

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ONLINE IN A MULTICULTURAL
ENVIRONMENT:
PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND STRATEGIES OF E-TUTORS

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Declaration Form

I certify that the whole of this work is the result of my own individual effort and that all sources and quotations have been acknowledged in the text. The work has not been submitted for any previous award.

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Abstract

This study is investigating the role of the online tutor in a multicultural environment. The result is a grounded theory which aims to increase the quality of online tutoring at University.

By using the open qualitative approach of the Grounded Theory (GT) methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) within a field where little previous research has been undertaken the study sought to sample a wide range of experiences and views. Microscopic analysis centred on semi-structured interviews with both students and tutors of an online Masters programme at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), interviews with e-learning experts from LJMU and other institutions and a focus-group with staff involved in e-learning projects at LJMU. Throughout theoretical sampling, the method of constant comparison and a circular research process, approximately 400 codes and categories were created which formed the basis for the emergent grounded theory. Within GT the process of data collection and analyses are closely connected which each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998); analysis of initially collected data got constantly compared with following findings on different levels of abstraction until an explanation of the investigated phenomena emerged.

Findings provide insights into perception and explanations of the situation of instructors at University who have to teach in a pure online environment. A theory emerged which details basically 1 central category: quality online teaching in a multicultural environment, 5 categorical aspects: awareness, workload, conditions, experiences, and perceptions as well as well as 4 sub-categorical aspects: Institution, subject, stakeholders, and course design. Those categories and their relations to each other outline concepts which may help to better understand the situations of online tutors at University. As an additional outcome of the analysis a set of codes and categories have been created which may help to better manage and support effective online tutoring in an international environment at University by providing tasks, challenges and suggestions for improvement. In addition barriers have been uncovered which may hinder online tutors to realise identified suggestions for improvement. Based on these findings, a guideline for online tutors who have to teach in an international environment has been developed.

Research results offer moreover a profound basis for ongoing discussion and issues worth pursuing in the future by providing guides to action.

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List of Acronyms or Abbreviations used

[CAP] Cultural Adoption Process Model

[CTP] Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology

[GT] Grounded-Theory

[ITS] Intelligent tutoring systems

[LJMU] Liverpool John Moores University

[LMS] Learning Management System

[VC] Virtual Classroom

1 Introduction

1.1 E-learning and globalisation in Higher Education

Web-based education and the availability of online courses have grown rapidly during the last decade in many parts of the world (Brown & Voltz, 2005; Morris et al., 2005; Wang & Reeves, 2007). Mazzarol et al. (2003) identified a series of waves of globalisation in the educational industry. The first one describes students travelling to a host nation in order to study at a University. The second one involved institutions gaining presence globally through twin-programmes. An additional phase of the second wave, which may also be considered as a separate, third stage in itself is characterised by the establishment of new teaching approaches that have been established as for instance the online delivery of courses. In line with this, an increasing number of traditional Universities, particularly English-speaking institutions, integrate pure distance-learning programmes into their curriculum that are offered to students around the world (McCarty, 2004).

New technologies combined with innovative pedagogical methods such as inquiry based learning and authentic tasks provide the opportunity for educators and students to teach and learn in powerful ways (Wang & Reeves, 2007). A particular strength of online education is that the supplied educational opportunities have the potential to be responsive and supportive to different needs of students, as for example, diverse learning types, more or less individual choice of learning time, amount of study time, and no need to travel. The online environment, furthermore, opens up the spectrum of educational programmes, to which learners may not have had access at their local institutions. Many reasons increasingly encourage institutions to try to reach students around the world, for example, the steady improvement of online delivery-systems as well as the growing emphasis on globalisation (Edmundson, 2007). The Global University in Springfield/Missouri, for instance, offers online education to more than 600.000 students in 178 countries (Rogers & Howell, 2004). Also LJMU is steadily enlarging their range of online programmes. In the year 2004 LJMU started to pioneer the new way of delivering education with a first pure distance learning programme in 'Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology' at the School of Psychology.

1.2 The role of culture in E-Learning

Researchers highlight the importance of culture to e-learning (Dunn & Malinetti, 2000; Edmundson, 2007; Evens & Vergnaud, 1998; Mcloughlin, 1999c; Quigley, n.d.; Selinger, 2004). Dunn and Malinetti (2002) suggest that culture does not have an impact on just our person, our thoughts, behaviours, and responses to our environment but also on how we learn. Hofstede (1986) further explains that classes with students and teachers with diverse cultural backgrounds provide a basis for varied confusion. For instance, the social positions of teachers and students and the relevance of the curriculum may differ; there might be a difference in profiles of cognitive abilities or differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. Additionally there is always the risk of cultural gaffes that may cause learning and teaching barriers. An often quoted example would be using the colour red as an attention sign in a class with Chinese students, while red is considered a lucky colour in China (Quigley, n.d.). Wang and Reeves (2007) emphasise that there is an urgent need to understand how culture affects online education as the number of learners with diverse cultural backgrounds engaged in online education is growing. Furthermore Richards and Ross (2004) believe that it is essential to make an effort to accomplish a situation where in current and future offshore projects cultural circumstances get considered in order to be successful and sustain international academic reputation. Many researchers agree that the consideration and integration of cultural factors is an essential aspect for the quality of online education (e.g. Bates, 1997; Chen et al., 1999; Dunn and Malinetti, 2000; Liu, 2007; Zaltsmann, 2007; Zorn, n.d.). Moreover, Leask (2000) implies that the diversities of cultures, also entitled as 'cultural diversity', will be more salient in online classes with multicultural student groups.

The amount of literature focusing on online education and culture is developing but still small, and there are even fewer empirical studies (Edmundson, 2007). Wang and Reeves (2007) point out that the limited number of empirical research in online education does ignore the importance of the cultural aspect. As a consequence of the lack of empirical work investigating culture and e-learning several recent international conferences (e.g. the 'Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication Conference', EDEN annual Conference 2008 'New Learning Cultures', Online Educa Berlin 2008, ¹) also focus on these topics. Wang and Reeves (2007) explain that the difficulty of both finding appropriate methodologies and adequate resources are the reason for the lack of research in this field. Another explanation mentioned by Wang and Reeves is the lack of agreement concerning the concept of culture. Zaltsman (2007) asserts that a lack of

¹ For more information see: <http://www.it.murdoch.edu.au/catac>, <http://www.eden-online.org>, and <http://www.online-educa.com/>

understanding as to how e-learning actually works is the reason for a high amount of failed cross-cultural e-learning projects. Research of Sadler indicates for instance that dropout rates within online courses are as high as 85 percent and the absence of *'cultural adaptation is a leading reason why e-learning fails to work for a globally distributed audience'* (Dunn & Malinetti, 2002). However, the field of necessary research for online courses addressing a multicultural audience is extensive (see for instance Edmundson, 2007; Uzuner, 2009). Compared to studies into technical and design topics, so far little research has been carried to explore the role of the online tutor in a multicultural environment at traditional face-to-face universities.

1.3 E-Learning, globalisation and the changing tutor role

Of the many factors that contribute to success or failure of (online) education, the (online) didactic competence of the instructor proved to be of paramount importance (Bründl-Price, 2004; Fleischhack, 2004; Hill et al., 2003). However, teaching in online courses is an extremely complex function (Anderson et al., 2001). Online instructors have the possibility to reach remote students and underserved populations, break down the barriers of time and space, and give access to students of different languages and cultures (Joo, 1999). However, by entering the arena of online teaching they are confronted with new tasks as for example to work with new pedagogical approaches when teaching a group of students with a culturally diverse background on a teaching and learning platform. Due to the changes caused by the virtualisation of courses, instructors may experience educational challenges as well as new physical, psychological or emotional challenges, resulting from the lack of face-to-face contact and the largely asynchronous nature of the online environment (Palloff et al., 2003)². Although there are many aspects of classroom teaching experienced educators can build on, in several important aspects online education follows its own laws and principles (Bender et al., 2004; McFadzean, 2001c; Paulsen, 2000). For instance, research has shown that the role of the online tutor is changing from traditional teaching towards moderating and facilitating (Berge, 1995; Salmon, 2004). Hence, to be successful, instructors will have to reconsider their roles in the online environment.

In addition to such general adjustments that need to be considered when teaching online, cultural differences in internationally recruiting online programmes constitute a further challenge (Bründl-Price, 2004; Carroll, 2005; Fleischhack, 2004; O'Dowd, 2004; Zaltsman, 2007). Next to marketing, technical and design issues these changes pose special challenges for educators teaching online. Besides language-based issues (for non native speakers) there are many cultural aspects that may

² Those challenges will be explained in more detail in chapter 2.1.1.

influence the quality of multicultural online courses (Bründl-Price, 2004; Edmundson, 2007; Fleischhack, 2004; O'Dowd, 2004). In some cultures it is for example considered inappropriate for students to question the instructor or the knowledge being conveyed in the course. Hence, Northern European students might be successful using 'personal learning portals' as they were generally taught to take initiative, ask questions, view instructors as equals and to be individualists. Such individualised approaches may not suit Eastern European students at all (Quirgley, n.d.). Conversely, a student whose culture is more communal, and where group process is valued, may feel uncomfortable in a course where independent learning is the primary mode of instruction (Joo, 1999). Additionally, a different understanding of the role of the online tutor may cause difficulties (Selinger, 2004). A study by McCargar (1993) on role expectations of teachers and students on international face-to-face courses demonstrates that expectations regarding the teacher and student roles vary considerably between various cultural backgrounds. Zaltsman (2007) concludes that *'the cause of most misunderstandings in cross-cultural education stems from differing cultural dimensions'* (p.292).

1.4 Questions, aims and significance of the research

Cross-cultural online education provides a set of opportunities on the one hand and entails several responsibilities on the other hand. A study by Shattuck (2005) reveals the importance of recognising cultural adaptation and training for educators, designers, and administrators who are involved in online distance education programmes. Moreover, Wang and Reeves (2007) highlight the distinctive potential of cross-cultural e-learning to form a basis for more tolerance and the ability to live with differences. However this potential will only be realised if researchers and developers of e-learning take the issue of cultural influences on online education more seriously (Wang & Reeves, 2007). There have been several general suggestions and empirical studies on problems, concerns, and issues addressing the role of the online tutor (chapter 2.1.3) as well as recommendations for instructors teaching international students face-to-face. However, so far only few empirically-grounded guidelines and recommendations have been presented for the online counterpart (chapter 2.3.2).

The urgent need for research into the internationalisation of Higher Education in general has been highlighted by Kingston and Forland (2008). They stress the necessity of internationally recruiting Higher Education institutions to increase their awareness of educational differences in order to continuously follow the goal of offering quality education for all. As mentioned above, in

comparison to the production of learning materials and resources, little research has been undertaken investigating the online tutor role in a multicultural environment. The quantity of online courses in Higher Education increases continuously and the variety of cultural backgrounds within the student population is growing (Berge & Collis, 1995; Le Baron et al., 2000), which accordingly influences online education. Since in many situations the online tutor will have an essential influence on the quality of an online course, significantly more research into online education is needed to understand the situation and the requirements of their new role in these changing educational settings.

The study aims to discover the role of the educator at university in a pure online and multicultural environment in order to better understand their situation. The focus is on traditional attendance universities, since the situation here is quite special: traditional face-to-face instructors are often suddenly confronted with the new task of teaching in this particular environment. Since the situation of the online tutor in an international environment has hardly been explored, a qualitative approach has been chosen as it is less limited by preconceptions and is more open to new or unexpected insights. To sum up, the core questions of the research are as follows:

- Where do traditional face-to-face teachers see their role when having to teach in a pure online programme offered to people around the world?
- How does the aspect of a multicultural student group influence their way of teaching?
- How do online tutors perceive their new role?
- What problems and challenges do tutors perceive when teaching online in an international environment?
- What problems and challenges do students perceive when learning online in an international environment?
- What do students expect from their online tutor?
- Are there any suggestions for improvement and to overcome identified challenges and problems?

Not all of these questions were part of the initial phase of the research, some rather developed as the research unfolded. Within the framework of Grounded Theory (GT), while engaging with the already collected data, new important research questions arose³. The final statement of theory, presented in chapter 4.3, reflects and explains on a more abstract level the situation of online tutors teaching in an international environment at university which has been uncovered within the study.

³ More details about the development of research questions are provided in chapter 3.4.2, 4.

As an appropriate initial case, an MSc online programme at the School of Psychology (now School of Natural Sciences and Psychology) at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) was chosen for investigation. The online MSc programme in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology (CTP) was considered as an adequate starting point for the study since it presents a typical situation at English speaking Universities: An online programme offered to students around the world that had originally been designed for the attendance mode. In 2002 the School of Psychology decided to offer the programme additionally online and teachers of the existing programme, which had been running successfully as attendance programme, suddenly had to teach online and in a multicultural environment. Another aspect of the online CTP course was perceived as being of particular interest for the study: the number of Universities addressing such a topic is very limited. As a consequence it was expected that the decision of students to study online was likely based on the fact that no comparable attendance mode programme was available to them. As a result, the challenge for tutoring and course design might be even bigger, since e-learning might not always be students preferred way of studying.

The intent was to allow tutors and students to tell me as authentically as possible how the pure online environment and cultural factors had impacted teaching and learning in the investigated programme and also to help them reflect on that impact in ways that might possibly inspire tutors for pedagogical improvements. The study highlights tutors' (and in extracts students') perceptions, investigates problems, challenges, and particular pedagogical issues in relation to teaching online in a multicultural environment in order to stimulate research worth pursuing in the future. It aims to formulate some empirically grounded concepts that together will form a framework for explaining the situation of the online tutor in an international environment.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

A qualitative approach, the Grounded Theory (GT), has been chosen as an appropriate method for investigation. Qualitative methodology is particular useful in order to investigate perceptions and experiences of participants (Patton, 2002). Hence I have chosen the GT approach to answer research questions mentioned in chapter 1.4. GT is an inductive strategy, which provides a philosophy and a set of tools and techniques and aims to discover the underlying structure in what people say and do (Elliot, 2005). Within the context of this study, GT was used for the generation of theory grounded in realities of everyday online tutoring practice. The approach is moreover suitable for investigating mostly unexplored aspects (Charmaz, 2005).

Considering the GT approach Glaser (1998) stresses that a literature review should follow *after* the initial data collection and analysis in order to gain a result more closely based in the data than on pre-existing concepts. In contrast Strauss and Corbin (1998) claim that undertaking a literature review at the beginning of the research process does support or clarify the purpose of the research as well as concepts to be investigated. Since this research follows the framework of Strauss and Corbin (chapter 3.1) an initial literature review was conducted (chapter 2). The purpose of this second chapter is to present current knowledge and empirical findings addressing the skills and challenges of teaching online and teaching in a multicultural environment, and methods and categories of the online tutor role as well as students' perceptions and expectations regarding the online tutor. Moreover the matter of e-learning and culture are discussed. In the following chapter (chapter 3) the methodology that has been chosen, a GT approach, will be presented by focusing on the theoretical perspective of GT before the research process itself will be described; such as the sampling procedure and the utilised methods for data collection as well as quality criteria of research. Ethical guidelines and the researcher's background are addressed as well. The next chapter (chapter 4) then presents the process of data analysis, research findings, the emerging theory followed by the conclusion and its critical reflection (chapter 5). In addition, limitations of the study are discussed and suggestions for further research are made. The appendices include supplementary details in order to provide transparency of the research in general as well as the process of data collection and analysis which guided the study towards the theory.

2 Literature Review

To provide a more comprehensive picture of the complex conditions an online tutor in a multicultural environment is confronted with, issues and concerns of the tutor role will be presented systematically. The literature review aims to describe the general situation, challenges, and expectations within online teaching. As an initial literature review literature has been selected particularly at the beginning of the research, hence reflects the current state of knowledge in this field up to year 2008. Following the GT approach of Strauss and Cobin (1998) it was envisaged that the literature review informs and guides the undertaken research to a certain degree in regard to arising questions, categories and codes. As Strauss (1991) argues, pre-existing knowledge and experiences sensitise the researcher and increase theoretical sensitivity.

In the first instance teaching online in general will be explored, including skills, challenges, student expectations, as well as categories and roles of the online tutor (see figure 1). Here the cultural aspect will not be considered in detail; however it should be acknowledged that no research is culturally neutral. The researchers for instance have a specific cultural background and so have the participants who contribute the data for the research. Hence, roles and categories of the online tutor as well as perceived challenges may vary from culture to culture. Addressing Wang's (2007) concern of the lack of agreement concerning the concept of culture (chapter 2.1) 'culture' will be defined in relation to this study next. Following on from this, general thoughts and study outcomes will be presented about cultural adoption in e-learning, which has been emphasised by researchers (chapter 2.2). Here some selected models are introduced in order to provide methods that identify differences and similarities among cultures and to work with culture empirically. After the tutor role and cultural aspects in online education have been addressed, the (online) tutor teaching in a multicultural environment will be discussed.

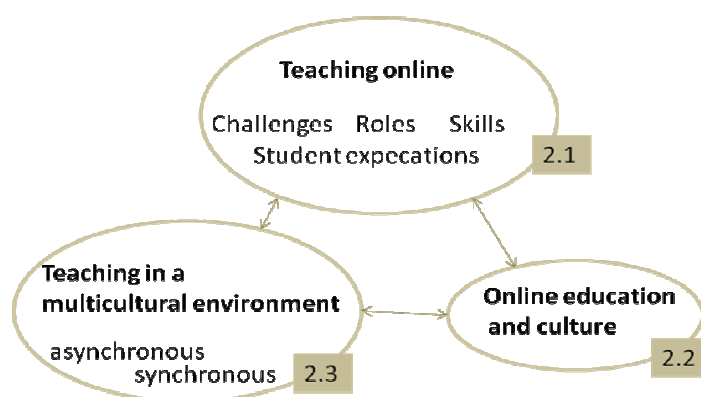


Figure 1: Topics of the literature review

2.1 Teaching online

As already introduced in chapter 1.3 the didactic competence of tutors is of paramount importance in online education. However teaching online is an extremely complex function (Anderson et al., 2001; Creanor, 2002). Anderson (2004) explains that *'the pervasive effect of the online medium creates a unique environment for teaching and learning.'* (p.273). To be successful an online tutor will need to consider many issues, such as minimising drop-out rates, alleviating student isolation, and committing to help students to be successful (Denis et al., 2004). To a certain degree teachers can build on experiences gathered in classroom teaching (Anderson, 2004), however both the teacher and the student are challenged by new roles, functions, and tasks in an online learning and teaching environment (Berge & Collins, 1995; Stodel, 2006). It is not the educator anymore who is the major source of information for the student. The traditional educational concept of classroom shifts from a physical place towards a rather conceptual area where teaching and learning takes place at (mostly) any time. The traditional teacher can utilise both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, whereas the online tutor has to concentrate on the verbal, nowadays still predominantly asynchronous forms of communication (Walters-Coppola et al., 2002).

General suggestions and useful empirical studies regarding problems, concerns, and issues concerning the quality of online teaching have been presented by several authors (e.g. Anderson et al., 2001; Barker, 2003; Berge & Collins, 2001; Brennan, 2003; Duggleby, 2000; Mason, 2001; McFadzean, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Moore, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Salmon, 2004; Smith, 2005; Yang, 2005; Yu & Brandenburg, n.d.). Based on these studies and recommendations a collection of key competencies and challenges of teaching online will be presented in the following (chapter 2.1.1). Additionally, students' perceptions and expectations from the online tutor will be illuminated (chapter 2.1.2), since the students' perspective is of vital importance in a learner-centred approach; an approach which has been recognised as essential quality criterion in online education (Smith, 2005). Following this, a collection of models and concepts of the online tutor role will be presented (chapter 2.1.3).

