coming to unit apart from the fact that he is doing a degree. At the moment he writes down what he has to in lectures and then leaves as everyone has their own little circles.** So for example if there is an assignment or assessment to write, they will tell each other what they are doing. I try to listen in and I feel a bit 'ugh'. I find it hard to bring myself to talk to them as they have already established themselves. **I feel like an outsider.**

Despite this, he is learning a lot and is being taught a lot of new skills and from the lectures you can see how knowledgeable the lecturers are about their subject.

J missed the lecture today but he met a friend on the bus, which was good. She is in her second year and they talked about how much course work she had in her first year. The friend

also advised him on to start talking to people to prevent him from being left behind and J acknowledges that this is the right thing to.

J feels as though he is behind and although he has not been so explicitly, he also feels as though he doesn't know what is going on as all the other students are talking about coursework and presentations. However, when he does go to lectures, he writes down a lot.

J has noticed the amount of different people around the university - older and young, for example. **He is aware that he is one of the younger ones as when he talks to people and says that he is eighteen they respond that that is pretty young. Most other students he talks to on a random basis are over 20. This makes J feel like a lost kid.** However, at the same time, it makes him feel as if he is in a working professional environment which he contrasts with school. At school it could be quite daunting to be at the top of the school, as there tended to be no-one else to look up to or go to for advice other than those in the same year. Whereas here, everyone is older and has something that they are doing and you can talk to them when he actually gets round to talking to them. It is a large university but there are a lot of activities such as the Students Union and sports. J has not yet participated in these activities but has some leaflets. Finally, J does not feel he has communicated much with other students and lecturers yet and so is unable to comment on the nature of communication, although everyone seems friendly.

Narrative summary, 'Mona' 19/11/2008

[Extracted from group interview]

English was used as the official language when the Socialist government came into power when M was in year one. They changed the language policy from English to Swahili. Mona felt that her parents were okay as the educational system used English and they didn't have any problems.

However, the problem for her came when English stopped being the language of communication. M feels that, as a result, she did not have a good background in English because she used Swahili. M also speaks the language of her parents. Her parents use it and although she understands, she cannot speak it. She is fluent in Swahili. In xxx she uses Swahili rather than English as it is the official language.

M finished her primary and secondary schooling in Tanzania. In 1999 her family came from Tanzania to work in the Embassy here. Even though she was better at writing than speaking, she felt she did not have a good enough background in English and decided to improve her English when she came over. When they left, M decided to stay to study and better her. She thought it would be good idea to start afresh.

M began to look for a job, but the only work she could find was care work. She did not mind as she wanted to remain here and study and eventually go to university. M went to xxx College to study hairdressing and ESOL, level 2. She gained help to do EAP and the tutor suggested she go to university because she was really good. M applied to go to university but Admissions said she couldn't attend and needed an Access course. M was determined and felt that no-one could stop her, but she also felt that the teachers from xxx College did not

help her because they said that she could not do ESOL and then go to university. Next she went to back to xxx College to study but they said that they **could not accept what she had done in xxx** so they suggested she did a pre-Access course instead to see how she got on. This made her feel bad because she had to prove that she was capable and that just because she went to school in xxx did not mean that she did not know anything. She wanted to prove that she could do something so she attended the Pre-access course. She did well and thinks she got level 2. She didn't do an access course because she didn't quite get the grade in sociology. This was because she had not studied it before but M did not feel that this meant she was not good enough for the access course. They wanted her to do a Tec rather than an Access course. M rejected this as she wanted to go to university and so instead she did level 2 and 3 in Care and an A1 Assessors courses and completed the course successfully.

Then she applied for university. M was determined because she knew she had other qualifications and decided she would do what she wanted to do which was to apply so, she applied and got into Northcentral. She got in although she was not sure she knew there was Learning Resources and she could study more easily than back home. By this she meant that there are insufficient books **back home in comparison**. M was determined to do well. Initially, M wanted to do social work rather than social policy but ended up doing social policy as the social work department did not accept her. She finds social policy interesting but is wondering what job she might do.