2.1.1 Challenges and skills of teaching online

A successful contribution of online tutors relies on the personal connection they initiate between students and the institution they are studying at via interactions, such as guidance, support, motivation, and perspectives on tutor attributes and expertise (Berge & Collins, 1995; McPherson & Nunes, 2004). Brown and Voltz (2003) suggest that the most important aspect of good teaching

practice is faculty-student interaction. Singh and Pan (2004) extend this further by saying: *'An effective learning environment is one in which there are always frequent and meaningful interactions among students, and between the student and the instructor.'* However interaction has been recognised as particularly time consuming (Yu and Brandenburg, n.d.), since it has to be initiated, encouraged and stimulated by tutors (Wall Williams et al., 2002). Within the online environment learners can easily remain as passive receivers of learning material. Fidas et al. (2006) emphasise that modern education accentuates learning activities, which support interaction in order to encourage knowledge construction and the creation of meaning. Interaction is one component that supports active learning, independently of the effectiveness of the provided teaching materials (Brooks et al., 1997). Here the importance of the tutor role appears again in multicultural settings since it is their task to compensate for missing cultural adaptation within a course which may hinder interaction among students. Furthermore, Tu (2007) found that social presence can improve interaction. He argues that with an increasing social presence the interpersonal relationships among participants will increase. Additionally, online learning can be improved by creating a supportive and communicative relationship culture among participants and tutors (Packham et al., 2006). Creanor (2002) argues that tutors should develop the facility to strengthen general understandings of their learners' backgrounds with regard to their individual situation and varied approaches to the learning experience in order to encourage learning relationships. Yu and Brandenburg (n.d.) suggest that this relationship could be advocated by a face-to-face induction programme. In some cases however face-to-face meetings are not possible, for example in courses with an international audience or even not desirable for instance for economical reasons. In any case, online induction programmes are useful for ensuring that students are conversant with the online environment (Packham et al., 2006). Moreover an induction module can be helpful in order to evaluate students' expectations and learning styles before the actual subject starts (Yu & Brandenburg, n.d.).

Group work has been recognised as particularly useful for the learning process in many educational settings. Since collaboration among students does not generally happen automatically, tutors should integrate effective collaborative activities (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). It is the obligation of the instructor to learn how to enable the collaborative process among students and to motivate them to work as a team (McFadzean, 2001c), which may cause particular challenges in international teams.⁴ In addition to facilitating group work online tutors should also assist students to become independent learners (Chan, 2002), in particular as the online environment requires the student to be more self-reliant in their learning. Research also found

⁴ Further details about issues which constitute a particular challenge for online tutors to teach in multicultural teams can be found in chapter 2.3.2.

that when instructors push students to learn (Middleton & Midgley, 2002) and set high demands, students used more sophisticated learning strategies and higher thinking skills (Curley, 1996; Turner, 2002). Therefore, both support and demands appear necessary for students to achieve their full potential (Curley, 1996; Middleton & Midgley, 2002). To reflect the complexity and demanding nature of teaching online, additional abilities an online tutor should possess are considered in the following.

Based on group discussions and interviews with online tutors Shelly et al. (2004) identified eight categories of necessary online teaching skills (figure 2): *qualities and affective orientation pedagogical expertise, subject matter expertise, IT skills, one-to-one interactive support skills, self-management, group support and management, and professional skills and responsibilities* (p.7).

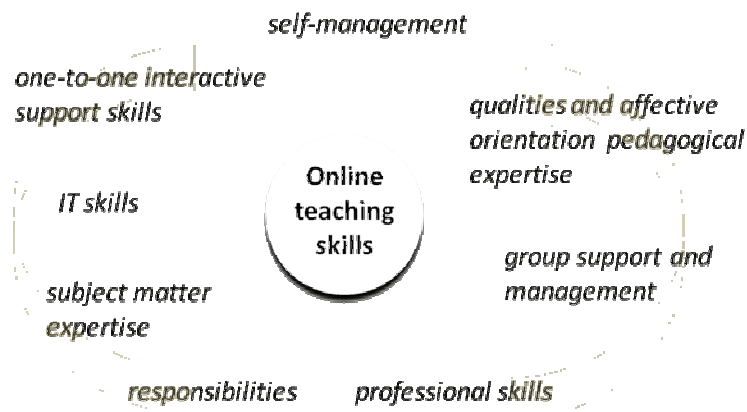


Figure 2: Necessary online teaching skills identified by Shelly et al. (2004)

The primary text-based and asynchronous nature of the online environment requires particular communication skills. Tutors as well as students need to be able to understand and use social stimulations expressed through, for instance, the text structure, emoticons and specific vocabulary in order to be able to act sensibly in the online environment (Astleitner, 2003). This might be a particular challenge within a multicultural environment where the meaning of words and text formats may vary.

In addition to such general skills an online tutor should possess, Leask et al. (2005) conducted a literature review and identified a set of additional online tutoring skills (Leask, p.26):

- evaluate feedback from students
- provide timely and appropriate feedback on student performance
- include local content in the programme through examples and case studies
- flexibility to change the teaching approach to achieve different course objectives
- adapt learning activities to suit the needs of offshore students
- use different modes of delivery to assist student learning

- to reflect on and learn from teaching experiences
- to communicate with other staff teaching on the programme

Instructors do not only have to cope with the complex task of online education; they are faced with additional challenges when teaching online, in particular when teaching online for the first time. Particular challenges for the online tutor are caused, for instance, by the predominantly text-based communication without visual and auditory cues, new technological settings, invisibility as well as anonymity (Zaltsman, 2007). If a student is for instance not communicating within the learning environment, the tutor has no opportunity to see if this is due to lacking interest in the topic, if they are following a discussion and prefers to listen or if they have other commitments which hinder them from participating. There might be functions within the online learning environment where online tutors can get a helpful overview of students' activities; however they have to be able to utilise this in a meaningful way. Furthermore, student-tutor interaction, an important task in online education (see above), has been identified as one of the biggest challenges. Outcomes of a study of Yu and Brandenburg (n.d.), who explored first-time online tutors, moreover indicate that an increasing workload as well as time management is another essential challenge when teaching online. They found that the tutor spends about twice as much time facilitating the online course compared to the traditional face-to-face counterpart. In line with this, the National Centre for Educational Statistics reported that online instructors spent much more time on preparation than their colleagues in the traditional classroom (Creanor, 2002). Several authors have attempted to explain an increased workload by citing pedagogical and technical challenges in the online environment. In contrast, findings of Morris et al. (2005) indicate that the workload in an online and a face-to-face class are about the same. They explain *'The majority of studies addressing faculty time and workload have relied on survey and faculty perceptions; few studies have explored the issue of workload and time commitment systematically and contemporaneously'* (Morris et al., 2005). Morris' findings might have concentrated on experienced online tutors⁵ because Odendaal (2002) found that with the increasing experience and expertise of the online tutor the time needed for preparation and teaching decreases. Instead of limiting the discussion of workload to such general considerations, Harasim (2001) presents a more fine-grained analysis by separating different phases of online education in order to compare the workload of online teaching to that of the correspondence distance mode. He found that tutors have:

- Much higher workload when first offering online education

⁵ Since the degree of experiences has not been addressed explicitly within his study, it is not clear if he has concentrated on experienced online tutors.

- To some extent higher workload when offering online teaching for the second time
- A workload very close to the face-to-face course workload for the third offering of online teaching

In addition to time management, the management of group work, which has been identified as particularly useful in online education (see above) has been perceived by tutors as particularly challenging when conducted online (Yu and Brandenburg, n.d.). A study of Shelly et al. (2006) also found that online tutors often feel isolated and frustrated since they are not able to provide enough student support as a consequence of a lack of time. However it is not just the teacher who contributes to the success or failure of an online course; it is rather that both teacher and student contribute to the organisation and regulation of the teaching procedure. Moreover, it has been observed that the tutor role can be partly carried out by students (De Laat, 2004). Creanor (2002) emphasises the individual nature of each online course, which requires tutors to be aware of changing circumstances, to recognise the learning process, and to choose the appropriate pedagogical technique in each educational setting.

2.1.2 Student's perception and expectations from the online tutor

Moving on from considering the role of the online tutor per se, the following section will discuss research findings regarding students' expectations of the online tutor.

Based on investigations into the student perspective, several researchers concluded that timely feedback and active support are the most important tasks of online tutoring. Hill et al. (2003) and Smith (2004) for example discovered that enthusiasm and feedback are key issues of quality online teaching. Many students valued tutors who were on the one hand encouraging, constructive, positive and transmitted enthusiasm for their subject, and on the other hand tutors who were supportive and facilitated debate and discussion (Hill et al., 2003). Support in relation to students' academic work has been particularly highlighted. Students appreciate feedback that is critical and constructive and that answers their concerns enthusiastically (Smith, 2004). In addition, quality criteria such as availability and accessibility of the online tutor were highlighted by students. Fearing (2005) explored that feedback of tutors has to be prompt; the majority of students in his study would have expected to perceive feedback within one day. A study of Odendaal (2001) moreover reveals that students expected the tutor to be available whenever they entered the learning environment. However, availability of the tutor 24 hours at 7 days a week would be impossible to realise. The way online tutors interact with students was perceived as particularly important (Zhang et al. , 2005) and influences the way students perceive online

learning (Kim, 2005). Since students' interaction within a course does not necessarily happen automatically, most students in a study by Zhang et al. (2005) expressed the view that particular interaction and training on how to interact would have a beneficial impact on their learning experience.

Employing document analysis Rossmann (1999) identified the following major categories of the online tutor from a student perspective (pp.93-94):

Faculty Responsibility, e.g.:

- Prompt feedback, timely posted comments in discussion forum
- Specific feedback and comments (e.g. 'nice job' or 'good response')
- Negative comments given privately, preferably a phone call

Facilitating Discussions, e.g.:

- Students appreciate and seemed to learn much from the responses of other learners.
- Discussion forums that encourage open and honest dialog; not dominated by one or two 'dominant voices', or used to express non-course-related concerns or complaints.

Course Requirements, e.g.:

- Guidelines regarding course requirements
- Provision of correct URLs

Findings also indicate that expectations among students and between students and tutors vary (Packham et al., 2006). In multicultural settings such differences may be further increased (Rogers et al., 2007). Packham et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study and found that the viewpoints of students and tutors differed when they set priorities of what quality online teaching means for them (Packham et al., 2006, pp.247-248):

a) from the instructor perspective:

- motivation
- time management skills
- building an online personality and
- organisational skills

b) from a student perspective:

- quality of feedback
- moderator support and encouragement
- module management

Hence, to avoid misunderstandings as to what can be expected from an online tutor, clarification and transparency are important. In this context Stevenson et al. (2006) offers a valuable approach of an expectation-led quality assurance process within online education, where the expectations of students and tutors get ascertained prior to the start of the course. However Stodel et al.

(2006) question whether expectations of online learners (and tutors) are realistic at all, since they might be higher for online than for face-to-face learning.

2.1.3 Models and categories of the online tutor role

A large amount of interdisciplinary research including psychology, sociology, and linguistics have helped to create a better understanding of aspects that influence the role of the online tutor (Watkins, 2000). But, as already mentioned, it is a complex picture: the teaching and learning process operates at many different interrelated levels, such as the individual teacher and student, the class, the University, the University system, the particular society, the wider cultural and the global level (Creanor, 2002). Hence, changes at any level are likely to interact with factors at the same or other levels (Watkins & Murari, 2000). Since the quality of online teaching is of paramount importance within an online course (depending on the course design) several studies aimed to define the role of the online tutor, employing different perspectives; some researchers focus on the tutor, a few on the student perception. Very rarely both views have been investigated concurrently.

Models and categories of the tutor role in an asynchronous as well as synchronous environment will be presented in the following sections. Within this part of the literature review the focus lies on the presentation of diverse models and perspectives in order to illuminate the complexity of the online tutor role. As an in-depth discussion of each model would be beyond the scope of this work, only the main points of these models and findings are presented successively and a summary of key features will be presented at the end of the chapter 2.1.3.1.

2.1.3.1 The tutor role in a mainly asynchronous environment

Berge and Collins (1995) summarise the role of the educator in four main categories of successful online tutoring: pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical; although not all of these roles need to be carried out by the same person (Berge, 2000):

- **Pedagogical:** Revolving around duties as an educational facilitator, using questions and probes for student responses that focus discussions on critical concepts, principles and skills. Tasks: e.g. providing guidelines for assignments, explaining issues, offering intellectual feedback, and evaluating student's contributions
- **Social:** Creating a friendly, social environment in which learning is promoted by, for example, promoting human relationships, developing group cohesiveness, maintaining the group as a unit, and in other ways helping members to work together in a mutual cause. Tasks: e.g. expressing support for the learning process and individual needs
- **Managerial:** Establishing general procedures for discussion and development of activities; setting the agenda for the conference, managing the interactions with leadership and direction. Tasks: e.g. setting up discussion forum, answering administrative questions

- **Technical:** Making participants comfortable with the system and the software used, making the technology transparent for the students. Tasks: e.g. providing students with technical assistance

As most of the suggested categories were derived from personal experience (Berge, 1995; Mason, 1991) Berge (2000) conducted a survey which investigated the online tutor role from the instructors' perspective, with the aim of verifying previous conclusions. Study outcomes define nine roles which are presented in table 1:

ROLE	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES
FACILITATOR	peer discussion participant, mediator
MANAGER	administrator, archivist, deleting/adding subscribers, dealing with bounced messages
FILTER	decides upon on-topic posts; increasing signal/noise ratio; rejects libellous posts; may reject jokes
EXPERT	compiling or answering Frequently Asked Questions
EDITOR	text editor, digest posts, formats posts, may correct spelling, grammar, newsletter editor
DISCUSSION LEADER	poses questions or otherwise promotes discussion, keeps discussion "on track"
MARKETER	promotes/explains list to potential subscribers or promotes sponsor of list
HELPER	helps people with needs in the list's focus area—more general than expert
FIREFIGHTER	douses or rejects "flames" or protests ad hominem attacks

Table 1: Berge's roles of the online tutor (adapted from Berge, 2000)

Using interviews with instructors and analysing discussion boards Morris et al. (2005) identified the following three roles (Berge's related roles are given in brackets):

- **Course Customization** (Managerial/Pedagogical Role),
- **Course Monitor/Facilitator** (Pedagogical/Social/ Managerial Role),
- **Evaluator/Grader** (Pedagogical Role).⁶

The study moreover revealed that the focus of online tutors depends on their experiences: experienced online tutors are generally focused on pedagogical tasks, less experienced on managerial tasks. The social role is being treated with less importance from both experienced as well as inexperienced tutors.

Moreover, Mason (1991) used a literature review to identify three role functions that online tutors should possess. These do not necessarily have to be carried out by the same person:

- **organisational** role: includes the setting of an agenda for the conference, which means next to describing the objectives of the discussion, giving a timetable, and putting up

⁶ For more detailed description of the three roles see Morris, 2005.

procedural rules and decision-making norms. Additionally the interaction has to be managed with leadership and direction.

- **social** role: contains the creation of a friendly and social environment and perception of each student as part of a community.
- **intellectual** role: suggested as the most important role by Mason (1991), the educational facilitator. This role includes the setting of an intellectual climate of the course, and the modelling of the student’s qualities by for example moderating the discussion, designing a variety of educational experiences, and being helpful concerning the student’s work.

Also Paulsen (1995) focused on the importance of moderating online discussions and further concretised Mason’s (1991) three roles as illustrated in table 2:

Role	Organizational function	Social function	Intellectual function
goal setter	high		
discriminator			high
host	high		
pace setter	high		
explainer			high
entertainer		high	
lecturer		low	high
tutor	high		high
facilitator	high	high	high
mediator	high		high
mentor	low		
assistant			
provocateur			high
observer	low	low	low
participant	low		

Table 2: Concretising Mason’s (1991) roles of the online tutor (adapted from Paulsen (1995))

Paulsen’s findings indicate the complexity of the online tutor role by defining 15 diverse roles.

Based on research of Garrison et al (2000) the primary responsibilities of a teacher are presented in the ‘community of inquiry model’⁷ (Garrison et al., 2000, see figure 3), as part of the category ‘teaching presence’ (Anderson et al., 2001):

- **design and organisation:** include designing and planning the online course
- **facilitating discourse:** maintaining the interest, motivation, engagement of students in active learning, assessing students learning outcomes
- **direct instruction:** providing intellectual and scholarly leadership, share their subject matter knowledge with students

⁷ The Community of Inquiry model assumes that learning occurs within a community through interaction of the three elements: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence; for more detail see for instance Anderson et al., 2001.

It should be mentioned that the ‘teaching presence’ is a means to an end to assist and enhance the two other elements of the ‘community of inquiry’, the social and cognitive presence, in order to enable educational results. It is defined as *‘the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes’* (Anderson et al., 2001a).

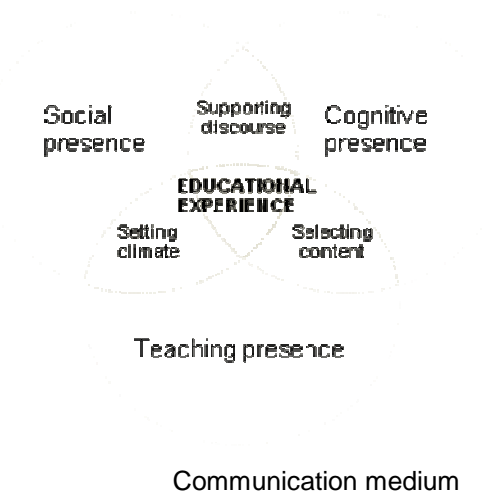


Figure 3: Anderson et al. (2001) ‘community of inquiry model’: Elements of an educational experience

Focusing particularly on the student perspective, Rossmann (1999) identified three roles of the online tutor based on students’ expectations:

- **Faculty responsibility,**
- **Facilitating discussions**
- **Course requirements.**

Recently Schofield (2007) has explored the most important roles of the online tutor as perceived by both tutors and students, illustrated in table 3. Schofield explored perceptions of students studying in year 12 and year 13 as well as from online tutors.

The most important tutor roles*			
Rank	Year 12	Year 13	Tutor
1	Offering emotional support	Monitoring progression of subjects	Offering emotional support
2	Monitoring progression of subjects	Offering emotional support	Monitoring progression of subjects
3	Academic support	Academic support	Academic support
4	Monitoring attendance	Careers advice	Monitoring attendance
5	Negotiating with teachers	Monitoring attendance	Dealing with issues of discipline

* ranked by frequency of response

Table 3: The tutor role from the student and teacher perspectives (adapted from Schofield, 2007)

Finally, a literature review by Julien suggests that the online tutor has to fulfil at least 17 diverse professions (Julien, 2005, p.295):

project manager, curricula planner, designer, knowledge designer, multimedia designer, graphic/art director, contents expert, web designer, software developer, systems administrator, content tutor, technical tutor, mentor, coordinator, evaluation expert, ODL (open and distance learning) methodology expert, the LMS/CMS (learning management system/content management system) expert.

Julien (2005) also assigns all these roles to different levels of online education:

- a) methodological and educational field
- b) managerial and organizational field
- c) technological field.

A summary of the models and categories that focus on the asynchronous nature of the online environment presented thus far is provided in table 4. While these models differ in some aspects, there are strong similarities between them, as all models focus on courses with mainly asynchronous communication. There are a few main differences: Firstly, only Berge's model includes the 'technical role'. In this context Anderson et al. (2001) argue that they have separated the 'technical role' from the teaching presence, as it is not necessarily the role of the online educator. However Berge (1995) has also emphasised that not all of the defined roles have to be carried out by the same person. Following Anderson's argument it is also not necessarily the task of the online tutor to actually create the course in every programme (see for example Salmon, 2004); this is what Mason and Paulsen illustrate in their models focusing on online conferencing without including the design aspect in contrast to Berge and Anderson. In addition, Anderson's teaching presence does not include the purely social aspect categorized by Mason and Berge, which is considered separately within their model. They argue that *'The creation of the social environment is the responsibility of students as well as teachers'* (Anderson, 2001). Paulsen's (1995), Morris et al.'s (2005) and Berge's (2000) models are more or less built on previous models (Berge & Collins, 1995; Mason, 1995), concretising their roles and could thus be subsumed under their foundational model. Rossmann's (1999) categories of the tutor role have a totally different conception by just considering the students perspective. In addition to the other models these categories might provide useful advice for concretising particular identified roles. The presentation of Julien's (2005) tutor role demonstrates an interesting way of combining diverse findings based on the individual situation and roles of the online tutor. In sum, the question: 'Which roles have to be fulfilled by the online tutor?' has no universal answer. Instead of continuing the discussion about the most appropriate categories, it should rather consider the

individual nature of each research sample on the one hand, the research method (see table 4), the course design, and the programme investigated on the other hand, which may be the result of and highlight the similarities and differences of each attempt trying to capture the role of the online tutor. However, the amount of diverse categories of the online tutor reflect the way online education takes place: Each programme might be structured differently by following diverse learning and teaching approaches for instance, lead through various project management strategies, which hence request tasks to be fulfilled by the online tutor. Both Creanor (2002) and Mason (1998) stress *'the diverse nature of online courses'*. Moreover the research methods within the presented studies do vary as shown in table 4 as do the levels of abstraction describing the roles of the online tutor. Paulsen's detailed description of the tutor roles for instance might be subsumed under Berge's four roles of the online tutor. It should also be mentioned that most of these models are generally conceptualised for a manageable group of students. Lentell (2004) argues that there is a need to rethink teaching assumption for larger student numbers, since in many contexts a small tutor-students ratio is unrealistic. Bolloju (2003) underlines her suggestions *'Using a discussion board in large classes can be quite a daunting task for instructors, due to difficulties associated with handling large numbers of messages and simultaneously ensuring that the discussion really does assist in the learning process.'* Lentell (2004) further suggests that further research is needed in order to develop alternative learner support models.

<i>Data Source</i>	<i>personal experience</i>	<i>questionnaires with tutors</i>	<i>interviews with tutors, discussion boards (tutor, students)</i>	<i>literature review</i>	<i>literature review</i>	<i>discussion boards (tutor, students)</i>	<i>questionnaires with student</i>
AUTHOR	Berge (1995)	Berge (2000)	Morris (2005)	Mason (1991)	Paulsen (1995)	Anderson (2001)	Rossmann (1999)
TUTOR ROLE	Pedagogical	Faciliator	Customization	Organisa-tional	Goal Setter	Design, organization	Faculty responsibility
	Social	Manager	Course Monitor/ Faciliator	Social	Discrimi-nator	Facilitating discourse	Facilitating discussion
	Managerial	Filter	Evaluator/ Grader	Intellectual	Host	Direct instruction	Course requirement
	Technical	Expert			Pace Setter		
		Editor			Explainer		
		Discussion Leader			Entertainer		
		Marketer			Lecturer		
		Helper			Tutor		
		Firefighter			Facilitator		
					Mediator		
					Mentor		
					Assistant		
					Provacateur		
					Observer		
				Participant			

Table 4: Models of the online tutor role in a primary asynchronous environment

2.1.3.2 The tutor role in a synchronous environment

As mentioned above online programmes are dominated mainly by asynchronous communication tools (chapter 2.1), in particular discussion boards. Students as well as tutors have the freedom to read and post any contribution to a discussion forum at a time and place of their choosing (Bolloju, 2003). Accordingly, most of the research has focused on the asynchronous nature of the online environment and, so far, little attention has been paid to the synchronous counterpart (Ng, 2007).

The use of chat rooms, for instance, revealed varied research outcomes; some researchers obtained disappointing results using a chat for educational purpose (Burnett, 2003). Agostinho et al. (1997) for example discovered that students' conversations in a chat often lack cohesion and direction, and that students felt a sense of confusion concerning expectations and were only motivated to attend when the chat was related to assessment tasks. It should be noted that the

study was based on small-scale investigations. Ng (2007) found that students often wished to have more time to think about a question and to have in depth discussion in a synchronous online course. Fidas et al. (2006) stress that online tutors should offer synchronous support next to the asynchronous counterpart, as live communication has been recognised as particularly important for online students who expect prompt support and response. Guidelines for computer-mediated communication highlight the social impact on synchronous conversation in a chat room (Burnett, 2003). However it should be acknowledged that a chat conversation easily gets confusing with more than five active, typing participants. Other researchers highlight the specific benefits of utilising a chat; for instance that it allows communication that is immediate and present (Murphy et al., 1998). Burnett (2003) stresses that it is more effective to '*capitalize on the features of online chat, rather than trying to suppress them*' (p.258).

Categories and roles of the online tutor that have been identified within asynchronous course settings might be transferred to the synchronous counterpart. However, both asynchronous and synchronous communications in an online environment to a certain extent require different ways of tutorial support (Ng, 2007). The following section discusses several studies in which the role of the online tutor in a synchronous environment is addressed.

Burnett (2003) and Ligorio et al. (2002) both appear to rely on Mason's (1991; see chapter 2.1.3.1) categories of the online tutor role (without explicitly referring to them) to address the particular role of the tutor in a synchronous environment. Based on these categories, Burnett (2003) describes the challenges an online tutor has to overcome in a synchronous environment and gives some general suggestions (p.250-258). She highlights the social aspect of the synchronous environment, where strategies for a supportive atmosphere should be established and summarises three tasks which create a social atmosphere: encouraging social interaction, affirming individuals' comments, and developing informal use of language. Burnett (2003) further suggests that it is essential to '*be explicit about the expectations for language use in different circumstances*', (pp.259). Burnett (2003) as well as Murphy and Collens (1998) mention the impact on evaluating the way language is used with the students in order to be more efficient in this environment. Moreover, the organisational task has been described as maintaining the focus of discussion by the following strategies (Burnett, 2003, p. 252, 253):

- *Directing*: achieve focus by explicitly directing students to post comments on what the tutor feels is relevant.
- *Selecting*: refer back to previous contributors or contributions in order to select comments that seem to have potential for further discussion.
- *Summarising and re-directing*: recognize and build on comments made by all group members.

- *summarising and waiting*: draw together the themes emerging from discussion, but allow for further student contributions in the same area
- *Maintaining* multiple strands: multiple strands could offer opportunities for layers of reflection to develop that simultaneously make sense of experience in different ways.

Lastly, Burnett (2003) focused on the managerial task in order to prompt discussion. Moreover Ligorio et al. (2002) found that the managerial function has been performed most.

Considering the technical development in information technology, a steadily growing number and wide variety of synchronous communication tools will find their entry in many educational approaches. Chat rooms are standard nowadays in every learning management system (LMS), virtual classrooms (VC), as well as video conferencing are additional pedagogical tools which offer powerful ways of communicating. These changes thus do provide further challenges and additional requirements of teaching online. With the growing complexity of such tools, the efficient utilisation of synchronous communication tools might represent a challenge for most new online tutors. Ng (2007) for instance found that online tutors perceived difficulties in managing the different tools for communication and presentation for synchronous learning as well as the moderation of tutorials.

VC solutions have been identified as appropriate for a broad number of diverse events with different kinds of contents. Within synchronous group work for instance participants may create an effective and positive working atmosphere and some sort of community (Hufnagel & Geisen, 2004). However, the amount of empirical work addressing the moderation of VC sessions is very limited. Hufnagel and Geisen (2004) stress the importance of effective moderation in a virtual team in order to gain a successful virtual team session and for the acceptance of the VC. In addition to universal tasks in online education, such as initiating, coordinating, and keeping communication going, the tutor needs to organise and structure a VC session, similar to a face-to-face meeting by ensuring that they do the following:

- welcome the participants
- present the agenda
- get to know the environment and to test the audio channel
- give information about roles and rights
- work on a content task by using slides or a moderation and creativity-technique
- achieve agreement over the ongoing tasks
- give feedback and
- afterwards a phase of reflection led by the moderator

In Musekamp's (2010) experience, managing the multitasking required by VC sessions in addition to the technical barriers is one of the biggest challenges for instructors (Musekamp, 2010). The

nature of synchronous communication in education indicates that the tutor's role, tasks and duties might change in the online environment over the time, since the development of technology and technological knowledge and expectations beside the students steadily changes.

2.2. Online education and culture

2.2.1 Definition and dimensions of culture

Before considering the role of the online educator in a multicultural or culturally diverse environment, it is essential to illuminate and clarify primary concepts of culture in particular regarding the dimensions of culture and the definition of culture underlying this work.

According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) the anthropologist Edward Burnett Taylor gave one of the first modern definitions of culture, defining culture as *'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'* (Taylor, 1924, p.1). Since then, an amazing amount of different answers to 'What is culture?' has been suggested, often depending on the field of research and the study purpose. In their early work, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified 164 dissimilar definitions of culture across various disciplines, and we have to assume that the number of definitions has grown since then. Considering this varied understanding, it seems impossible to provide one definition of culture that captures all the meanings. Nevertheless, a consent emerged concerning two aspects: (1) *'Culture is a way of live based on some system of sharing meanings; and (2) culture is passed on from generation to generation through this very system'* (Danesi & Perron, 1999, p.1). Researchers further agree on the point that mankind's cultural make-up is layered (Dunn & Malinetti, 2002). Using for example the image of Tompenhaars (1997), who likens the idea of cultural layers to an onion. Outer cultural layers are the most visible and easy to change, though the core sets, our cultural assumption, which is hidden from view, is harder to identify and difficult to change (Dunn & Malinetti, 2002). The global internet culture appears to operate very much at the outer layers, whereas the key aspect of the cultural identity, such as how one learns, might be totally different. Instead of analysing the pool of exciting definitions of culture and choosing the most suited one, or adding a new one, it is also possible to shift the view on 'how culture is viewed in society and the everyday practice of the members of a society'. Following Bodley (2000) the focus might be on three categories: mental - What people think?; behavioural - What people do?; and material - What people produce?.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of culture other researchers have tried to deconstruct the meaning of culture and describe it in the sense of multicultural dimensions. The influential work of Hofstede (1997), for example, has classified the attitude of people towards their jobs and employers along a number of 'dimensions of culture' (Hofstede, 1997). The dimensions are the result of a comparison among nationalities and have been defined as (Hofstede, 2009)⁸:

- (a) **Power Distance Index (PDI)**: *'[...] the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions [...] accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.'*
- (b) **Individualism (IDV)**: *versus its opposite, collectivism ' [...] the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side... societies in which the ties between individuals are loose. On the collectivist side, [...] societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups'.*
- (c) **Masculinity (MAS)**: *versus its opposite, femininity, ' [...] refers to the distribution of roles between the genders.'*
- (d) **Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)**: *'deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity [...]. It indicates to what extent a culture programmes its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations.'*
- (e) **Long-term (LTO)**: *versus its opposite, short-term orientation ' [...] Values associated with Long-term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with Short-term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'.'*

Despite criticisms such as impoverished research design and an oversimplified concept of culture (Baskerville, 2001), Hofstede's (1980) original study of cultures still remains popular (Richards 2004) and, according to Wang (2007), is the most frequently mentioned framework in the literature. Henderson (1996) further explains that Hofstede's dimensions serve as a conceptual anchor in order to understand the influence of culture in computer-mediated communication literature.

Another approach to examining cultural differences, which is often found in the literature, has been established by Hall (1985), who distinguished between high and low context communication. In Mexico for example, a country with high-context communication, communication relies on indirect verbal messages, whereas in the USA, a country with low-context communication, messages provide most of the information in the explicit code itself.⁹ This

⁸ For a detailed description of the dimensions see Hofstede, 2009.

⁹ A more detailed description of low- and high-context communication in relation to e-learning can be found for instance in Bentley et al., 2005, p.122.

approach has recently been used in research on cultural studies and education in addition to Hofstede's work (e.g. Al-Harhi, 2006; Edmundson, 2007; Gunawardena et al., 2001). Because of the high dependence on written communication and lack of verbal cues, distance education represents low-context interaction (Al-Harhi, 2006).

Two different approaches of understanding culture have been presented: On the one hand by investigating the definition of cultures, on the other hand by seeing the dissimilarities among cultures by investigating cultural dimensions which have been invented. In summary, Pinto (2000) will be emphasised, who stresses that culture is too complex to be understood exclusively on the basis of a limited number of dimensions, but they can be very helpful in explaining differences.

2.2.2 Cultural differences in education

Cultural differences in general have been intensely researched (for ex. Hall, 1985; Hofstede, 1997a; Tompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997); however research in relation to e-learning is still limited. Many researchers agree: *'Cultural differences created by language and the various educational and social systems around the world produce learners who are educated, trained, and comfortable learning under different conditions'* (Bentley et al., 2005, p.120). Hence a culturally inclusive learning approach has been emphasised by many researchers supporting a student-centred solution that allows students to consume education in a way which is in line with their own values, beliefs, and learning styles (Chen, 1999; McLoughlin, 1999c). However, Bentley et al (2005) cite the United States as an example, to point out the common expectation that learners from outside the culture should assimilate to the given culture and adopt their values. McLoughlin (1999c) emphasises that it is a potential weakness for institutions offering American-centred learning worldwide without considering diverse educational values and social systems.

In the following section a few cultural differences will be considered in detail with particular focus on their relevance in education. This presentation aims to illustrate the variety of possible differences influencing education. Here the risk of oversimplifying cultural issues and stereotyping different cultural patterns also needs to be considered. Both Selvarajah (2006) and Lui (2007) add in these contexts that the risk of generalisation and therefore, stereotyped concepts, *'[...] turn out to be a hindrance for mutual communication and understanding'* (Lui, 2007, p.40). However, prejudices are also guiding our way of thinking about and acting towards other cultures.

A list of eight cultural differentials that are of value in relation to quality cross-cultural online education has been suggested by Bentley et al. (2005), based on many years of experience and research (pp.118-123):

- Language differential
- Educational cultural differential
- Learning style differential
- High- and Low-context differential
- Social context differential
- Technical infrastructure differential
- Local versus global differential and
- Reasoning pattern differential.

One of the most evident difficulties of teaching a global audience is the matter of language (Olaniran, 2007). Joo (1999) stresses, just knowing the taught language is not a guarantee that one will be able to fully understand a foreigner's online resources. For people teaching and learning in their first language it is often difficult to fully comprehend the disadvantages experienced by those who do not study in their own language (Bates, 2001). Although the asynchronous communication in online education has an advantage in this context (when compared to face-to-face and synchronous online education): Students can take their time to understand the written word; although on the other hand students are not able to recognize the communicator's gestures which may help them to understand the word. People from different cultures tend to misunderstand each other's behaviours; as a result Hofstede (1997) mentions that mistrust among students might arise.

Many studies that focus on the comparison of Western and Non-Western culture (Catterick, 2007; Edmundson, 2005; Rattanapian, 2002; Ryan, 2005; Shattuk, 2005; Selverajy, 2006; Watkins & Murari, 1995) describe Western world views, for example, as competitive, individualistic, and task orientated. In comparison non-Western world views are described as cooperative, collective, and socially orientated.

A major advantage for participants of online programmes is the possibility to work collaboratively (Bates, 2001); however not all participants are able to make use of these opportunities, depending on their cultural background. Focusing on Finish and American students, for example, Kim and Bonk (2000) indicate that Finnish students are more group-focused, reflective and, sometimes, theoretically driven; whereas students from the United States are more action-oriented and pragmatic in seeking results or giving solutions. Some researchers believe that the tendencies of some cultures do correspond better with distance education than the ones of other cultures (Anakwe & Kessler, 1999). In this context Anakwe and Kessler (1999) found that

collectivistic cultural orientation is less consistent with distance education than individualistic cultural orientation¹⁰. In some cultures it is considered inappropriate for students to question the instructor or the knowledge being conveyed in the course, such as most Asian cultures (Kubota, 2007). Indeed this is what Lui (2007) indicates as the critical factor in his study on Japanese students in an online programme of Western design. Hence, Northern European students, for example, might be successful using 'personal learning portals' since they are generally taught to take initiative, ask questions, view instructors as equals, and to be individualists. Such individualised approaches may not suit (for example) Eastern European students at all (Quirgley, n.d.). The co-creation of knowledge and meaning in an online course, coupled with the instructor's role as an equal player in the process, may be uncomfortable for a student from this type of culture. A student whose culture is more communal, and where group processes are valued, may feel uncomfortable in a course where independent learning is the primary mode of instruction (Joo, 1999). A study of Gardner (1989) reveals that Chinese students for example do prefer a 'mimetic' approach to education; doubts about the teachers as well as the learning material are unthinkable. In contrast, a 'transformative' approach is preferred by American students; educators personify more the role of a coach who tries to bring out desired qualities from students. A similar result has been published by Venter (2003). Being isolated from the tutor has raised more concerns for Asian students who regard the teacher as '*a figure of authorities*', and the '*person with the answers*' (Venter, 2007, p.277), whereas students from Europe had more concerns regarding isolation from other students and missing out the possibility of discussion and debates. Further findings of Venter (2001) indicate that uncertainty and self-discipline were particularly difficult for Asian students compared to Europeans. Moreover, rote learning has become unpopular in Western education systems, whereas in some Asian systems it still remains popular (Mason, 1991). Furthermore, expectations among students may differ in relation to their cultural background (McCargar, 1993; Rogers et al., 2007). In addition to this, a study by Shattuk (2005) found that students in an online environment did not perceive a 'third culture¹¹' as often suggested by other researchers (e.g. Mason, 1998). Students within her study recognized that they were '*outside familiar meaning systems and struggled with clashing of their deeply embedded, "non-negotiable" cultural traditions*' (Gunawardena et al., 2003, p.176).

Relating to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (see chapter 2.2.1) the most frequent cause of problems in intercultural interaction has been recognised as differences in power distance and in uncertain avoidance (Hofstede, 1997). Experiences of decision making in multicultural workgroups

¹⁰ The term collectivist and individualist are used in relation to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (see chapter 2.2.1).

¹¹ This third culture develops 'outside both cultures but intelligible to participants from both who are involved in the interactions' (Mason, 1998, p. 156).

further indicate the difficulty to get multicultural groups to function (Hofstede, 1997), particularly groups with both individualistic and collectivistic cultures (assigned to low- and high-context cultures, Annake & Kessler, 1999). Individualist and collectivist cultures have been identified as differing in the way they communicate (Gudykunst, 2004). Individualistic cultures, for example, might monopolise the floor because the setting is not acceptable for collectivists. Additionally their way of dealing with conflicts might be different. Another problem could occur within 'masculinist' cultures, as these participants may refuse to accept each other's ideas as this could indicate defeat. Hofstede's (1997) findings further indicate that members of different (synthetic)¹² cultures had widely different perception of the same event. Accordingly Anakwe and Kessler (1999), Edmundson (2007), and Rogers et al. (2007) all conclude out of their research that the cultural background of the students had an impact on his or her overall perception of distance education. However, students were open to try new approaches to learning, although if it did not align with their cultural backgrounds (Edmundson, 2007).