M has an Assessor's qualification for care work and remembers when she went for an interview at Harrow College. The job was for a NVQ Assessor. There was one other candidate who was a lecturer and M was disappointed as she was greeted by the interviewer with 'So who is the? She realised that she would not get the job and that perhaps the college thought that it was too big a leap even though she would do the job very well. Now, she feels that she is exploited in her workplace as she has qualifications and because of this, they give her extra responsibilities. She works for xxx whenever she can in xxx.

The topics she is studying are interesting, but she feels that she could learn more from the class and did not feel that she can contribute a lot because of the way x is, because of the teaching methods. If she asks a question, x will ask a question back in return when she is looking for an answer. This put her off asking questions in class and is off-putting. She finds out more by herself outside the lecture. For example, M wanted to see him for her dissertation proposal but she thought that there was no point and that she would just try and do it herself and wait until she gets a supervisor who will understand that English is not her first language. M feels that she does not know that much about this country as she just came and that x needs to understand this. M feels that she enjoys xxx's classes more than anyone else. She comes prepared and she knows what she is doing. She finds them really interesting.

M's concern is with Learning Resources as people don't study there and they make a noise. She feels it isn't possible to study there. People talk all the time and continue even when she asks them to stop. If students complain to the library staff they will not help and they ignore them. So, after her class she just goes home and finds somewhere else to study. Another thing she wanted to mention is that the library closes at 10pm which is early compare to other universities such a the University of Hertfordshire which is open 24 hours. She tries to find a quiet time to study, as there is no way she can study during the day.

Another significant thing for M is that she is now able to read the dissertation handbook. It is

now clear to her at what she is doing although before this she did not know. She thinks she will be able to do the dissertation without any problems as long as she has the handbook. Previously, for example, she did not know what to do or how to choose a topic, policy for analysis or her dissertation.

She went to her tutor for the first time who said that she could not do her topic and M decided she would not go and see them again until she found a topic, whatever grade she would get because she did not get support. She did not know how to find a topic, but surprisingly she was able to do this without any help or support and got a 9 for her proposal at the end of her second year, which wasn't too bad.

M was excited when she was told she was to Hendon but she realises it was better when she was at xxx campus. She could get help and support from the lecturers there, whatever time she needed. **Here, she feels socially excluded because she only sees the lecturer when they are in class and that's it. They have locked themselves in their offices and they look at you from afar.** M wonders if it is like this at other universities or whether this is Northcentral university. For example, she really wanted to speak to x and he was walking towards her. She was relieved when she saw him but he just looked at her and turned around and so she wondered how she was going to get hold of him when she needed to speak to him. **She wishes she were at xxx campus.** Things have changed and it is difficult to get help.

M tells her friends and family that it is a disappointing experience and that they should not even bother applying. Her niece was thinking of coming and she advised her to apply to another university. At xxx campus she would have recommended anyone go there. She does know not know where things are, while at xxx campus she knew where everything was located. She used to use a lot of journals when she was at xxx campus but she cannot even locate a dictionary at Hendon.

Narrative summary, 'Mona' from group two (19/11/2009)

M brought an assignment she was working on for discussion because she was struggling to resubmit it. She asked for a little help with it in order to help her understand the question. She originally completed the assignment two months before which was: 'Critically discuss any one recent piece of immigration legislation or policy document highlighting the main measures including the extent to which it represents significant changes in policy.'

M says her feedback was really bad and she is aware that she definitely has to improve. The whole assignment was poorly done. She says that the feedback stated this was because English was not her first language but she feels she had a problem understanding the question and M accepts this may be an issue and why she got poor grades. She said to RS that the problem was not her English as she has been doing other assignments and has been getting good grades. She told her the problem might be that she misunderstood the question.

M feels that she ought to redo the assignment even though the lecturer did not suggest she arrange an appointment to see her. M has not seen the lecturer or tried to arrange an appointment to see her and decided she wanted to try and understand the question first before making an appointment to see her. M now understands the question is asking her to discuss a policy or white paper to highlight the measures the government has taken in tackling immigration control because in the first place policy changed to put measure in place to stop

people coming. M chose to discuss the Secure Borders paper and feels the emphasis is the change of policy between 2002 and 2008 when the govt stated that refugee status should become temporary whereas before people used to gain permanent stay once they gained refugee status. They began to favour British interests.

The basic policy tries to reduce the number of people coming into the UK because they don't need them anymore. For those granted refugee status, they will have to leave when things settle in their country. They used to take people who have skills but now there are tiers and people are graded. If you are from the first tier and qualify here at university, you will be a higher rank, whereas if you are unskilled you will be at the bottom. They need people who will benefit the country as well.

You also have to do tests to get things like citizenship to put people off. The Secure Border Act is significant because it did not allow people to come in any more. The number of people whose application has been accepted has declined.

M reported that she did try hard to pick out the changes she thought might be key issues. There is nothing positive about her essay. She has been told she should attend classes for people for whom English is a second language. 'S' did not offer M an opportunity in order to book an appointment and to sit down and to see where she went wrong like other lecturers. She felt like she was left by herself. M says that she finds it difficult but that she will try and do it. She has joined the class and hopefully she will have something to contribute when she resubmits it. She felt like the bit she missed was the point of view of others but to be given 18 points was unfair as she had tried. M went on to say that she can see that there is a contradiction between the Home Office and the New Labour policy because there is no link or communication and they seem to work quite separately. The change in direction from welcoming people to controlling measures is significant. M has picked this out and the assignment is 1750 words but can be up to 2000. She is also aware RS wants more referencing to support her ideas.

M included the citizenship exam as a change in policy and says that even though she is studying citizenship, she still has to do it if she wants to become a British citizenship to prove that that she is sufficiently integrated. M feels that this is a kind of segregation by keeping children out of mainstream education.

Towards then end of the tutorial, M comments that she thinks she did not understand 'significant changes' which is what she is unclear about. After some discussion, she comments that the Geneva Convention was not used until recently for temporary rather than permanent residence. It has been recently reinstated.

M likes reading but thinks she missed how to read critically. This is what she used to do with Lecturer B: read a complicated text and pick out important points. M asked VO for helpful handouts and ends by saying that she did not expect VO would give her the chance as she is such a busy person. She continues that she thinks VO is a very important person to her and VO is able to connect things which M must have missed in her childhood. M took the opportunity to thank VO and she also remembers when VO said 'It's not too late' when M had already given up on the sessions. This comment remained in her mind which is why she tried to join a least a few sessions which were still running. M is in the library most of the time and is available for future meetings.

Narrative summary: 'Maisha' from group three (01/04/2010)

M did a Diploma in Tourism in xx in a college called xxx and worked in the industry for a while. She first came in 1994 and has stayed in the UK since. She had always wanted to come and see what the UK was like and her grandmother lived here, although she was Kenyan. Her grandfather was British and they have both since passed on. At the time of her visit, her grandmother convinced her to stay and she used to care for her grandmother who had had a stroke. In the process of caring, she began to work for the social sector and the NHS.

For a long time M considered going to uni and doing a social work degree, but then at some point she realised that she did not want to be a social worker. Instead, she wanted to work with deprived people. **M feels it is more or less the same, but feels that she could relate more to Development because she could go out to the Third World and work and give back to society what they have given her.**

Northcentral and xxx have always been close to her home and she had to choose one of the two. At xxx, they don't do Development Studies and so she ended up coming to Northcentral. Northcentral has been a good learning experience being a mature student. Maisha has learnt a lot of things and one thing she has learnt is that she used to assume a lot of things. She now critiques and knows that she has to read a lot of stuff to get the facts right. That's the main thing she has learnt. This has changed her as a person in terms of what comes out of her mouth and how she communicates. She has become a thinker in the sense that she thinks before she talks and has to get her facts right before she starts throwing accusations or before giving ideas. She must have some basis for this.