2.2.3 Cultural adoption in online education

As well as the research into e-learning in general, a great amount of research concerning the role of culture in education has been undertaken. However, the combination of both – cultural aspects of online education – pose particular challenges and empirical knowledge is currently fragmentary and limited. Since the role of the online tutor cannot be considered as independent from that of the course design, the latter will also be included in the following section.

Opening the access to cross-cultural audiences does not necessarily lead to adaptation to changing learning needs in practice; often the resource setting stays the way they were originally developed (Dunn & Malinetti, 2002). The motivation for offering online education is economic, educational and strategic (Joo, 1999; McLoughlin, 1999b). Also, if a University promotes itself as an Institution within a particular cultural setting, Manning and Mayor (1999) stress that, it needs to take into account the possibility of a mismatch between cultural and educational expectations whenever it recruits internationally. A lack of cultural adaptation is a leading reason why e-learning fails to work for a globally distributed audience (Dunn and Malinetti, 2002). Ignoring cultural factors may cause the learner to become frustrated and lead to ineffective learning experiences. In this context it should be noted that most e-learning programmes have been designed by Western institutions and companies and are based on Western learning and teaching strategies. Conversely, the Eastern cultures are the largest and fastest-growing consumer of

¹² In Hofstede's research on 'wired international teams' each group of participants has chosen a 'synthetic national culture' that acted as a collective mental pre-programming for it (Hofstede, 1997).

online education (Edmundson, 2005). For this reason a few recent studies focused on the West-East comparison of online teaching and learning strategies (see chapter 2.2.2 and e.g. Catterick, 2007; Edmundson, 2005; Rogers et al., 2007; Ryan, 2005; Shattuck, 2005).

Cross-cultural communication provides particular challenges and opportunities for the course planner, as online communication lacks the opportunities to, for example, 'give and save face', which is important for some cultures, and to deduce meaning from non-verbal cues (Chase et al., 2002). Miscommunication, as mentioned above (chapter 2.1.2), may be a result of cultural gaps between individuals and the dominant culture in the course. Zorn (n.d.) adds that in addition to paying attention to language, writing, symbols, and colours, cultural, technical, and social aspects need to be addressed in a culturally sensitive design for intercultural communities. The difficulty is to identify which aspects need to be adapted since *'when planning for cultural adaptation it is not cost-effective to address every idiosyncrasy, every identifiable culture'* (Dunn and Malinetti, 2002). It is instead important to discover and integrate those elements *'that make or break the learning experience'*, the ones that Tompenhaars describes as the core layers of the onion (see chapter 2.1.1.). These layers should be described in theories that are rooted in empirical research and describe specific cultures with their distinctive cultural values. Following Dunn and Malinetti (2002) these values are essential parameters that determine the quality of an online course. Both Doherty (2004) and Selinger (2004) go further and suggest that new ethical guidelines may need to be considered, as *'we are faced with the erosion of definitive cultural scripts about ourselves and others'* (Doherty, 2004, p.23). Doherty (2004) highlights *'cyberspace is not colour free, but it needs to have the added artificial colouring and preservatives of nostalgic construction of cultural identities'* (Doherty, 2004, p.23). Within an inclusive investigation on 'Cultural and pedagogical implication of a global e-learning programme' by the Cisco Networking Academy, Selinger (2004) advises that a modification of teaching approaches is necessary, so that students with different cultural backgrounds are supported in order to achieve 'deep learning'.

When planning and delivering online education for a cross-cultural audience also some very general aspects need to be considered. McLoughlin (2007) summarises three areas (p.224):

- Global vs. local perspectives
- Adoption vs. general approaches
- Pedagogical uniformity vs. accommodating cultural diversity

Wang (2007) emphasizes that the particular challenge of addressing a global audience should not be underestimated. A peripherally conducted international programme obviously allows different

adoption than a centrally conducted programme.¹³ Focusing particularly on centrally conducted programmes, the design of instruction generally comprises of a gap between the necessity to ensure flexibility and access to learners of ‘multiple cultures’ and to ensure the need for localisation and to accommodate a particular set of learners’ cognitive styles and preferences (Collis, Remmers, 1997).

Various models and guidelines for instructional design and cultural adoption in a multicultural environment have been developed which consider these propositions (e.g. Collis, 1999; Dunn, 2002; Eberle, 2007; Edmundson, 2007; McCarty, 2007; McLoughlin, 1999a, 1999c; Palaiologou, 2007). Two innovative models will be briefly presented in the following section. Henderson (2007) has initiated the ‘multiple cultural model of instructional design’, an approach considering multiple cultural realities or zones of development on the one side, and allows flexibility and variability for the learner on the other side (Henderson, 2007). Depending on the complexity of the course design, diverse cultural adoption issues are considered. The adoption of such a model would require examining the pedagogical dimensions of the cultures they are providing resources for. McLoughlin (1999a) points out a set of questions that need to be answered in this context such as (p.5):

- ♦ What kind of learning environment is most familiar to the students?
- ♦ How does the cultural background of these students influence their use and view of time?
- ♦ How do students conceive the role of the teacher?
- ♦ What kind of relationship does the student want with a teacher?
- ♦ What kinds of assessment tasks will be fair and unbiased?
- ♦ What rewards and forms of feedback will be most motivating for these students?
- ♦ Is the locus of control congruent with these students’ own sense of personal control?
- ♦ What cognitive styles characterise the target group?

Based on the previous work of Dunn and Malinetti (2002) and Henderson’s ‘multiple cultural model of instructional design’ Edmundson (2007a) has developed the cultural adaptation process (CAP) model, which provides a guide for developing and evaluating online courses n (table 5). According to this model five steps have to be followed when designing a course for an international audience. The model furthermore considers different content types (level 1-4) which require different design strategies. The role of the online tutor is one aspect addressed as a ‘critical *cross-cultural dimension*’ that needs to be considered within step 3 ‘identify media’.

¹³ A peripherally conducted course may provide different course designs considering the diverse cultural background of the participants; in contrast a centrally conducted course offers the same course design for all students.

Online programmes on course level 1 do need a more didactic approach, compared to programmes on level 4, which require a more facilitative tutor role. However the developer emphasizes to optimise this model with additional research findings and experiences in practise, since the *'critical and assistive cross-cultural dimensions need to be further tested'* (p.287).

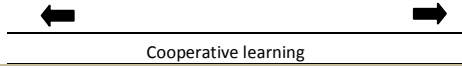
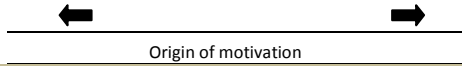
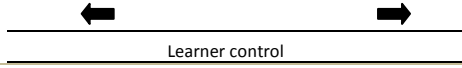
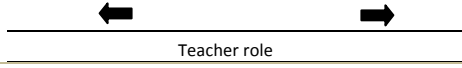
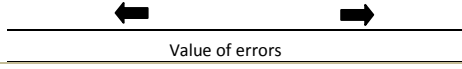
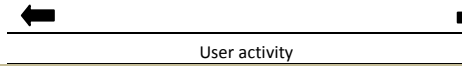
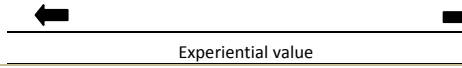
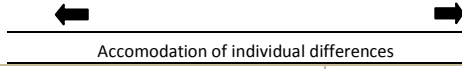
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Step 1: Evaluate content type and examples	Simple information, core knowledge, and concepts, such as those used in application software, most computer related skills	Low-level, cognitive hard skills; simple knowledge and concepts, such as those used in application software; most computer-related skills	Some soft skills, complex knowledge, such as project management, presentation skills, marketing strategy	Mostly soft skills; attitudes and beliefs, such as negotiation skills, motivation, teamwork, conflict resolution
Step 2: Identify pedagogical paradigm, include instructional methods, activities, and so forth	Instructivist-objectivist, with behavioural objectives and sharply-focused goals; low-context communication; Mimetic	More closely related to instructivist-objectivist than constructivist-cognitive paradigm	More closely related to constructivist-cognitive than instructivist-objectivist paradigm	Constructivist-cognitive with cognitive objectives, unfocused goals; High context communication; transformative
Step 3: Identify media	Lecture, handouts, simple demonstration	Satellite broadcasts, audio-conferencing, recordings, television	Threaded discussions, list servers, online chat, e-mail	Videoconferencing, Webbased-training, streaming with media and Web conferencing
Step 3: Identify national level cultural dimensions of learners and critical cross-cultural dimensions (associated features and characteristics) of the course. The following dimensions of e-learning appear to be closely related to cultural dimensions found at the national level. Research indicates that a user's profile (e.g. see the work of Hofstede) will dictate what learners are likely to prefer with respect to these dimensions.				
Critical cross-cultural dimensions	Unsupported			Integral
	Extrinsic			Intrinsic
	Non-extrinsic			Unrestricted
	Didactic			Facilitative
	Errorless learning			Learning from experiences
Step 4: Identify national level cultural dimensions of learners and critical cross-cultural dimensions (associated features and characteristics) of the course. The following dimensions of e-learning are related to potential preferences of groups of e-learning. Assess their preference before modifying or developing any e-learning course because these are known to change based on variables other than cultural dimension at national level.				
Assistive cross-cultural dimensions	Methemagenic			Generative
	Abstract			Concrete
	Non-existent			Multifaceted
Step 5: Adaption strategies	Translation	Localization	Modularization	Originate

Table 5: The cultural adoption process (CAP) model – version 1 (adopted from Edmundson, 2007)

Following a study by Rogers et al. (2007) a deeper understanding, as it has been gained since today, of many cultural aspects would support the instructional designer to create cross-cultural

online education of high quality. Collis (1999) also stresses that *'guidelines in themselves are not enough for cultural flexibility; sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness remain human activities'*. (p.201). He suggests that further research should focus on cultural expectations concerning the teacher-student relationship and roles, issue of saving face, varying need for face-to-face interaction, ideal classroom environment and types of activities engaged in, meta-cognitive strategies learned, writing style, and assessment types.

2.3 Teaching (online) in a multicultural environment

In addition to general adjustments, described in chapter 2.1, that need to be considered when teaching online, cultural differences in internationally recruiting online programmes constitute a further challenge (see introduction; Bründl-Price, 2004; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Fleischhack, 2004; O'Dowd, 2004). The transfer of training techniques for cross-cultural use is accompanied by difficulties for both the trainer and the student (Gilleard, 1998). Mullins et al. (1995) found for instance that international students perceive three to four times more difficulties doing assignments and participating to tutorials compared to local students. Moreover, it should be considered that there are differences for international attendance students and those studying exclusively online. Attendance students, for example, will have more opportunities to adapt to the cultural context the University is placed in or at least will probably be more aware of cultural differences than online students. As mentioned in chapter 2.2 cultural differences will be even more salient in online classes given that *'it is the information and the ideas rather than the students that are mobile'* (Doherty, 2004, p.6). Online students might not have any experiences in working or studying with culturally diverse people at all.

Hence, cultural differences among students and teachers provide a further challenge for educators, as the role of the online tutor might be vital for the success or failure of the online experience (chapter 2.1.). Moreover it is suggested that *'The burden of adaptation in cross-cultural learning situations should be primarily on the teachers.'* (Hofstede, 1986, p.316). As McLean et. al. (2005) notice it is the role of the teacher to correct the student; however it is the role of the student to adjust in relation to the corrections made. McCarty (2004) adds that *'especially when teaching across cultures, an educator cannot take for granted the cultural context as welcoming any practice [...]'* (p.1). As mentioned above in chapter 2.1 the openness of classrooms to an international audience brings about new roles and relationships between the teacher and the student, the teacher and the administrator as well as among teachers and students (Berge & Collins 1995; Joo 1999; Stodel 2006). As shown in the literature review, online

teaching is both an intense intercultural encounter as well as an educational encounter (Leask, 2000).

An array of guidelines and recommendations for instructors teaching international students face-to-face has been published in the past (e.g. Aguado, 2006; Biggs, 1999; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Forest, 1998; Grant, 1992; McCarger, 1993; Ryan, 2000; Watkins, 2000). Moreover, a great amount of research has been carried out investigating the problematic nature of situations in classrooms when teacher and students have different cultural backgrounds (e.g. in Banks & Banks, 1995; Jacob & Jordan, 1993). At the time of conducting this dissertation first guidelines and recommendations that address online education for international students in general had been presented (Carroll, 2005; Dunn, 2002; Eberle, 2007; Edmundson, 2007; Flannery, 2006; Leask, 2000; Moore, 2003; Selinger, 2004; Wang, 2007;). However, in comparison to the production of learning materials and resources, in addition to software and hardware issues, so far little research has been devoted to investigating the role of the online tutor. The paucity of attention given to teaching online at a distance has been lamented by a number of authors (e.g. Shelly, 2006). Lentell (1994, 2003) explains that tutors may 'not be heard' or the importance of their role might even be underestimated. In the following section a selection of studies and discussions that addressing the tutor role in a multicultural environment, in a face-to-face environment and also in the online counterpart, will be presented.

2.3.1 Teaching a multicultural audience face-to-face

In general educators have recognised that students from different cultures learn differently and have different conceptions of learning (Wang, 2006). A challenge for educators teaching a multicultural audience is to establish the required sensitivity towards their students' learning needs and socio-educational learning backgrounds (Gilleard, 1998). Many researchers emphasise that being aware of the students' as well as one's own cultural background is of paramount importance for teaching in these situations. Levy (1997), for example, argues that '*without a working knowledge of students' homelives and cultural backgrounds, teachers risk misunderstandings which can damage the educational experience for all involved.*' (p.50). Thus, not considering different cultural needs may lead to misunderstandings, prejudice, stereotyping, and low student achievement. In addition to the awareness of students' cultural backgrounds teachers should be able to reflect on their own training practice (Gilleard, 1998) as well as on their own cultural background by establishing some sort of 'meta-awareness' (Carroll, 2005a). Being aware of cultural differences may help to re-interpret previously negatively viewed behaviour by

using an established technique called 'cultural-repair'¹⁴ (Carrol, 2005a). Furthermore, one needs to be aware that different cultural backgrounds may lead to different expectations concerning the teacher and student's role (McCargar, 1993). It is thus beneficial to know students' expectations (also see chapter 2.1.1). Knowing the expectations of participants may help to reduce problems which originate from unfulfilled expectations by guiding students towards the ones that can be fulfilled. However, teachers need to realise in this context that '*expectations may change slowly or very little*' (McCargar, 1993, p.2001). By recognising cultural differences Carroll (2005a) outlines additional abilities educators should possess: being explicit about assessment, teacher-student relationship, academic writing, and teaching methods. Carroll (2005a) adds that it is one of the competencies of teachers to know when and how to be explicit as well as what to be explicit about.

In developing teaching styles and assessment methods for students with diverse cultural backgrounds, Selvarajah (2006) further stresses that it is necessary to be able to comprehend the student's intention for enrolling in the programme. Assessment methods which do not consider different learning styles of the students '*will limit the extent to which expected knowledge transfer takes place.*' (Selvarajah, 2006, p.153). Investigations of Selvarajah (2006) revealed that Chinese students and New Zealand European students do prefer different assessment methods¹⁵.

To sum up, for developing cultural core competencies when teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms, two pathways have been defined (McLean, 2005, p.46):

- Becoming more aware of one's own cultural 'pre-programming'
- Learning about cultural encoding of others

It is the combination of the just mentioned awareness and general teaching abilities that enables the educator to deliver high quality teaching in class. Gilleard (1998) for instance identified three approaches which may help learning in intercultural environments (p.93):

- heightened awareness to stereotypical cultural learning backgrounds;
- responsiveness to learning barriers;
- ability to creatively exploit learning gaps.

Following a suggestion of Kern (2000), who focuses on language education, it is a particularly crucial task of the teacher in intercultural exchanges to lead follow-up discussions in order to

¹⁴ For details about this technique please see Carroll, 2005a.

¹⁵ The assessment process provides also what Doherty (2004) describes as negative potential of cultural differences; for details about positive and negative potential of cultural differences see Doherty (2004).

enable examination and interpretation of produced text. As mentioned in chapter 2.1.3.2, teacher immediacy has an impact on the effectiveness of teaching, which may be moderated by cultural differences. For instance, a study by Powell and Harville (1990) found that Asian and Latino students require a higher degree of teacher immediacy than Western students. For Asian students a relaxed and expressive behaviour of the tutor was of importance and a lack of that immediacy and hence a lack of social presence might lead to frustration. Ryan (2005) further recommends that international students should get the opportunity to demonstrate their skills; home students moreover should be taught to listen and learn from other experiences. In addition to gaining more globalised knowledge, Ryan (2005) and Mc Lean (2005) argue that it is the aim to support the ability of students to work in global settings.¹⁶ Globally experienced instructors agree on the point that educators who aim to develop cross-cultural skills, knowledge and competence require face-to-face experiential learning with people from other than their own cultural background (cited by Merryfield, 2001, p. 146).

Coming back to the previously mentioned key issues of cultural differences that need to be explored (chapter 2.2.2), referring to Gibb (1996) Richards and Ross (2004, p.260) suggest that an *'effective enterprising approach to teaching and learning is possible, provided a number of key cultural matters are addressed.'* As discussed in chapter 2.2.3 one of the challenges is to identify those key issues. As a result of investigating a Singapore and Australia offshore programme, Richards and Ross (2004) develop a combination of Hofstede's dimensions and Gibb's Model of Teaching (1996), which is presented in figure 4.

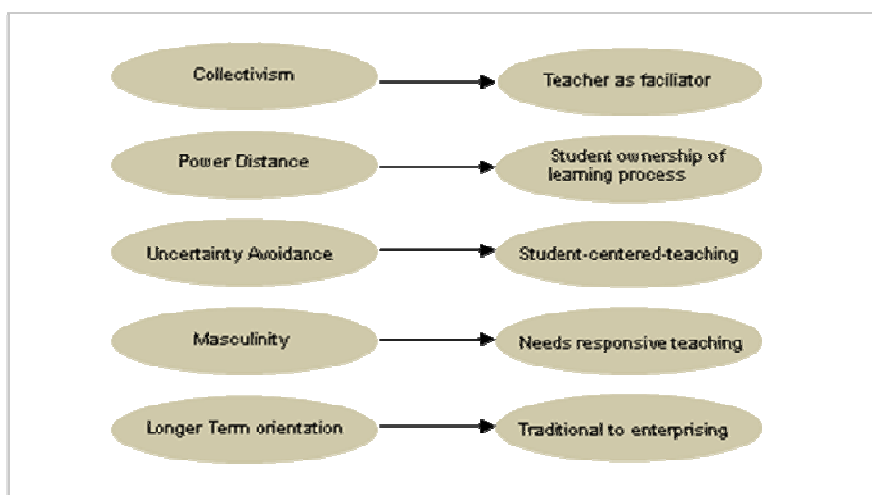


Figure 4: Hofstede and Gibb: The link between culture and enterprise teaching (adapted from Richards and Ross, 2004, p.263)

¹⁶ Further works which describe these pathways in more detail can be found for instance in McLean (2005) and Ryan (2000).

Currently the empirical evidence for this model is still lacking (Edmundson, 2007; Wang 2007). It would be potentially worthwhile to pursue the approach presented by Richards and Ross (2004) further.

2.3.2 Challenges and skills teaching online in a multicultural environment

As we have seen, some empirical work addresses the challenges and task of teaching a multicultural group of students face-to-face (chapter 2.3.1). As teaching online is an even more complex task (chapter 2.1) and to a certain degree follows its own principles (chapter 1.3) the questions arise: whether and to what extent findings from studies concerning face-to-face education are also relevant to the online counterpart. Furthermore, one may ask which additional strategies and tasks need to be considered. With these questions in mind, this chapter will discuss the particular task of online educators.