She has changed in the sense that she reads a lot and has done a lot of research. If there is something she wants to know about, she'll go on the Net and look for books. Often she'll be doing something and then she'll just sit down and write. She does a lot of that. She's the sort of person who will sit down. She is that way inclined. She'll write a prayer or write about how she feels and sometimes how her life is and she is the sort of person who will go back and reflect. Funnily enough, the other day she was going through her stuff and was amazed to discover stuff she wrote in 1994 when she came here. M was amazed just to reflect back and try to remember what was going through her mind and what was happening in her life and what drove her to writing. This is very interesting to look at what she has put away and not gone back to look at for some time. Also, M thinks she has become more inquisitive.

It's also quite challenging writing an essay: **writing is not easy**. She probably writes more about the things she likes and the things she knows about. She has learnt a lot during the three years she has been here. She has learnt a lot at Northcentral. She thinks her personality has changed as before she would just not talk, just argue on the basis of nothing and stick to what she knows. However, now she is more laid back about other people's opinions. She might not agree with them but she lets them speak and explain their point of view while before she would just force what she knew on them and keep forcing and forcing!

M is writing about gender, which is a topic she loves writing about as gender is crucial to the development process. **The ideas are there and she knows what she wants to say but probably what is most challenging is getting her ideas down and coming up with a coherent theme(?), but her ideas are there.** She knows what she is talking about and she knows what she wants to say.

It's amazing as sometimes when she is asleep she is sub-consciously awake and her mind is trying to work. Sometimes she wakes up at three o'clock in the morning and she just gets up and starts doing stuff because her mind won't let her sleep. This has always been the case, but not all the time because when you have an assignment there is a sense of urgency. M feels that she has something inside her telling her that she has to do it. On the other hand, if she is just coming for lectures then she is more relaxed because she doesn't have those assignments to do at that particular time. It's like this when she has an assignment or an exam, which is when these things start working, and she gets ideas and

feels she just has to get up and try to write a passage. That's how she works and after putting everything down and she later returns to it to do the structure, although, with the dissertation, which is 7000 words and she is used to writing 3000 words, the challenge is trying to put her ideas in certain places and makes sense of it all. M thinks she is getting there slowly and she thinks that for her, as the days move on and that is if she does try, things will fall into place but she is not the sort of person for whom, if she started a year earlier, things would be better. At the start she is not challenged and feels the closer you get to the deadline, the more of a challenge it becomes and the more you think. She is not sure but it seems to work that way for her.

She always produces something at the end of the day. It's hard for her to judge her own work and perhaps someone else who has read her work could comment better than her. **So far she has managed to get good grades which is sort of positive feedback on what she has been doing** such as structuring and she has always done well in that area. So maybe it's not such a big problem. Of course, she would like to become a better writer and become more fluent at English which is not her first language. Sometimes she thinks of a word and what she is trying to say and whether what she says will come across in the way that you want and can become a challenge.

M speaks Swahili which is the national language of xxx but M is not sure whether she actually thinks in Swahili as it is not her mother tongue. Swahili was the dominant language in the place where she grew up but M has her mother tongue called Kikuyu, her Mum's language. M did a bit of French in xxx but she cannot remember much of it. She thinks she has 3-4 languages. However, she tries to think in English because she feels that if you are writing in English there is no use thinking in other languages because if you are trying to think in other languages and then translate it directly it doesn't make sense. M sees this in people from her country and sometimes she reads things they have written and can see they have made the mistake of translating things directly. An example of this would have to be a bit complex, with a bit of a twist in it, because if you just say 'I'm going home' it would be the same. She cannot think of an example, but it happens quite a lot.

M is taking xxx, which is the other xxx course, the xxx course. Her courses are very much Area Studies and for her dissertation she is focussing on gender - very much so. In her first year, she did xxx and there were different courses in her first year. They were all different. She can remember that she used to reference in the same way but it didn't work for some courses and in the process she learnt what was expected of her.