In addition to the multicultural aspect of international programmes the online tutor is confronted with particular challenges. In the online environment, *'the student remains physically and socially within the different culture, a culture that is foreign to, and mostly unknown to, the teacher'* (Moore, 2006, p.1). Tutors are required to understand their changing role in this educational setting and need to realise that *'one-size fits all is not going to be successful with different cultures and different learning styles'* (Olaniran, 2007, p.29). In chapter 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 some findings and suggestions have been presented which might guide the way tutors should act in the multicultural environment. Bates (2001) further reminds us that when distance education crosses national borders it *'raises questions concerning values and beliefs [...] that everyone who enters into the process of teaching has to operate on the basis of a set of values and ethics'* (p. 122).

Gorski (2004) suggests that it is most important that educators set off and take on a process *'of examining one's own perspectives, prejudices, and biases and how these are informing our teaching practice and thus affecting our students' learning'* (p.47). However the process of deciding about teaching approaches is not necessarily a conscious one, as Catterick (2007) adds¹⁷. Catterick's objection highlights the complexity and difficulty of reflecting upon one's own culture. Cultural awareness does not happen automatically and an unawareness of cultural differences may lead to intercultural communication barriers (O'Dowd, 2004). It is the role of the online tutor to support cultural awareness among students so that students become aware of cultural differences and the culture of the institution (Beltz, 2002). Moreover culturally different

¹⁷ A brief reflection of diverse teaching strategies can be found in Catterick, 2007, pp.119-121.

expectations regarding the roles of 'teacher' and 'learner' need to be addressed (Osman 2007). Leask (2005) provides a summary of four aspects the online tutor needs to understand to broaden their cultural awareness (p.26):

- local culture(s) including the political, legal and economic environment
- teachers' own culture affects the way they think, feel and act
- culture affects how we interact with others
- the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students

Based on her study of e-mail exchanges between students of a German and an American University, Belz (2001) further underlines the importance of identifying the way macro features of context and setting can affect the development of intercultural learning in networked exchanges. It is also suggested that intercultural awareness could be best obtained if tutors *'give students an opportunity in developing their intercultural competence not simply through teacher-created activities, but also through dealing with the realities of their and their partners' worlds'* (O'Dowd, 2004, p.230). Chan (2002) further found that students appreciate online tutors who have the ability to tolerate new ideas and different opinions in order to support critical thinking and helping students to explore different perspectives (Chan, 2002). Another piece of advice for handling the multiculturalism of an online group has been presented by McLoughlin (2007). McLoughlin goes beyond the suggestion of Aguado and Malik (2006), who advise to focus on diversity and accepting as the norm (see chapter 2.3.1). Instead of focusing on cultural differences in the first stage when teaching online, a tutor starts *'by noticing differences objectively and by attempting processes that might be termed 'assimilation'; that is we attempt to assist students to blend in with the majority rather than capitalise on cultural differences'* (p.232). In the second stage tutors should accommodate their teaching strategies, after recognising and adjusting cultural differences; followed by the last stage where the tutor should try to extend students' cognitive abilities while focusing on learning. Creanor (2002) adds the importance of being constantly aware of changing circumstances and the learning process within a running course in order to decide which pedagogical technique to bring into play.

Eberle and Childress (2007) point out that tutors should be aware that many countries do not support Western views such as feminism, individualism, and secularism and that a missing sensitivity for such differences may affect the reaction of students towards learning activities and collaboration. Students with an individualistic cultural background, for example, do require a facilitator or coach who allows them to control their own learning, whereas students with a collectivist cultural background seek individual or group guidance in completing a task or

assignment (Olaniran, 2007). A student-centred, constructivist approach is the mainstream pedagogical approach in native English-speaking countries whereas institutional cultures in Africa, the Middle East, Russia, and Asia tend to use a more teacher-centred and instructive approach (McCarty, 2007). In line with this McLoughlin (2007) highlights that there is often a divergence between what teachers perceive as their roles and what students perceive as the main focus of learning. While stressing the importance of being aware of cultural differences, authors also warn of two risks: stereotyping (McLoughlin, 2007) and tokenism (Henderson, 2007). McCarty (2004) advises that online tutors should rather be *'cautious about stereotyping students based on nation of origin or a static notion of culture'* (p.1).

With a growing cultural awareness online educators are able to insert tasks into their teaching which might benefit the online cross-cultural learning processes. Selinger (2004) advises that the role of the online tutor is to make the curriculum culturally and pedagogically relevant for the students. As the student should feel comfortable in their learning environment the curriculum has to be adapted for presentation. However in this context the institution's beliefs, core values, and behaviour might have some impact on the adoption as well (Carroll, 2005a). Specific activities and assignments can help to 'break the cross-border ice' especially in the preliminary phase of a course (Le Baron et al., 2000). Here cultural issues might be a matter of the induction programme. Doherty (2004) for instance mentions the positive impact of integrating cultural differences in the course curriculum as a discussion point. Findings of Doherty's case study reveal that all students get involved in such an approach, since not just issues of different cultural groups were discussed; moreover diversities within the domestic group were presented as well. Furthermore online educators should possess the ability to *'engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work'* (Leask et al., 2005, p.25). However integrating students in synchronous discussion and group work might be difficult since globally dispersed teams living in different time zones might have problems finding a suitable time to meet. Since online education is primarily a reading and writing medium Cook and Crawford (2007) highlight the effective use of semiotics for instructional designers and online tutors in a cross-cultural environment.

Leask et al. (2005) summarise a set of skills online tutors in a multicultural environment need to possess: (pp.5-6, 32-33):

1. Be experts in their field, knowledgeable in the discipline within both an international and a local context (where local refers to the offshore context), and both informed about the latest research and able to incorporate it into their teaching
2. Be skilled teachers and managers of the learning environment: able to acquit the operational issues involved in teaching offshore effectively and efficiently

3. Be efficient intercultural learners culturally aware and able to teach using culturally appropriate materials and culturally appropriate methods which recognise the critical role played by language and culture in learning and be flexible enough to make adjustments in response to student learning needs
4. Demonstrate particular personal attitudes and attributes for example, approachable, patient, encouraging and passionate about what they are teaching.

Further aspects online tutors (and instructional designers) should consider when teaching online to (and designing e-learning for) an international audience have been presented by Eberle et al. (2007) who categorises these aspects into seven points: clientele identification; abilities/disabilities; language; culture; gender; time barriers; technology. Within these categories Eberle et al. (2007) give some general and very basic suggestions, ranging from avoiding national chauvinism to the use of simplified writing¹⁸. Moreover O'Dowd (2005) and Cifuentes and Murphy (2000) highlight the benefits of a close working relationship between teaching staff for the quality of online education. The relationship between colleagues, also if from diverse countries, can be used for intercultural understanding and may help to increase students' cultural understanding too. This suggestion has been mentioned previously when addressing face-to-face education (chapter 2.3.1).

Wang and Reeves (2007) have summarised guidelines and principles for tutors in a globalised environment that have been developed from McLoughlin and Oliver (1999a), Collis (1999), Bentley (2005). A summary of these principles and guidelines is presented in table 6.

¹⁸ For more details see Eberle et al. (2007).

Principles for Teachers
Adopt an epistemology that is supportive of multiple perspectives
Create flexibility in learning goals, tasks, and modes of assessment
Design authentic learning activities and task aligned with the learner's existing skills and values of their own community
Ensure different forms of support within and outside the community
Create online journal to manage self-directed learning
Attempt to increase students' self-confidence and motivation early in the course by providing necessary scaffolding
Design activities that enable small groups to give feedback to members of those groups
Discuss embedded values explicitly and honestly in class
Encourage students to keep writing in an online class and to lower internal editor when composing their messages
Provide clear guidelines for online communication to avoid unnecessary confusion
Clarify the level of English skills required in the course
Use simple sentences structures
Avoid slang, colloquialism, and local humor when possible

Table 6: Principles for Teachers (Wang and Reeves, 2007, p. 11, 12)

Finally, findings from McLoughlin (2007) will be presented which provide an example how the needs of a multicultural audience might be met through focusing on assessment, learning activities and curriculum aims (table 7).

Teaching learning activities	Curriculum objectives	Assessment tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active, inquiry-based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of performance verbs (explain, solve, analyse, compare, evaluate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure real world authenticity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicate levels of desired student performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure multiple perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-regulated 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-directed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scaffolded 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include peer and self-assessment

Table 7: Constructivist pedagogy and cultural inclusive through web-based course tools (adapted from McLoughlin, 2007, p.232)

General suggestions for teaching online, which have been provided in chapter 2.1.1 can obviously not be taken as independent of the issues mentioned in this chapter. Skills which have been

mentioned earlier by Leask et al. (2005) are closely related and interconnected with those listed here, such as the relationships between the teacher's knowledge of the student's social, educational, and cultural background and their skills in offering learning activities which suit the learning needs of the online students. The second issue 'how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act' influences the tutor's capacity to engage with students with diverse cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work, assess students' feedback, and reflect on and learn from their own teaching experience. Interestingly Leask et al. (2005) found that cultural knowledge was ranked as most important by academic and management staff

One issue that has not been mentioned within all the discussion around cultural awareness and adoption is the connection of course design and the role of the online tutor. In other words: To what degree should the diversity be adapted? McLoughlin (2007) concretises 'When to adapt to cultural differences?' by suggesting that there should be no initial focus on cultural differences, rather on 'assimilation'. However the CAP model (presented in chapter 2.2.3) provides an answer to this question and suggests that a constructivist-cognitive pedagogical paradigm requires more facilitative pedagogical techniques, whereas an objectivist-instructivist paradigm needs a more didactic exposition of knowledge (Edmundson 2007). Moreover, the grade of cooperative learning support depends on the pedagogical paradigm. However although the CAP model is based on several empirical works, it still needs to be tested in practice and within further research, validated or modified.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature review

The literature review identified three main research fields that are relevant to this study (chapter 2.1, 2.2, 2.3). By nature of the research these areas cross discipline boundaries between educational science and psychology and computing and cultural studies which adds to the complexity of the study. The literature review furthermore outlined the problem that has been addressed in the present research. Empirical studies focusing on the tutor role in a multicultural environment that is purely online are currently rare, while the necessity of such studies has been clearly identified. Moreover it has been demonstrated that the tutor plays a central role in online education and that cultural knowledge and awareness are important aspects when teaching online in an international environment.

3 Research Method and Background

3.1 Introduction

Given the fact that the role of tutors in a pure online and multicultural environment is a newly evolving research topic and little detailed research has been carried out to date, it is crucial to start out with a broad approach. By using an open, qualitative approach, the research will seek to sample a wide range of experiences and views and to get a *'better understanding of the subject matter at hand'* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.4). Qualitative research is particularly useful to investigate complex issues (Lewis, 2003) and seeks to understand phenomena within its unique context (Joniak, n.d.). As the literature review illustrated, the role of the tutor in a pure online and international environment has to be understood as a complex issue, considering, for example, the different perspectives from which these roles can be viewed (e.g. student's, instructor's, institution's, researcher's) and the differences between the disciplines or subjects involved (e.g. education, IT, culture, and the taught subject). Crotty (1998) also advocates that qualitative research has the ability to gain information in a depth that may be unachievable by quantitative studies.

To elucidate the research process and the involved underlying assumptions, I will introduce the nature of the chosen research approach before describing the method in detail.

Since the term 'qualitative research' represents an overarching category for a wide field of approaches and methods within diverse research disciplines (Flick, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Joniak, n.d.), researchers have tried to capture the essence by offering different working definitions. There is general agreement that *'qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social world'* (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p.3). Others describe qualitative research by concentrating on key aspects of the methodology, such as the flexible nature of the research design, the volume and richness of data or the observational methods (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Additionally, some authors express their views by explaining what qualitative research is not. Strauss and Corbin (1998), for instance, delineate qualitative research as *'any type of research that produces findings not arrived by statistical procedures or other means of qualification'* (p.10-11).

For practical purposes, though, it seems important to highlight a set of widely accepted key elements that describe qualitative research (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003, p.3-5):

- Focusing on in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of the participants by getting to know their circumstances, experiences, perspectives and histories
- The sample size is small and selected on the basis of particular criteria
- The data collection method allows close contact between participants and researcher
- Emerging data are detailed, rich, and extensive
- Analysis enables openness to emerging concepts and ideas
- Research findings interpret social meaning by 'mapping and re-presenting the social world of the participants'.

It should be noted that not all of these elements have to be present. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3), for example, point out that data collection in qualitative research is not necessarily based on a close contact between researcher and participant since it might involve other data such as texts and productions. Moreover, the sample size may vary because using methods such as focus groups may increase sample sizes quite significantly.

Qualitative research is also largely understood as the epistemology of interpretivism, hence researchers are supposed to understand the social world through the participant's and their own perspective and should offer explanations by meaning instead of causation. Although it is debated whether qualitative research should be considered a deductive or inductive approach, I rely on the view expressed by Flick (2006) and Lewis and Ritchie (2003), who consider it an *inductive* approach, arguing that the theoretical background of the researcher influences the research as well. For this reason, I decided to include the literature review, an issue often discussed by researchers. I used the literature review to provide an overview of the area of research and explain the significance and necessity of the research, and tried to make use of the chosen methods (chapter 3.2) in a more or less inductive way. Strauss (1991) emphasises that in this context the openness for new insights does not depend on the ignorance of content already known, it rather relies on a methodical way of searching for new insights. Pre-knowledge and experiences serve therefore as sensitising concepts to increase theoretical sensitivity. Therefore, I would prefer to describe my methodological approach as semi-inductive.

3.2 The Grounded Theory approach

The GT approach initiated by Glaser and Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 2005), has been selected since it offers appropriate methods and tools for this study. The main aim of GT

is to generate descriptive models of human behaviour that are grounded in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is in general not a preconceived theory in the researcher's mind which guides the initiation of the study. The researcher rather allows the theory to emerge from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.12) argue that theory which is drawn from data *'is more likely to resemble the reality than it is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experiences or solely through speculation'*. Instead of starting with a theoretically derived hypothesis, I decided to start from the actual perceptions and experiences of staff and students involved in online education (chapter 4.1.2). At a later stage within this study superior theory status can also be considered. GT enables the complex, multi-faceted aspects to emerge without pre-imposing rigid definitions, and for prospective research to be more grounded in real-world, lived experiences of concrete practitioners (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding & Cebrary, 2002). In particular, for the not much penetrated topic addressed in this study, these aspects seem to be important. Apart from the general assumption of the importance of culture in cognition (Neuliep, 2003), I began with no particular presuppositions as to how considerations of the cultural and online environment might influence the perception of the online tutor and the students. In line with this, the literature review was structured according to the general structure of research and not to guide the research process. Rather, my intent was to allow online tutors and students to tell me as authentically as possible how they perceived the pure online and multicultural environment in the investigated programme.

The GT approach on the one hand offers a sense of vision *'where it is that the analyst wants to go with the research'* and on the other hand a set of techniques and procedures which *'furnish the means for bringing that vision into reality'* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.8). GT provides a highly structured process which provides the opportunity to produce data where not much is known about the process or experience being studied (Giddings & Wood, 2000). While offering a highly structured process (see chapter 3.2.2), GT enables flexibility and creativity, which has been perceived as particularly important for the study, since not much is known about this field of research. One strength of GT is the opportunity to constantly reflect on the process of investigation and, when identified as required, to shift to or integrate another way of data collection or adding additional samples. In light of these considerations the GT approach seemed appropriate for the purpose of this study.

3.2.1 Philosophical background

The roots of GT are located in the positivist traditions of Glaser (Glaser, Strauss, 1967) and in the empirical traditions of the Chicago school field research and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism of Strauss' upbringing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss, experienced in qualitative

studies, introduced the symbolic interactionism in order to underpin the methodological approach of GT; Glaser, whose previous work has been influenced by quantitative analysis, introduced comparative analysis to the process in order to identify, develop, and relate concepts. The result of their collaboration was a new methodology, focusing on the discovery of theory or explanations of phenomena by systematically following a set of procedures to develop theory grounded in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The GT approach is informed by a constructionist epistemology, the foundation of the symbolic interactionism. This epistemology is that meaning is constructed, that there is no objective truth or knowledge, and meaning is derived from a social context in order to explain human reality (Crotty, 1989). The underlying assumption is that humans live in a world of social objects or symbols. The symbolic interactionism is known as a theory about how meanings are produced by humans through interacting with symbols (Joniak n.d.). It has its roots in pragmatism, where truth can be seen as being in a constant state of change (Bowers, 2000) and linked to outcome (Crotty 1998). Lewis (2003) explains symbolic interactionism as an exploration of behaviour and social roles in order to *'understand how people interpret and react to their environment'* (Lewis 2003, p.13). Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the term *'symbolic interactionism'*, summarises the basic assumptions as:

- (a) Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
- (b) the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
- (c) these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p.2).

Consequently the central starting points of research are the different ways subjects set meaning to objects, events, and experiences and so on. The instrument to analyse social worlds are the reconstruction of such subjective points of view (Flick, 2006). An additional central assumption has been offered within the *'Thomas-Theorem'*: The assumption that when a person defines a situation as real, this situation is in its consequence real, does lead directly to the fundamental methodological principle of symbolic interactionism: Researcher must see the world from the perspective of the subject that they are investigating (Stryker, 1976).

Based on these assumptions the methodical consequence to reconstruct the perspective of a subject follows different aspects (Flick, 2006):

- In the form of subjective theories, with which humans explain the world or at least a particular universe of discourse as fragments of this world;

→ In the form of autobiographic narratives, with which bibliographic progressions are copied out of a subject's perspective.

Hence, symbolic interactionism zooms in on the individual instead of the system. It looks at the perspective of persons being studied by taking the role of the other and understanding reality from the perspective of the participant (Chenitz, 1986). The aim pronounced in new developments in psychological research is also to reconstruct subjective theories (Flick, 2006). This might be the reason why GT is being considered more in psychological research.

The underlying assumption of symbolic interactionism in relation to qualitative research is not absolute. The relationship nowadays stays often rather implicit and perspectives of research shift their interest from subjects to interactions (Flick, 2006). The focus of this pole of qualitative research is on subjective meanings of participants. Joniak (n.d.) summarises '*Knowledge is not gained through discovery of objective truths, but created through understanding of a phenomenon/text/object within a particular context. Moreover, understanding is not immutable, but rather fluid in nature.*'

The collaboration of the GT founders Glaser and Strauss with such a diverse research background initially enabled this particular method to emerge; while at a later stage in the 1970s, these differences may have led to the conclusion of any further collaboration. The consequence was that GT developed in two different directions (see figure 5):

- Glaser's GT: a more inductive approach with trust in the emergence of theory out of data if they are analysed long enough.
- Strauss and Corbin's GT in contrast: more related to empirical criteria of verifiability (Reineck, 2005).

Moreover, Charmaz (1985) provides a constructivist interpretation which seems to rely more closely on earlier work of Glaser and Strauss instead of later directions presented by Strauss and Corbin.

The methodology of this study will rely more strongly on the direction of Strauss and Corbin, since it is more specific regarding the treatment of theoretical pre-knowledge and the problem of verification.¹⁹ Glaser's approach of leaving data untouched by the researcher's interpretations has been criticised by Charmaz who argues that '*no analysis is neutral*' (Charmaz, 2005, p.510).

¹⁹ For more information about the two emerging directions of Glaser and Strauss see Strübing (2004, p. 64-73).

As for this study it seemed to be appropriate to be more open to existing insights and experiences from recent research (see chapter 2) the direction of Strauss and Corbin was considered to be more suitable. Moreover, as will be explained in the following chapter (3.2.2), the structured coding paradigm (of Strauss) seemed particularly useful.

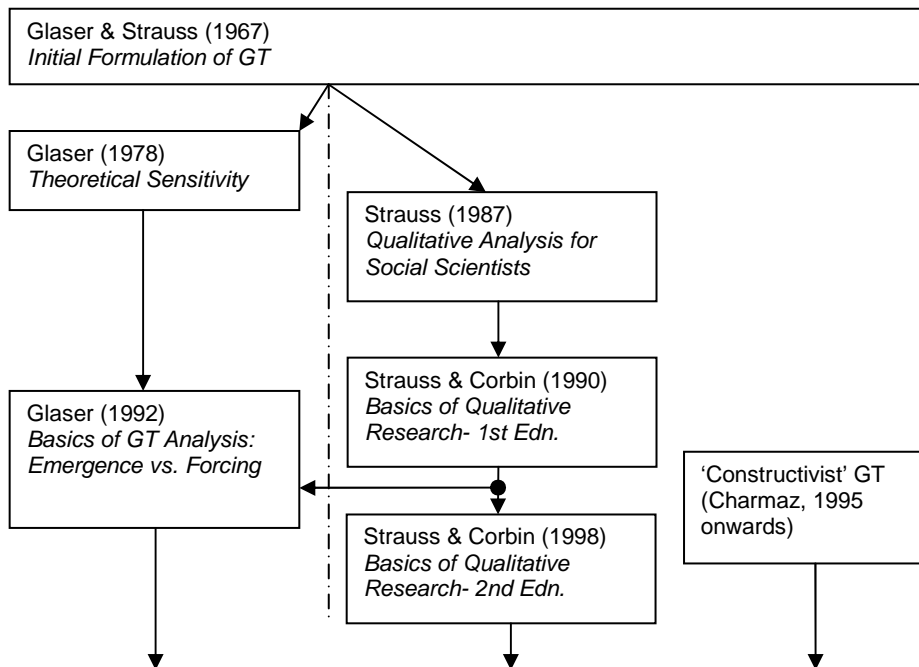


Figure 5: Key stages in GT development (adapted from Harwood, 2002, p.67)

3.2.2 Circularity of research process

In contrast to many other, in particular quantitative, research approaches the GT follows a circular rather than a linear process (Flick, 2006). Here data collection, data analysis, and eventually theory are closely related to each other. The circular process of data collection, analyses, and theory should be repeated in GT until saturation has been reached (Reineck & Szalai, 2005). In this context, saturation means that the collection would not add that much more to the study and would thus be counterproductive (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Reaching and determining this point might be very time consuming and Flick (2006) highlights that the circumstances of the whole research process (for instance time and financial resources) do also determine to what degree saturation is reached. Flick (2006) argues that the circularity itself, if utilised correctly, is a strength of this approach. Through this process the researcher is forced to constantly reflect on the whole research process and its separate steps. Besides the obvious advantage of this process the researcher experienced the openness of this approach as time consuming.

The set of analytical tools provided within GT has been perceived as being particularly useful for this study, since the coding paradigm can be seen more as a guide than a strict instruction that

needs to be followed. In this context Reineck and Szalai (2005) stress the importance of discretionary-margins and the abandonment of strict systematisation of methodological rules, since our social world provides a variety of coincidences, which might have influence on collection and analysis of data. Also the individual approach of the researcher, their ability and context-knowledge might be blocked or destroyed by strict rules. Accordingly, Strauss rather considers their methods as guidelines which should act as orientation while doing research; at the same time the provided methods should indicate that some operations within qualitative research however are unavoidable (Reineck & Szalai, 2005).

3.2.3 Building theory

GT aims to generate theory. Since the term 'theory' might be used with different meanings it is necessary to explain briefly what is meant in this context. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the process of theorising as a complex activity which is well separated from description and conceptual ordering.²⁰ The following definition of theory, relying on Strauss and Corbin (1998), has been the foundation for the study: *'a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena'* (p.15). Hence, theorising goes beyond offering an understanding or a vivid picture, it rather brings about the possibility to explain and predict events while providing guides to action. Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that theory is never finished, it is rather always evolving. The general descriptive presentation style of the emerging theory in GT approaches, where implicit declarations are embedded in discussion and description, enables that impression of 'everlasting development' (Strauss 1991) and the derivation of additional hypotheses. Hence, the researcher abandons mainly any formal empirical declaration, which however might leave the tendency that the theory is 'fixed' instead of evoking the wish of continuing development.

3.3 Researcher's background

In all qualitative research approaches the researcher is considered to be the research instrument. Hence, the researcher can *'grasp systematically and reflect holistically on the phenomenon under study while remaining sensitive to the influence of a personally shaped history'* (Rossman & Rallis as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3). Following Denzin and Lincoln (2000) the qualitative researcher is described as 'bricoleur', as a 'maker of quilts' (p. 5) weaving together data and research techniques into a useable, whole pattern. Moreover, Marshall and Rossmann (1999, p.

²⁰ For further details about description and conceptual ordering see Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 16-21.

25-28) argue that the 'circle of inquiry' recognises that the guiding assumptions of the researcher impact where, how, and why the researcher enters into the web of observation, discovery, understanding, interpretation, analysis, explanation, or intervention. The conducted study evolved from the researcher's personal experience [as an "enquiring self" (Usher et al., 1997, p.217)] with online education, tutors, and international students.

Therefore a brief overview of my background is provided in the following, particularly addressing aspects that are closely related to the research topic.

'My interest in the topic of e-learning is a result of my professional occupation. While studying business computing at the University of Hamburg/Germany in 2002 I was working part-time at the Beiersdorf AG in order to support an e-learning project. This work gave me the opportunity to write my Masters Thesis in the area of 'quality assurance in e-learning'. With the aim of broadening my knowledge in this area I visited the workshop 'Train the E-Trainer'²¹ at the University of Hamburg/Germany. Since then I have been working as a freelancer supporting diverse e-learning projects. I am teaching and supporting e-tutors and students, particularly online, am developing online content, and administrating the teaching and learning platform for the 'TeleLearn-Akademie'²² in Hamburg. After having attended the course, 'E-Moderating' by Gilly Salmon²³, I had the opportunity to lead this course by myself. Moreover I am working at the e-learning office at the University of Hamburg²⁴, consulting instructors in all areas of quality e-learning. Through these experiences I got to know the field of e-learning from diverse perspectives and found out about the complexity of teaching online. Depending on the course design I experienced the tutor role often as a leading function in relation to the quality of the course, impacting on dropout rates and the confidence of students within a programme. My interest in intercultural themes emerged mainly out of various stays abroad in India, Italy, and Australia. Living and working in foreign countries increased my own cultural knowledge as well my awareness for cultural variations. However I perceived working in a foreign country as enriching, furthermore as quite often challenging. When realising that more and more Universities, particularly English speaking ones, are offering their programme worldwide, I was interested in how the cultural aspect has been considered in course design and teaching methods. My personal view on this topic is mainly influenced by work of Edmundson (2007) who stresses the necessity of considering cultural aspects in cross-cultural programmes.'

²¹ For more details see http://www.aww.uni-hamburg.de/fstz_angebote_tet.html

²² For further details see <http://www.telelearn-akademie.de>

²³ For more details see <http://www.atimod.com>

²⁴ For more details see <http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de>

3.4 The research process

3.4.1 Sampling procedure

Theoretical sampling, the method of data collection in GT, has been used in this study and can be seen in its basic form as typical way of data collection in qualitative research (Flick, 2006). Theoretical sampling means that decisions about data collection take place based on concrete criteria about content instead of abstract methodological criteria; in other words it is not based on representation, but rather on relevance. Flick (2006) argues that it is closer to everyday life than a method that focuses mainly on representation. While analysing data, decisions about additional data collection are made at the same time (Glaser & Strauss, 2005). Glaser and Strauss (2005) stress the possibility that a routine and previously fixed sample choice might direct the researcher in a wrong direction. Just at the beginning of a project the choice of samples ensues based on theoretical and practical precognitions (Reineck & Szalai, 2005).

This study concentrates particularly on the role of the tutor in traditional face-to-face Higher Education institutions where the tutor role has suddenly and occasionally shifted from face-to-face towards online education.

As explained in chapter 1.4 the online CTP programme at LJMU has been chosen for investigation at the beginning of the study. Altogether, seven instructors of the University were involved in the online MSc programme. The pure online mode of the programme enables students from all over the world to participate in the MSc in CTP. In general most of the students participating are English native speakers, mainly living in the United Kingdom (UK). However a few students are from non-English speaking countries, for instance other European countries, Asia, or South and Middle America. Course candidates must fulfil a range of requirements for attendance: at least 21 years old, have shown proficiency in English (IELS, TOEFL), posses ICT skills and access to ICT equipment in order to use Blackboard, have a degree in Psychology or in other subjects that shows a suitable level and relevance of background knowledge and competence or an adequate professional qualifications and/or experience. Key and indicative resources of the online CTP contain books, book chapters, journal articles, web sites and other online materials. The main part of the communication in the course takes place asynchronously in forums of each module. Here topics and themes provided by the tutor are supposed to promote interaction, enabling peer-led as well as tutor-led interaction, and provide the opportunity for both formative and summative assessment. Synchronous meetings via chat are only planned a few times. Students do not have to pass any formal examinations; formative assessment takes place exclusively by submitted coursework.

Within this study the perspectives of tutors as well as students were of interest. While analysing the collected data from the MSc programme, it emerged as appropriate to include further perspectives, since nearly all tutors of the MSc programme had embarked on online teaching experiences for their first time within the MSc programme (chapter 4.1.1, table 8). Thus, answers to questions arising during the analysis of initial data were searched by interviewing tutors from different Institutions with particular experience in either online teaching, teaching in an international environment or both. Based on these findings it was subsequently decided to include the perspective of other staff at LJMU involved in online education in order to gain additional insights into the online tutor role at LJMU. All selected samples will be described in chapter 4.1.1 in more detail. As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter 3.4.2, data collection ended when saturation was reached.

3.4.2 Data collection

Reading studies that are using GT gives the impression that there are generally just two acceptable data sources in GT research:

- First person observations
- Face-to-face interviews (found in most published studies using GT)

A reason for these conservative methods of data collection might be that GT is still regarded as a rather novel methodology which has not yet 'won its spurs' in some research areas. However, Glaser and Strauss (2005, p.167) present an entire chapter on new sources for qualitative data in which they suggest, that for example documentary materials in libraries are potentially as valuable to generate theory as observations and interviews. Strauss (1991) also mentions that data collection in GT means to find all sorts of appropriate material, such as audio or video material, books, diaries or personal records. Charmaz (2000, p.514) also points out that '*GT methods do specify data analytic strategies, not data collection methods*'. One should bear in mind that the possibilities and circumstances of undertaking interviews and observation has changed since the development of the GT by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's: a new technical generation enables the conduction of interviews via telephone, chat, or videoconferencing; generating data which might be as valuable as face-to-face interviews, depending on the interest and focus of the researcher. Moreover, the circumstances of the researcher (time, human, and financial resources) do not often allow conducting observations and interviews in the traditional way, considering for example the focus on globalisation and the need to travel.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress the importance of taking care when choosing the methods that best fit the research question and aims and best meet the needs of the group being studied and the skills of the researcher. While being open to a wide variety of data sources, this study focused primarily on data gathered through interviews. Interviews offer the possibility of gaining subjective insights in depth (Flick, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were considered an appropriate method for this study as they allowed exploring a process as it unfolds over time, while assuring that all aspects that have been considered to be important will be addressed, without applying too stringent restrictions. In creating the interview guidelines and conducting the interviews the recommendations for interviewing in qualitative research by Kvale (2005) were taken into consideration. Mindmanager²⁵, a software for 'mind mapping', was used to support the creative process of designing the interview questions and to outline the interview guide in a transparent and flexible way (appendices B, C).

Students and online tutors were contacted via the CTP programme leader and other staff involved in the course. In addition to this, an email was sent to potential participants (online tutors outside of LJMU) presenting the project and asking for participation while informing them about ethical procedures that would be adhered to.

Interestingly, just students from Great Britain indicated their willingness to give an interview. In order to also include perspectives from students with from other backgrounds than British the researcher considered to collect data from discussion boards within the course. However, it was not feasible to do so, as the agreement from every single person who has contributed to the discussion board would have been required.

All, except one, initial interviews with online tutors of LJMU, were carried out face-to-face at LJMU. One online tutor was abroad during the time of data collection, and offered to respond to the interview protocol in a written form. For economical and practical reasons student interviews were conducted via Skype²⁶, voice-over-IP software. The pure auditory nature of the telephone interviews was not perceived as disadvantage, since observation does play a less important role in this study. It might have rather been an advantage since the interpersonal influence of the researcher might have been reduced. The subsequent interviews were all conducted via telephone and recorded with the recording software for Skype named 'Pamela'²⁷.

The researcher opened the interviews with a small introduction to the research topic and briefly outlined ethical principles of the study. The content itself of the transcripts has not been modified

²⁵ For more information see <http://www.mindjet.com/products/mindmanager/default.aspx>.

²⁶ For more details see <http://www.skype.com/intl/en/welcomeback/>

²⁷ For more information see <http://www.pamela.biz/>

in any case. Participants were then offered the opportunity to ask any questions to confirm their comfort with the process before the interview proceeded. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes and was audio-taped. The interviews were then transcribed and sent to the respective participant with the request to check and approve the transcription and make corrections, if necessary. Nearly all interview as well as focus group participants made minor changes to the transcription with respect to orthography and form of expression. After the transcribed and revised interviews had been returned by the participants the process of data analysis commenced. Throughout the interview the researcher tried not to control or direct participants answers. Moreover a terminology that may not be easily understood had been avoided. Notes were taken during the interview of any issues which needed further clarification. At the end of each interview participants were offered the opportunity to share any additional issues that they perceived as being important which had not yet been mentioned.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), as data collection begins and analysis takes place, initial interview guides give way to the need to explore concepts emerging from data. Thus as theoretical sampling progressed interviews became more refined to explore specific concepts, categories, relationships and their dimensions. After having analysed the interviews particular questions and key categories arose.

For example, after having interviewed three students it became apparent that all of them have a slightly negative tendency towards a couple of issues in learning online. All of them would have preferred to participate in the attendance programme, though other commitments didn't allow them to move to Liverpool; the online programme was the only possibility for them to do the course. Hence, it became of research interest to investigate in further interviews the preferences and reason of the students regarding the programme mode by asking '*Why did you choose to take part in the online programme?*'.

Developing questions during the course of the study moreover led to a shift of the main research focus. Figure 6 provides an overview of the study process in relation to developing aspects of particular interest within the study. While analysing the first data, the interviews of the CTP online tutors, the focus of the research question shifted from *perceptions* of teaching online in a multicultural environment towards *suggestions for improvement*. Towards the end of the data collection phase the focus shifted towards *preparing online tutors*. While dealing with the data, it became obvious that different perspectives on the developing questions were necessary. In chapter 4 this process will be illuminated in more detail.

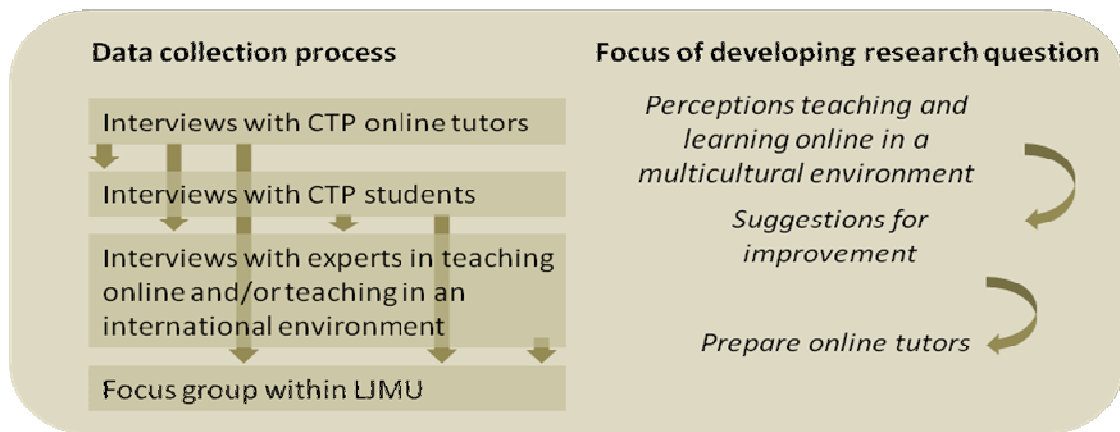


Figure 6: Development of data collection process and focus of core research question

For deepening the investigation and to answer selected questions, it was then decided to set up a focus group. Focus groups can yield additional perspectives, data and insights which are based on group interactions and would be less accessible with different methodologies (Flick, 2006). The purpose was to gain additional insights and guides to action as a result of group interaction and the spontaneity that arises from the stronger social context and the more naturalistic setting (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Focus groups are particularly known as an efficient technique for investigating attitudes and needs of staff (Denning, Verschelden, 1993). Moreover, group discussions are particularly suitable if the researcher wants to encourage participants to discover important issues on their own, generate questions and set priorities. At this stage of the analysis the key category of 'need of teachers' training' was of central importance. The aim thus was to illuminate if participants perceive that training is the right way to go and what should be part of such training.

In this sense focus groups reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques. Staff of LJM U was recruited via an e-mail invitation and five people offered their willingness to join the focus group. A small group size was chosen, to allow sufficient time for each participant to express their views, as I expected that all of the participants were likely to have a lot to contribute. The focus group lasted for approximately 1.5 hours. The interviewer initiated the discussion with a brief introduction and a small focus group guide (appendices D) helped the interviewer to intervene when the discussion drifted too far away from the research topic. However the interviewer aimed to intervene as little as possible in order to not interrupt the natural flow of the discussion and allow a relatively open and more authentic development of the discussion. The focus group was recorded, transcribed, and sent to all participants for validation

before data analysis took place. The researcher perceived it as challenging to find the right balance between structuring the discussion and to allowing flexibility.

After analysing the focus group data, the researcher decided that no additional data needs to be collected. As mentioned in chapter 3.2.2 the circular process of data collection, analyses, and theory should be repeated in GT until saturation has been reached (Reineck & Szalai, 2005). This would be the case when the researcher concludes that new data were likely to add only minor insights to emerging concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Here core categories of the study should be saturated more than less central ones. In this context the research questions addressed the particular situation at LJMU. The focus-group included staff members with various functions at the University in order to have diverse perspectives and experiences which can be integrated within the study (see chapter 4.2). Additional data as for instance from online tutor outside the University would be worth pursuing in the future in order to expand emerging concepts answering questions such as 'What is the right way to prepare and support online tutors at other Universities?'. The challenge of this method is to concentrate on just a few emerging questions that came up within the process of data analysis since research time and resources were limited. In this context Glaser and Straus (1967, p.62) accentuate *'Theoretical sampling is not statistical sampling -- it may only require a few groups to exhaust one category, and many groups to exhaust another. The number of groups is based on the extent of saturation and the level of theory one wants to generate.'* However within this study the focus is as mentioned on the situation at LJMU. Flick (2006) argues the circumstances of the whole research process do determine the degree of fulfilled saturation. The researcher tried to recruit additional staff at University without success. However the number of staff suitable for the undertaken research is limited; participants need either experience in teaching online within a multicultural environment or be a key person in regard to e-learning at the University.