She finds it easier to put her thoughts and her references together and then put the reference at the bottom. She finds it challenging to say: 'so and so does that'. She tends not to do that and just puts them together at the end. For Development she has to reference more often between them, but with xxx you could put the reference at the end of the paragraph. The words are different **for Social xxx and you are learning things to do with the welfare state; whereas for xxx you are learning things to do with other countries**. She finds this more sometimes when talking to lecturer B, as he tries to give her ideas; however, she can only associate him with neo-Marxism and Marxists and he cannot get it when she tries to explain something in development terms. She will understand him and say, yes, yes, yes, but it's quite different. In xxx you are mostly dealing with international organizations like the IMF as well as dealing with the feminist critique side of things. There are many things which change over time whereas with xxx she has found that there are many things to relate from the beginning to the end of the course. The mechanisms and the policies tend to form a vicious cycle but for xxx it is different and she is learning that it is mainly the First World and the Third World and that the policies are made in the West, yet for xxx she is kind of learning about Britain and the class system. For xxx she is learning about the centre-periphery, which is different.

With xxx, M was lucky in the sense that she worked in the social sector in this country and so she understood that the welfare state system, but not as much as she does now as most of her understanding was it is based on assumptions and mostly she thought that the welfare state was the

benefit system. So, when she came to start learning she found that there were many things that she had probably come across and many things to relate to what she saw in her day-to-day life. **For xxx, she is lucky as a mature student and being born in Africa as some of the things she is learning she has seen in reality and so she is lucky that way. The new version that she is learning comes from the West, but she is very much aware of what happens on the ground. She knows about poverty, the mechanisms of it and how it manifests itself but now she is learning more. As a mature student, she's been lucky in this way and thinks that it's probably more challenging for the young students who don't have the experience and they have to think of it. M knows how it works in practice to some extent.**

In development, B talks about co-opting xxx into it but it is still from within a different context. It's different because you are talking about a third world context in terms of different cultures and countries but here you are just talking about the British welfare system. Of course there are ethnic minorities but it's still different because we have a welfare system here and yet in Africa you cannot say that we actually have one, a functional welfare system. It's totally different there, or is Asia or South America for that matter. It all depends on the context from which you are looking at it. The context is different but it's all to do with improving the lives of the poor and things like that.

What M has found challenging is social research and writing about methodology because the terminology is quite complex and you have to find out what each word means because you have not come across it before. That's another thing that has been challenging, but M must say that it has been good because she has had the opportunity to read more and understand it. She admits and acknowledges that maybe she does not know everything, but that she has a better understanding.

M has been lucky because her lecturers have been good and have been approachable. B in particular is very good and has made xxx Studies very interesting for M as the way she delivers her lectures is very good and she is easy to understand. She is very good at delivering the lectures as some people can lecture and you can sit there and not understand. They've all been good and helpful. She can't pick out one and say they've not been helpful in any way. They've all been wonderful.

Appendix Five

The online dimension

Reflections on developing an online research strategy

To date, I have received a few brief texts and emails from 4-5 students and, so far, have been unsuccessful in my attempts to initiate any kind of meaningful online dialogue using email. In my limited experience of conducting online writing courses, sustained engagement can be difficult to achieve. For example, I have run three 6-week online writing courses during the academic year 2008/9 and typically around 20-30% of participants post regular, non-superficial comments and reflections on tasks online. I imagine this may be different when assessment and credits are involved. Based on this kind of experience, I decided to postpone attempts to set up an online discussion until after I had a sense of who the group of research participants I would be working with were. I felt it was important to have some sense of who was posting messages in order to respond appropriately online. This meant conducting initial biographical interviews with sufficient first years before online discussions were attempted.

An apposite time for this seemed to be February 2009 during efforts to set up the parallel research discussion seminars with the first years. During the observation immediately before the research meeting, I noted that all the participants I had contacted the week before, had texted, emailed or phoned me to cancel that day or were present in the course lecture which preceded my session with them. However, relatively soon after this time, course deadlines, school half term, snow and an organised trip to the UN seemed to haemorrhage my field role and relationship with participants. In addition, my attempts to initiate email discussions after individual research interviews with Mary and Vera have been unsuccessful.

Thus, to date, deciding on an appropriate online environment has been surprisingly complex and I have considered a number of options summarised in Table Five below:

A summary of appropriate VLEs options considered for research purposes

Option	Pros	Cons
1 - setting up a discussion in the university's VLE using a closed group in the social science course	It's quick to set up and in theory students should be familiar with this VLE	Postings will be visible to all staff associated with the course which will be inhibiting for students and will as create ethical concerns because of this
2 setting up a discussion in the university's VLE using a closed group in the English Language & Learning (ELLS) support course I am associated with	Participants would feel less inhibited as social science lecturers would not be able to view their discussion group.	Postings will be visible to all staff associated with the course and as all students (25K) are automatically enrolled on the course there is a far greater number of staff than average who are associated with this course so course which will be inhibiting for students and

3 setting up a discussion in the university's VLE using a closed group in either the soc. science xxx course I am associated with but anonymous postings

No ethical implications in terms of confidentiality and anonymity

will as create ethical concerns because f this

After discussions with technical staff there seems to be no way of tracing back posting to a named participant: anonymous postings would remain just that.

4 - Using a commercial discussion forum

The free ones have intrusive and inappropriate advertising characteristic of social networking sites.

The ones that charge, that I have seen cost a minimum of £160 irrespective of the number of students and level of use.

5 - Using an IBM forum (set up by my husband but which I could then own and manage

Free, anonymous

The steps you need follow to enrol seems extremely labour intensive and complex to follow and assumes quite a bit about the computer literate CoP you are attempting to enter:

Participants might give up half way, as I did.

6 - Private discussion in JISC mail. After some negotiation, I have received the go-ahead to set up a private group with xxx students only

Free, anonymous and confidential and hopefully sufficiently distant from the university setting to be able to initiate a discussion in the short term

I intend to return to the possibility of setting up an online discussion with participants in their second year.

Appendix Six

Entering the field narrative

This document outlines the process of negotiating institutional gatekeepers and entering the research field.

On June 10th 2008 I submitted an ethical clearance form to the Social Science Sub-Ethics Committee (SSEC). Prior this, I had had discussions with the Programme leader for Social Policy who is one of the two lecturers involved and gatekeepers for the project. He had expressed both support and interest for the project and we had had a number of informal discussions since the proposal was submitted as we work relatively closely. The lecturer confirmed he would be happy with class observations to take place and did not foresee any issue with this from him or from the students concerned. Before submission, I also sent the form to the Director of Programmes and Head of Department to make them aware of my intentions as they were departmental if not institutional gatekeepers.

The old social science campus in North East London closed officially at the end of June and Faculty from the School of HSSC entered a transitional and unstable period while their new accommodation was being completed at the new campus in North West London in time for September. During this period, I became increasingly concerned that I had not received an email acknowledgement from the SSEC, nor from a courtesy email sent to the Head of Department, a key gatekeeper, the month before. I decide to contact the Director of Programmes and we met in temporary accommodation.

By mid-July 2008 the Programme leader was able to identify two potentially suitable social science courses. The first year is taught by another lecturer whom I know of but have had very little contact with and the third year course is taught by the Programme leader. The Programme leader agrees to talk to the Director of Programmes, responsible for a range of social science degrees, over issues of gaining ethical clearance from both Middlesex and Canterbury. Meanwhile, I make contact with the first year course leader who also expressed interest in the project and who also at the time did not foresee any problems either.