3.4.3 Categories and their properties

Data analysis within GT has been described as interplay between researcher and data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover it is considered a science, since the researcher is obliged to follow a certain degree of rigor and ground their analysis in data, and at the same time an enactment of creativity since the researcher creates categories, asks stimulating questions, makes comparisons, and extracts a scheme from huge amounts of raw and unstructured data. In order to advance the theoretical understanding and to direct the theoretical sampling the process of continuously asking questions is strongly emphasised within GT. The second analytical tool is making comparison to stimulate thoughts about categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Flick, 2006). As

suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) the researcher has constantly and systematically followed these two analytical tools throughout the research process. The coding process in GT can be subsumed as theoretical coding (Flick, 2006), which consists of three ways of dealing with textual material (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.101,123,143)²⁸:

- a) Open coding: *'The analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data.'*
- b) Axial coding: *'The process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed axial because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions.'*
- c) Selective coding: *'The process of integrating and refining the theory'*

In line with Flick (2006) the theoretical coding generally used three processes which can neither be clearly separated from each other, nor be seen as temporally separate phases of the process. At the beginning of the coding process the coding sequence 'open→axial→selective' has been followed to a certain degree. Following Strauss and Corbin (1998) I initially used 'in vivo codes', which were labelled after the verbatim words found in the data, to help achieving results that are firmly grounded in the experience. Relying on these 'in vivo codes' avoids the mistake of distorting meaning by introducing abstractions too early within the research process. At a later stage of the coding process more abstract categories were used.

For example, the following sentence of an interviewed tutor:

'I have taught online chat sessions on Sunday afternoon because that's the only time when [...] more than one time zone is involved.' (Tutor A, App. E, p.5, l.17)²⁹

was initially labelled under the substantive code 'conduct chat sessions' which was re-coded in the selective code of 'synchronous communication' and which came eventually under the category 'perceptions teaching online in a multicultural environment'.

Likewise:

'I think that to a certain extent we have tried to make allowance for that fact. They were not able to express the ideas exactly as a native speaker of English would be able to do.' (Tutor B, App. E, p.8, l.54)

The original substantive code was 'making special allowance' which was re-coded under the selective code of 'language' and which came eventually under the category 'perceptions teaching online in a multicultural environment'.

Another example of the coding process is:

'I think because it's postgraduate that's often the case that the students are already the experts and its more methodology that you assist with.' (Tutor A, App. E, p.4, l.32)

²⁸ For further information about open, axial, and selective coding see Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 101-162)

²⁹ All Interviewee names have been replaced by letters in order to provide anonymity.

The original substantive code 'assisting with methodology' found a place in the code 'support students with content' and eventually under the selective code 'Direct Instructor'.

Considering the circularity of the research process (chapter 3.2.2) a huge amount of time can lie between two samples being analysed and as a consequence exact meanings of very abstract codes can easily be lost. Therefore memos³⁰ and diagrams are created. This helps to generate and structure ideas as well as to reflect on analytical thoughts and, at later stage of the research process, for further development and refinement (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; examples are presented in Appendix H).

After having conducted and analysed a few interviews an additional literature review was undertaken and was used to support the coding process as it can foster conceptualisation when used as an analytical tool (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Moreover, research questions do become more concrete and specific within the process of data analysis. The selective codes of the perceived tutor roles, for instance, (Direct Instructor, Learning Coach, Course Manager/Administrator, Course Designer, see chapter 4.1.2.1) were developed with particular consideration of Berge's and Anderson's investigation of the tutor role (chapter 2.1.3.1).

NVivo³¹, a software for qualitative data analysis, was used to support the analysis process, while considering critical aspects provided by Weitzmann (2000) such as in 'software and qualitative research'.³² The software has been used in order to support intellectual tasks and to think more coherently about the meaning of the data.

3.4.4 Quality criteria of research

The issue of trustworthiness and generalisation of qualitative research is often stressed when it comes to question this direction of research in general (Glaser, 2005). Classical criteria, such as reliability and validity, developed for quantitative research cannot be applied directly to the qualitative counterpart (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Flick, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There are interpretations that reliability as used in quantitative research is not applicable in qualitative research since the nature of the methods and epistemological assumptions generally promote the

³⁰ Memos are notes, comments to the data material (Reineck & Szalai, 2005). For further details about memos see for instance Strauss (1991).

³¹ For more information about NVivo see for instance http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx

³² Examples of NiVo codes can be found in appendix G.

uniqueness of the research. With the aim of solving the problems of measuring progress and results, diverse directions of discussion can be found in the literature (Flick 2006). One direction focuses on the utilisation of classical criteria such as validation and reliability, and accordingly tries to reform them in an appropriate way. However the utilisation of classical criteria has been intensively questioned in early years (Glaser, 1967), since the understanding of the reality of quantitative and qualitative research is very different. Based on this scepticism another direction has been initiated, which intends to create new quality criteria which are more suitable for the qualitative approach. Strauss (2005) suggests that *'What is important is that the criteria used to judge the merit of qualitative (or quantitative) work are made explicit'* (p. 266). The researcher took precaution to ensure that quality factors were dealt with in a way consistent with those in the literature. Specifically addressing the GT approach, Elliot (2005) argues that it is the task of the researcher to understand how the basic aspects of GT, as for instance the comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and the writing of memos (see chapter 3.2) impact the quality of the research. *'Taken together, constant comparative analysis and data collection offer the researcher an opportunity of generating research findings that represent accurately the phenomena being studied'* (Elliot, 2005, p. 50). The creation of memos for instance does avoid the loss of analytically valuable thoughts and enhances theoretical precision and consistency through the explication in written form. Through the method of constant comparative analysis the closeness and complexity of the emerging theory increases if also coded material gets involved in the process of comparison.

By considering those arguments new as well as classical, however modified, quality factors for qualitative research are presented in the following section particularly in order to enable an evaluation of the quality of study outcomes.

Reliability and validity

Lewis (2003) argues that reliability and validity do have relevance in qualitative research when using these concepts in their broadest conception with the meaning of 'sustainable' and 'well grounded', as they may help to clarify the strength of the data.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability in the sense of reproducibility cannot be followed since social phenomena are difficult to reproduce; it is, for instance, impossible to conduct research at different times under exactly the same conditions as might be done in a laboratory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Recurring interviews with the same participants would probably lead to at least slightly different results. Following Flick (2006), reliability in qualitative research tries to make

explicit what the perspective and the statements of a participant are, and where the interpretation of the researcher begins. Therefore almost all participant statements within the study are presented as verbatim citation. By providing additional information about the researcher's background (chapter 3.3) the researcher's influence on interpretations should be made more transparent. Moreover, the research process should be as explicit as possible in order to allow a better comparison between researchers. The reliability of the whole research process should be increased by providing reflexive documentation (Flick 2006). To fulfil these requirements I provided as much transparency as possible by underpinning all codes and categories by citations and demonstrating the research process itself by means of specific examples and figures. Moreover all transcribed data as well as an excerpt of memos and research diagrams have been added to the appendices (appendices E, F, H). Through writing extensive memos and designing diagrams throughout the whole investigation, ideas, approaches, process, and directions were documented which lead to theory. Lincoln (1985) explains that the researcher does not have the responsibility to supply an index of transferability but to provide the database that enables transferability judgments on the part of the applier (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity

Corbin and Strauss (1989) argue that internal validity³³ is high given that within GT the methodology is grounded in the reality of the data. External validity defined as the generalizability of the findings to the general population will be addressed at a later stage within the chapter. Following Flick (2006) the starting point for validity is on the one hand the process of research itself, on the other hand the presentation of phenomena. The tendency of all approaches is that a shifting occurs from validity towards validating, and from a judgment of single steps towards a creation of transparency (Flick, 2006). As mentioned above the researcher has tried to provide as much transparency as possible within the research.

Flick (2006) provides an extensive discussion of validity criteria, which will form the basis for the following argument.

- ***Analysis of the interview and focus group situation***

The question to ask here is whether the aspired degree of authenticity within the research process could be provided. Did the interviewee have any reason to present, aware or unaware, a version of their experience that is not or not totally congruent with their perspectives? Following the ethical guidelines, and trying to offer as much autonomy as possible for the interviewees and focus group participants, I tried to achieve a situation of trust while conducting the interview and focus group. It was explicitly stressed that everything said within the discussion would be treated

³³ Internal validity is defined as a measure of how congruent the findings are with reality.

confidentially. However there are always biases by participants and a tendency to avoid articulating particular problems or challenges which could have a negative influence on one's personal interest. The inductive approach of the GT itself however supports the process of '*checking emerging categories and their properties by gathering new evidence*' (Elliot, 2005, p.51).

- **Communicative validity**

The concept of communicative validity has proved to be quite helpful in this study. In order to reflect as realistically as possible what research participants have said within the interviews or the focus group the researcher sent all transcriptions to the participants for revision before starting to analyse the data. Participants were invited to provide additional input to their interview in order to adjust misunderstandings and circumvent personal bias. Nearly all interview as well as focus group participants made minor changes in regard to orthography and form of expression to the transcription. The content of the transcripts itself was not modified in any case.

- **Procedural validity**

The procedural validity can be subsumed as an attempt to act sensibly in the field. Based on criteria suggested by Wolcott (1990) I followed general guidelines on how to interview and guide a focus group in the sense of: The researcher should mainly listen, instead of talk. Moreover, as suggested by Wolcott (1990), feedback about the study from a few fellow students, the advisors and the director of study supported me with helpful inspirations and guidance.

Triangulation

Triangulation means to involve and combine different methods, data sources (time, space, person), researchers, theoretical perspectives or analytical methods in order to check the integrity of, or inferences drawn from the data (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). There is much debate about the aim of triangulation, whether triangulation may validate qualitative evidence or widen and deepen understanding of a subject. From an ontological perspective, '*there is no single reality or conception of the social world and that attempting to do so through the use of multiple sources is futile.*' (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 44). The researcher tended to agree with Lewis & Ritchie (2003) who imply that triangulation does not grant a more certain picture of the investigated phenomena, it rather enables to get a fuller picture of phenomena. Denzin (1970) argues that triangulation provides an approach which may increase validity, strength, as well as interpretative potential of an investigation. It may moreover help to reduce biases of the researcher and procure multiple perspectives.

Within the study 'within-method triangulation' has been used by involving two different procedures of data collection, interviews as well as a focus group. It is the aim of the researcher to

decrease *'deficiencies and biases that stem from any single method'* (Mitchell, 1986, p. 19) creating *'the potential for counterbalancing the flaws or the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another'* (p. 21).

Another subcategory of triangulation, 'data sources triangulation', can be described as a convergence towards theoretical sampling which has been established in this study (chapter 3.4.1). It has been perceived as necessary to observe diverse perspectives (online tutors, students, experts in teaching online and/or teaching in an international environment, technical staff at LJMU) in relation to the emerging theory. As described in chapter 4.1 samples have been chosen by considering core research questions while analysing the data. In the first instance for example general perceptions and experiences in teaching online within a multicultural course have been of interest. While analysing the collected data particular questions arose, such as 'Are there any suggestions for improvement in regard to the online tutoring?'. Here the perspective from students undertaking the online CTP as well as experts in the field of teaching online and teaching in an international environment have been perceived as being crucial. The variation in persons, times, and space have a beneficial impact to the study since it increases the possibility to identify similar patterns as well as atypical aspects, which enhances the confidence in research findings (Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

Generalisation

Flick (2006) argues that the difficulty of generalisation within qualitative research is that it generally has a particular context basis; hence conclusions do often have a more specific significance. As mentioned earlier it is not the aim of the study to generate theory that carries generalisation (chapter 1.4). It is rather pursued to generate theory grounded in data that will be used to elaborate tentatively on the issue, to discuss the relevance of our present understanding, to suggest alternative routes for further research and to formulate answers to the questions presented in chapter 1.4, which may well be added to amendments based on new research findings uncovering variations (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Corbin and Strauss (1998) argue in this context that the term generalisation should be replaced by 'explanatory power', which means the *'ability to explain what might happen in given situations'* (p.266) such as teaching at University online in an international environment.

3.4.5 Ethical considerations

The issue of ethics in qualitative research has particular resonance since the nature of qualitative research is particularly in-depth as well as unstructured and facts that are not always anticipated

can arise (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Ethical approval to proceed with this study was granted in January 2006 by the LJMU Ethics committee (Appendix A). In this process the possible benefits and risks for participation in this study were considered.

Following Lewis and Ritchie (2003) researchers have to ensure they have adequately addressed issues such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and protecting participants and the researcher from harm:

a) Informed Consent

In this study participants' informed consent was obtained in written form via a consent form that was part of the participant information pack as well as in oral form as the introduction part of the interview/focus group. Participants were also informed that they have the right to withdraw from participation at all times; however no participant within the research made use of that option.

b) Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity in this study means that no one else other than the researcher should be able to identify those who were participating. All names of research participants were replaced by a letter in order to provide anonymity. Furthermore all participants, female and male, obtain the male form for the same reason. Participants were informed that all the collected data will be treated confidentially and will be anonymised, following the Ethical Guidelines of the BPS³⁴.

c) Protecting participants from harm

In order to protect participants from harm the researcher should provide a clear understanding of the issue the study will address before asking for participation. It has been perceived as a challenge on the one hand to provide the participants with information about the project, on the other hand not to give too much detail which may influence participant's spontaneous views (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p.67). While collecting data the researcher tried to be aware of what is or what is not relevant for the study in order to avoid irrelevant details which may cause discomfort as for instance asking for the participant's age (see appendix E). With the aim to guarantee that no collected data will be used for analyses which might cause discomfort or might have been misunderstood, all transcribed interviews as well as the focus group have been sent to the participants for revision.

d) Protecting researcher from harm

Reflecting on the undertaken study risky situations have not arisen since interviews have taken place at public places or via telephone and the interview content itself was not of any particular fragile nature or likely to cause anger or risk.

³⁴ For more details see <http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/>

4 Analysis and results

Within the process of open, axial and selective coding more than 400 codes and categories were created. As outlined in chapter 3.2.2 GT entails a circular process where data collection and analysis are closely interrelated (figure 7).

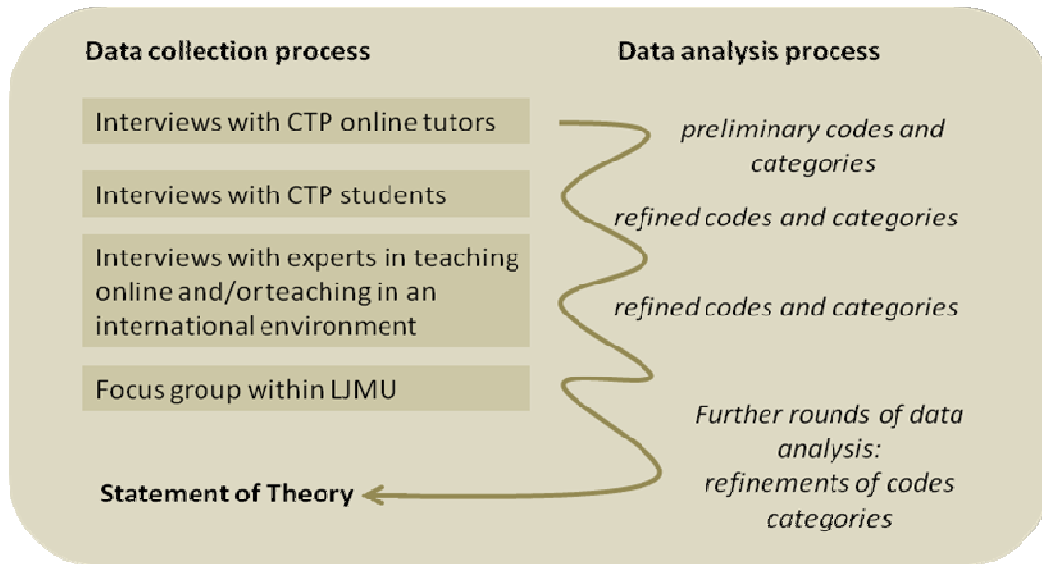


Figure 7: Data dance of the GT (adapted from Kelsey, 2003)

As the data analysis progressed codes and categories got more and more refined. Developing questions within the investigation moreover shifted the focus of the core research questions. Figure 6 in chapter 3.4.2 provides an overview about the study process in relation to developing aspects of particular interest within the study.

In the first instance online tutors of the CTP programme were interviewed. Here it became obvious that they are faced with difficulties within the online environment. Tutor A for instance mentioned that they had problems to engage people to communicate (within the discussion boards).

We have the problem to encouraging people to communicate from the beginning on. (*App. E, p.3, l.17*)

Tutor D pointed out that they just do not have enough time to fulfil their role as an online tutor within the course.

The main problem I have experienced and I have seen is that for all the colleagues it's not enough time. (*App. E, p.22, l.33*)

Other problems in relation to the multicultural environment were raised. Tutor A for instance mentioned that non English native speakers may misunderstand something that is written by native speakers.

[...] because of most of the classes are speaking English for their first language, she misunderstood something. (App. E, p.3, l.29)

Many other difficulties were perceived by interviewed online tutors of the CTP programme and no particular solutions to those issues were provided. As a consequence the researcher decided to integrate student's opinion, when starting with the next data collection stage, if they have any 'suggestions for improvement?' (see appendices C). This question was of particular interest until the end of the data collection process through interviews. While not having the opportunity to collect further data from students with other than British background through interviews or analysis of discussion boards, the researcher shifted the perspective outside of the programme. The researcher decided to involve additional perspectives from experts in the field of either teaching online or teaching in a multicultural environment in order to find more answers to emerging questions. Those interview candidates were recruited by e-mail via different stakeholders and colleagues. A website presented first information about the study³⁵. During this phase altogether six online tutors were recruited and interviewed by using Skype.

Another core research question which arose while analysing the interviews of the CTP tutors was: Do first time tutors need any particular training or preparation when teaching online and in a multicultural environment? Online tutors of the CTP programme have not received any particular training or preparation in order to teach online and in a multicultural environment. In this context tutor F for instance mentioned that he is missing answers to particular issues as for example:

'So you know someone wants to make trouble for example how do you deal with it? (App. E, P.41, l.13)'

Hence participants of the third data collection stage where asked if they are of the opinion that first time online tutors do need a training or particular preparation when having to teach online and in a multicultural environment. Here the major opinion was that online tutors do need to be trained when having to teach online in this particular environment. Tutor EXI for instance mentioned

'[...] they need all the skills of working online and through my view no teacher should be let anywhere near the online environment without the benefit of training and development [...].' (App. E, p.68, l.43)

The analysing process continued after having collected all the data (see chapter circularity of the research process) in order to further refine codes and categories with the final aim of providing the statement of theory (chapter 4.3). On a more abstract level the researcher came back to the initial overarching research aim of understanding the situation of online tutors teaching in an international environment. Here particular codes with particular relevance were selected and new

³⁵ Please see: <http://www.student.ljmu.ac.uk/psyknils/>

categories created in order to reflect underlying connections and patterns. During the analysis process an overarching aspect emerged which subsuming all research questions under the topic of the 'quality of online teaching in a multicultural environment'. The following questions shall serve as examples *'What are suggestion for improvement?', 'How should online tutors be supported and prepared?', 'Where do online tutors see their role when teaching online and in a multicultural environment?', 'What problems and challenges have been perceived?'* – the list could be continued and within all those question the issue of 'quality online teaching' resonates. In chapter 4.3 Emerging Theory this topic will be discussed in more detail. However it was not the aim to finally discover: What are the aspects which constitute quality online teaching, it has rather been discover as an issue which resonates within the whole research process within asked questions and provided answers.

In the following results will be presented following mainly a narrative structure in order to provide a better transparency of the analysis process. However findings have been compared throughout the whole research process with each other and cross references are made at many places.