Towards the end of July, I received an email from the Director of Programmes who also sits on the SSEC. The application for ethical clearance has been rejected. He wrote explaining the reasons for rejecting my application in the first instance and concluded that: 'In essence the classroom ethnography is not something that would be likely to get ethical approval.' (per. comm. ME 18/07/08). Later it transpires that this is due to, among other more minor objections, my use of the term 'participant-observation'. I chose to refer to my field role as one of participant-observation, rather than non-participant observation, given as given my professional role within the university. It felt unrealistic to view my role as one of passive observation. However, the Committee felt students on the courses would not be free to give informed consent if I were also teaching them, which is how the word 'participant' was interpreted. This was not in fact the case. I team-teach on a different third year social science course with the same Programme Leader and for whom the observations were unproblematic. The use of the term 'participant- observation' was to signal deliberately the fact that whilst present in lectures and seminars, observing and note-taking, it is likely that my presence may influence the nature of the data collected. In fact, there is field evidence showing that both lecturers and students from both classes initiate communication with me directly and regularly during observation.

Initially, this rejection felt like a significant set back as it seemed unlikely that I would be able to observe mainstream courses as opposed to more peripheral support classes, or as the email suggested by creating my own classes: '... we feel that perhaps the best way for you to proceed would be via a series of parallel sessions

outside of the lectures and seminars that form part of the courses.’ (per. comm. ‘E’ 18/0708). The aim of the research project is to explore changes students undergo as they negotiate the institution and its discourse practices; and therefore observational data on how students interact with lecturers and other students is central to an ethnographic study of this kind. Following Ivanič (1998), the focus is on a group of social science student’s language and discourse experiences in their subject areas rather than writing in skills or support classes only. Nevertheless, I thank the gatekeeper, the Director of Programmes, for his support but I do not revise the application form straight away.

Unexpectedly, at the very end of July, I receive an email from the Chair of the xxx Ethics Committee. He had just been forwarded my original application which was sent to the administrator in the middle of June: she had been on extended leave. The Chair is positive and supportive and the register of the email is very different to the one explaining reasons for rejection by the sub-committee:

I've read the ethics form and don't see a problem with it. However I was wondering whether Victoria hasn't completed an ethics form in her supervising university? In which case do we need one completed at xxx? No problem either way! I suggest that I speak to Victoria on my return from leave after 18 August. (per. comm. 29/07/09)

I felt encouraged by the email.

The ethical clearance form was resubmitted with amendments by mid-September. Now, however, there are delays due to staff and students adjusting to the new campus and the impending campus induction for new students. I am aware this is a busy time for xxx staff and decide to make contact with the Chair directly after two weeks.

While delays became an issue in terms of the timescale for data collection by mid- September, I felt unable and unwilling to follow up the Ethics Committee members for a second time as I was aware they were key gatekeepers and the project as it stood hinged on their approval. Nevertheless, after several emails and phone calls I arranged a meeting with the Chair who was once again supportive. He suggested the best way forward would be for him, me and one other member of the sub-committee, the Director of Programmes who rejected the application to meet in order to work through the objections made. It is now mid-October and the start of teaching and it proved difficult for three academics with different schedules to meet and, as a consequence, a further three weeks were lost. During this time, however, I do manage to meet with the Chair and he advises me on ways in which to amend the ethics application form. For instance, I attached a part of the draft methods section in support of the application in which I describe myself as having a ‘Quasi-covert participant-observer’s role’ I was told emphatically to remove the word ‘covert’ as I would never get approval if it were present in any of the documentation submitted.

After two or three meeting cancellations and subsequent rescheduling, the Chair, the second member of the Committee and I meet to go through the ethical clearance form and associated consent forms for distribution to students. I was advised to make two further changes which were: the exclusion of participant observation in one of the associated documents and to indicate on the form that there were gatekeepers to negotiate. Initially, when first completing the form, I had not thought of my colleagues as gatekeepers to my research or indeed students as I already had a role within the University. Verbal approval was then given by the Chair and I was asked to resubmit the application form formally for a second time. It was now the middle of October and the Thursday before reading week for both courses.

Emails were sent to students explaining who I was, what I was doing and why I needed signed consent from them. I posted letters with Self-addressed envelopes to all students on both courses and also gave my contact details, including mobile phone number, and although there were no emails or phone calls at this time, the consent forms began to trickle in slowly. Both lecturers signed their consent forms without delay.

Now early November, I arrange with the year one lecturer to meet the class and to distribute hard copies of the information about the project and consent forms already sent by email and by mail before I began observations the following week. This was important as two or three students did not have term time London addresses entered onto the student record system. Contrary to my expectations, this group seemed the more wary of the two. For instance, one member of the group emailed me requesting further clarification:

I am interested but on the other hand curious about you been present in one of my seminar, therefore I would like to know the purpose of the project and how will benefit me (per. com. BA 1/11/09)

In contrast, the year three lecturer had a different and more relaxed approach towards gaining informed consent: 'I did ask but no one objected' (per. Comm. 22/10/08). Indeed, after I told him I had received verbal approval from the committee and his consent form had been signed, he was happy for me to begin observing and expressed surprise when I failed to turn up the following week: 'yes I did expect you in the session today: didn't realise the bureaucracy dragged on' (per. Comm. 22/10/08). I was reluctant to begin as, despite the time delay, I had only had two or three forms out of 11 returned. In general the year one lecturer seemed less concerned over the SSEC practices surrounding informed consent expressed by the sub-committee in July.

As a consequence of this informality, I began observing the third years a week before the first years. After the two-hour seminar, one or two students chatted and came over to where I was seated. Some of the year three group had been taught by me in their first and second years. One asked about help with her project proposal (MW) and apologised for not completing the consent form as she had thought that I was 'just a student' in her words; a second (MG) told me that she would seek a tutorial with me; and a third (DO) completed the form and returned it to me straight away. Yet, another student (AC) expressed interest but said that she was employed outside the university and would participate if the project did not clash with this work. I was surprised as I had expected the third years to indicate they were too busy writing dissertation proposals at this time.

Appendix Seven

Languages survey pilot

Rationale for language background survey

Street (1995, p.136) literacy viewed **as critical social practice** which means that we need to take into account the historical backgrounds and contexts as well as linguistic backgrounds of our students

This may help us to locate our ss. lit practices according to Street

Languages & background survey – operational instructions

The class was invited to take part in a research project on Northcentral/Social Science students' language use.

In order to find out more and understand which languages you speak write, when and to whom, I would like to ask you a few questions about your background.

If you are happy for me to use some of the information you provide in future for a presentation, then please sign the consent form and add an email address. If you do not wish to take part, then add your name and student number but do not sign the consent form.

Please remember to put your name (later removed), student number and email on all pieces of paper.

Part Two: Languages survey - prompt questions

1. What languages do you speak?
2. When did you learn them?
3. When do you speak them?
4. How important are they to you?
5. How is Northcentral for you?
6. Is there any thing else you would like to say/add?

Part Four: Survey findings from one participant

Sri Lankan Tamil, also speaks Sinhalese and English.

1st year Diploma Health Studies (pseudonym) March 2008 intake

Esol level 1 Literacy

Daughter at xxx [highly prestigious state school in North London]

Now naturalised and has passport, interview 7 days before interview

Tamil, mother tongue used exclusively at home

Also personal investment as language of children as they are sent to Sunday school to write and speak Tamil

Sinhalese in school, language medium of formal education

Now only speaks Tamil with sisters and friends

Medium English academic and strived for language, site of struggle and possibly some frustration and shame in contrast with Tamil as professionally expressed sense of pride as she has the role of ward interlocutor

Unusually learnt to write Tamil in order to maintain long distance relationship with then boyfriend who was in UK while she was still in Sri Lanka.

Reflexivity - says experiences at Northcentral are fine and that people are friendly and supportive yet she has already failed work due to lack of preparedness. Does this reflect our relationship and/or her valuing of education as daughter at prestigious grammar (?) school in north London?