Of course not all created 400 codes and categories can be found in the next chapters, the researcher has rather selected codes and categories with particular relevance to the research question. Considering the richness and complexity of the collected data it has been perceived as a particular challenge to stay focused following a few emerging questions and not getting lost in steadily evolving interesting research questions. A few of evolving questions, which have not been included in the main part of the study, are mentioned in chapter 5.3, where directions for future research are being discussed.

First, analysis and results of interviews with students and online tutors of the CTP programme as well as tutors outside the programme will be presented (chapter 4.1). In order to provide a better picture of interviewees their background with regard to culture, experiences of teaching and learning online and in an international environment will be addressed briefly (chapter 4.1.1). Then the focus will be on teaching and learning online within the CTP programme (chapter 4.1.2). As highlighted before there have been many investigations and there is a large amount of literature about teaching online in general; therefore this chapter will be kept short and involves just interviews of students and online tutors of the CTP programme. Interviews with online tutors outside the CTP programme have been more specialised, addressing emerging research questions focusing on the multicultural aspect when teaching online. The main focus of this work is on teaching (online) in an international environment which will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter (chapter 4.2). The subsequent chapter (chapter 4.3) presents the emerging theory

where selected codes and categories will be analysed and interpreted in more detail following the aim to better understand the situations of online tutors who have to teach in an international environment.

4.1 Analysis and results of interviews with online tutors and students

4.1.1. Experiences and background of interview participants

In the following chapter interview participants will be characterised in more detail, addressing issues which might be particularly relevant with regard to their answers to research questions:

- Students' and tutors' cultural background
- Tutors' and students' experiences in teaching / learning online
- Tutors' experiences in teaching in an international environment (online)
- Tutors' preparation to teach online
- Students' experiences in working in an international environment

Interviewed online tutors as well as students of the CTP course are referred to by the letters from A to F; interviewed tutors not involved with the CTP programme are referred to as ExA to ExF, and participants of the focus group with FA to FE.

4.1.1.1 Online tutors of CTP programme

Four of the six interviewed online tutors are English and two are German who have been living in the UK for several years. The online tutors who were interviewed represented a fairly homogenous group in regard to their experiences in teaching online (see table 8 for an overview of online tutors' experiences). For nearly all tutors it was their first time teaching online when they took over the role of the online tutor in the CTP programme. Just two tutors could build on very limited experiences as a student learning in an online environment (tutors A and E). All of them, except one (tutor B), have been teaching online from the launch of the programme, which was about three years ago at the time when the interviews were conducted. Furthermore, none of the tutors had any experience in learning in a comprehensive, proper e-learning course. In contrast, tutors' experiences in teaching in an international environment were very heterogeneous, from 'only in this programme', 'a little bit of classroom teaching in China/South Africa/with international students', up to 'in almost every conceivable setting'. Tutors also mentioned that they have not been offered any particular preparation or training in order to fulfil their new roles as an online tutor. Compulsory programmes such as the equal opportunities programme have been attended, and two tutors added that they have completed the 'Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education' where online education plays a minor role. In this context tutor C indicated that the CTP programme has been one of the

first pure online courses at LJMU, hence the institution's experience in initiating such new directions in teaching was very limited at the time of the launch of the programme.

'[...] our programme was one of the first that John Moores [...] we were pioneering. I never expected anyone to help me; I knew that I was launching a way of teaching.'

EXPERIENCES				
E-learning			Teaching	
Name	as a tutor		as a student	in multicultural groups
A	Since the start of the MSc course	First time in a proper e-learning	Not much at all, one small course	Little bit of classroom teaching, teaching in South Africa
B	Recently within the MSc course (after start)	First time	No experience	A group of Chinese students (economics, English as a second language); a few overseas students
C	Since starting of the MSc course	First time	No experience	On this course online
D	Mainly in relation to the distance learning version of the MSc	Sort of first time	No experience	Only to the extent that in the University
E	Since starting of the MSc course	First time	Very limited, but this was not really e-learning	Difficult to say - not completely aware where the students come from
F	Since starting of the MSc course	First time	No experience	Learning experiences in almost every conceivable setting

Table 8: Experiences of tutors with e-learning and multicultural groups

4.1.1.2 Students of CTP programme

Interestingly, only students from Great Britain from the online CTP programmes offered their participation. A possible, although unconfirmed, explanation might be that students whose first language is not English may have felt too insecure about issues of language understandings. Alternatively, one might speculate whether cultural differences regarding the participation in such research projects may have played a role. Of course, it is also possible that no common reason contributed, but rather a variety of personal reasons coincidentally lead to an entirely British student sample. Irrespective of the underlying reason, it is worth keeping in mind that all interviewees were English native speakers; all with British background. The interviewed students represented a homogenous group in regard to their experiences with online education since none of them had studied in an online course before (see table 9 for students' backgrounds). Moreover the majority of students (B, C, E, F) mentioned that they would have preferred to study in attendance mode, but due to various personal circumstances were not in a position to move to Liverpool for the course. Participants' year of study ranged from 1st to 3rd. Their occupational

background was very heterogeneous as was their experience of working with other cultures. Some students have been living and working in different countries for many years, while others had no experience with people from other cultures than their own.

Name	Year of study	Reason study online/background	Experiences	
			e-learning	other cultures
A	last	Was not used to learn in groups; online was fine for her	No, first time	A few different nationalities at work
B	first	Would have preferred attendance mode; no choice because of circumstances	No, first time	No
C	last	Not her natural inclination; no choice because of circumstances	No, first time	A few working with other cultures
D	first	?	No, first time	Yes, living aboard and working with other cultures
E	second	Would have preferred attendance mode	No, first time	Works in an international company, travels a lot
F	second	Would have preferred attendance mode	No, first time	No

Table 9: General information and experiences of students

4.1.1.3 Online tutors of diverse programmes

Four of the seven interviewed external tutors are from the UK, two from Germany, and one from the US (see table 10 for tutor's backgrounds). All except one tutor (ExJ) had many years of experiences in teaching online. Three of the interviewees had their own company focusing on e-learning, whereas one of them instructs e-moderators (ExI). The range of experiences in teaching online in an international environment varied from none but face-to-face overseas-students within the University, to many years of extensive experience. All except two of the tutors (ExK, ExN) had not received any additional preparation in order to teach online (in an international environment). ExG mentioned that when he started to teach online there were no training programmes in online tutoring. One tutor had participated recently in a pilot programme on online education with Chinese students and students from the UK. The other one had been provided with courses and guidelines by the Open University (OU).

EXPERIENCES					
Name	Place of origin	E-Learning in general	Teaching online	Teaching international students online	Preparation to teach online (multicultural students)
ExG	Germany	Course design, leads Institution that offers blended learning solutions worldwide	Extensive, learning concept design, primarily blended learning	a few times	No, self-trained through experiences and conferences
ExH	Germany	Leads Institution that offers blended learning solutions worldwide	Extensive, learning concept design, primarily blended learning	a few times	No, self-trained through experiences
ExL	UK	Designed, redesigned and taught a pure online courses	Teaches since four years online: mentors in nursing	Few students from other countries in online classes	No
ExK	US	Studied and taught online, designed a course	?	Yes; additionally many years of working and with and living in other cultures	Did a course with focus on online education in an multicultural environment (China, UK)
ExJ	UK	Used e-learning facilities in traditional class at University	Using Blackboard and blogs in traditional courses to extend contact hours	At the learning development unit (face-to-face)	No
ExN	Germany	?	Since 2004 at the Open University (OU)	Since 2004	Yes, diverse courses and guidelines from the OU (teaching online / in an international environment)
ExI	UK	Designed a well known course for online tutors, responsible for e-learning at a University	Own training company for online tutors; trained about 2000 online tutors	First time in 1989 at OU, within own training company	No, did a lot of research because when starting to teach online there was no offer of guidance

Table 10: General information and experiences of online tutors

4.1.2 Teaching and learning online within the CTP programme

The following chapter focuses on teaching and learning online within the CTP programme in general. Hence, within this chapter only interviews of tutors and students of the CTP programme are part of the analysis. First, identified tasks of the online tutor were categorised. The categorization of roles within the CTP programme does help to provide a better picture of the particular tasks carried out by the online tutors. Moreover it was hoped that these categories do help to present and/or explain identified challenges and problems when teaching online (in a multicultural environment). Secondly, perceptions of both teaching and learning online in the CTP

programme are addressed before challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvement when having to teach online are discussed.

4.1.2.1 Perceived roles by online tutors

Based on categories of the online tutor that have been created by other researchers (Berge, 1995, Anderson, 2000, Mason 1991; see chapter 2.1.3) and analysis of the interviews with tutors of the CTP programme, four main categories were created concerning the roles of the interviewed tutor within the CTP programme:

- **Course Designer**
- **Course Manager/Administrator**
- **Direct Instructor**
- **Learning Coach**

These roles have not necessarily been carried out by the same person; they rather intersect with each other. Perceived tasks of these categories are illustrated in figure 8.

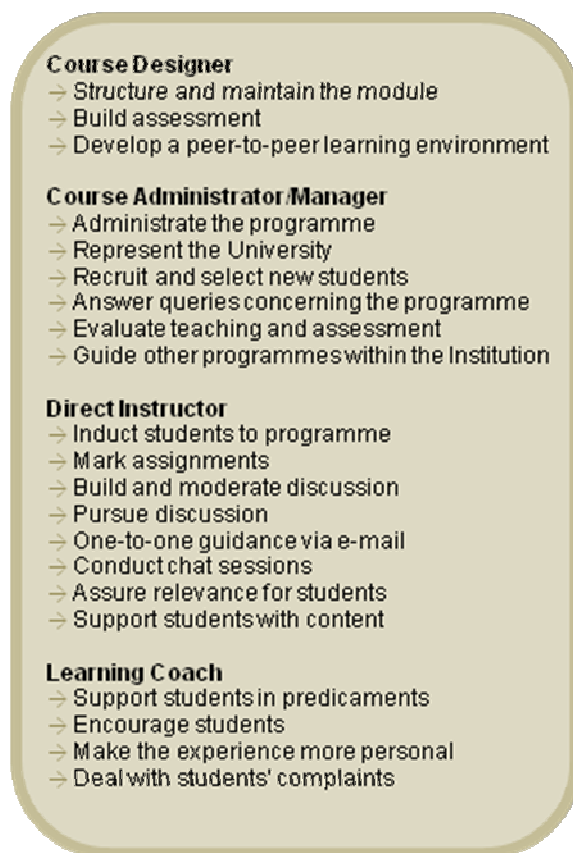


Figure 8: Identified roles of the online tutor

4.1.2.2 Perceptions of teaching and learning

As perceptions of teaching and learning online in general might be closely connected to the international character of such an environment, perceptions of online tutoring were also investigated. Here the following codes were created, which will be explained briefly in the following section in more detail:

- *Prefer teaching/learning face-to-face*
- *Enjoy teaching online*
- *Not aware of benefits arising from online study mode*
- *Satisfied with online tutoring*
- *Minor tutor contact on a personal basis*
- *Not aware of contact person*

Prefer teaching/learning face-to-face

All online tutors seemed to generally prefer teaching, as they are used to, in a face-to-face setting. Tutor C for instance accented:

'And I think that [...] it's never as rich as sitting face to face [...] the richest way to teach.' (App. E, p.14, l.12)³⁶

Moreover all interviewed students mentioned, except two, that the online version was not their first choice; rather other commitments prevented them from doing the face-to-face programme in Liverpool (chapter 4.1.1.2).

Enjoy teaching online

Apart from preferring teaching face-to-face in general some tutors also seemed to enjoy teaching online, particularly if, for instance, students got more deeply involved in a subject as tutor A mentioned:

'[...] one or two of the students, one particularly is really excited about it and really got into it. And that was great.' (App. E, p.2, l. 52)

Not aware of benefits arising from online study mode

Tutor B in contrast, who had not collected much experience in teaching online when doing the interview, explained that he is not aware of many benefits arising from this sort of e-learning, however mentioned that he does not know other ways in doing it better.

'[...] the only change over it doing by the post is that the students can respond quickly and we can respond to the students more quickly than you could do by posting it.' (App. E, p.7, l.39)

Here the analogy between experiences and awareness emerges which can be found in later sections of the study again.

³⁶ Citations within the research are labeled as follows: The Appendices where the data can be found within the context of the interview / focus group (App.), the page number within the Appendices (p.), the line number (l.).

Satisfied with online tutoring

In general most of the interviewed students were satisfied with the tutoring that has been offered to them. Student C mentioned for instance:

'They do a really, a really good job of the core [...] in terms of the role of the tutor [...] I think they do it very well.' (App. E, p.39, l.4)

Minor tutor contact on a personal basis

But there were also students who didn't make much use of the tutoring on a personal basis, as student A added:

'I haven't really used them. I have just basically kept my head down and had minimal contact on a personal basis. [...]' (App. E, p.48, l.30)

Not aware of contact person

Student A added that he was not aware of the right contact person within the course.

I think the main problem is wondering who do I ask?! I mean I have this feeling that [...] the tutors are very busy.' (App. E, p.48, l.30)

The reason for the lack of information about the contact person might be that this information was not transparent enough or communicated in a clear way to students. Another possibility is that tutors were very busy, as student A suggested, that they had the impression keeping in contact with tutors on a personal basis is not appropriate or welcome. It should be mentioned that sometime after initiating the CT programme, when student A had been nearly finished with his study, 'personal tutors' have been introduced to the programme which might have helped to clarify who to contact on a personal basis. However, online tutors mentioned, that resources such as time, have been very limited within the online CTP course (chapter 4.1.2.3).

4.1.2.3 Challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvement

In the following chapter perceived difficulties and challenges when having to teach online are presented. Additionally a few 'suggestions for improvement' have been provided which will be explained briefly in the following section as well. Focusing on perceived challenges and problems, mainly the roles of the 'Direct Instructor' and the 'Learning Coach' have been affected, in particular the tasks: build and moderate the discussion, pursue the discussion, deal with students complaints, make the experience more personal (see figure 9).

The following categories and codes have been created:

A Communication barriers

Tutors wish more interaction among students
Risk of ending up being impersonal
Students wish more use of the discussion board
Students wish to deepen learning
Residential in order to overcome barriers

B Difficult situations

Problem dealing with difficult situations

Missing answers to problems

C Difficult working conditions

A Communication barriers

Tutors wish more interaction among students

Many tutors often perceived communication barriers and wished for more interaction among students within the discussion board.

'I suppose the difficulty there is [...] to get them to pursue the discussion further. [...] typically, it's been difficult to maintain the dialogue.' (tutor D; App. E, p.8, l.20)

The wish implies the searching for particular answers in regard to difficulties within the online environment since no solution to that problem has been provided. Zaltsman (2007) explains that tutors are faced with the challenge of communication barriers which might be the result of the dominantly text-based communication without visual and auditory cues, new technological settings, invisibility and anonymity within the online environment.

Risk of ending up being impersonal

In this context the possibility of ending up being impersonal within online environment has been stressed by a tutor A

I think there is the possibility that you can end up being quiet impersonal (App. E, p.2, l50)

Students wish more use of the discussion board

Additionally, students (A, B, D) were of the opinion that more use could have been made of the discussion boards within the course. Student B added that he had the impression that the tutors tried to motivate them to discuss, but it did not work. He also considered that it might have been the student's fault.

'And I think if there was some way that they could encourage more interaction. And I think they have been trying – or may be its more of student's problem than the tutors.' (App. E, p.33, l.23)

Students wish to deepen learning

Student D expressed the wish to deepen learning and recommended that (more) questions might be asked by the online tutors within the discussion boards:

'Well, why do you think like that? Where is your evidence? You know: What is this thinking based on?' (App. E, p.45, l.14)

This relates directly to Berge's (1995) pedagogical tutor role: *'[...] using questions and probes for student responses that focus discussions on critical concepts, principles and skills'*. Since the

analysis of the discussion boards has not been part of the investigation it is not clear to what extent questioning has been used by the tutors to moderate the discussions.

Tutor D stressed in that context that there is not much time for students to further deepen and engage in discussions.

They don't have the time to think back and engage in the more informal discussions around that at that earlier topic (App. E, p.15. l. E)

Residential in order to overcome barriers

In order to overcome the perceived challenge 'to make the learning more personal', a residential element, lasting for a weekend, has been integrated in the curriculum of the CTP programme at a later stage. The general hope of the tutors was that a residential element would help to decrease communication barriers within the course.

'So I am hoping that when students come and meet them and meet us [...] that that will [...] break down some of the social barriers a bit may be and really enhance communication and interactivity in the course.' (tutor A; ; App. E, p.23, l.41)

Not all tutors agreed to such plans considering that a face-to-face meeting might disadvantage students who cannot attend, as they are living too far away for instance.

'Really on logistical grounds so we thought students being in New Zealand and the United States and Mexico and Eastern Europe and so it would be unpractical to try and insist the students come to us.' (tutor D; ; App. E, p.15, l.48)

By the time of doing the interviews with the students of the CTP programme, the residential weekend had taken place. Nearly all of the students who were interviewed were able to attend (chapter 4.1.1.2), however none of them were from outside GB. All interviewed attendances (students A, C, D, F) were positive about the residential. Student A for instance found that the face-to-face contact had a positive influence on his ability to talk to tutors.

'Yeah that was seeing someone face-to-face did make a lot of difference [...] it was a lot better once I met them in person [...] then it seemed easier to be able to talk to them.' (App. E, p.44, l.28)

Student D added that the residential had a positive influence on following informal discussion [online].

'[...] just provides another level of, of comfort you know? [...] you feel you can, you can have more informal discussions you know with people.' (App. E, p.26, l.44)

Furthermore, student F stressed that he made some useful contacts on the residential however he realised that these contacts weren't very substantial as a consequence of the missing face-to-face contact afterwards. In this context self organised local study groups might provide a solution; however these sorts of groups have not taken place among the interviewed students on a regular basis as far as the researcher knows.

'And I found following the residential week there was some contact which I made with students [...] but the contact isn't sustained ahm but I think in the sense that, that demonstrates the importance of meeting people face-to-face because when you meet people face-to-face you do make a connection.' (App. E, p.44, l.36)

Problem dealing with difficult situations

Tutor C added that he found it difficult to deal with students who might want to disturb the course and who are criticizing the staff.

'[...] someone wants to make trouble for example –how do you deal with it?' (tutor C; App. E, p.13, l.41)

B Difficult situations

Missing answers to problems

Tutor C supplemented that he is missing an answer to those sorts of problems like how to deal with difficult students. This sort of wish has been repeated at other places within interviews and the focus group (chapter 4.1.3.2 and 4.2)

In this context student B mentioned through his view it is the role of the online tutor to compensate for the missing face-to-face contact if difficulties arise.

'[...] if students are having difficulties it's probably a lot easier for that to be recognized by both the students and the tutors. [...] I think it's a lot more difficult online [...] I think the tutor's role is to compensate for that in as much as possible.' (App. E, p.33, l.16)

C Difficult working conditions

Some tutors (A, E, F) mentioned that they perceived difficult working conditions considering a lack of time.

'Just because I didn't have time [...].' (tutor E; App. E, p.21, l.15)

'As a part-time lecturer I put in many more hours than I was paid for.' (tutor F, App. E, p.21, l.28)

Additionally students realised that online tutors are very busy.

'[...] I think the main problem is wondering who do I ask?! I mean I have this feeling that [...] the tutors are very busy.' (App. E, p.48, l.30)

Additionally tutors put a lot of effort in their online tutoring as for instance tutor A mentioned that he is working for the programme on Sunday afternoon.

'I have taught online chat sessions on Sunday afternoon' (App. E, p.5, l.17)

Within the study it became obvious that tutors are generally motivated on the one hand to offer quality online teaching as they are searching for answers; on the other hand their working conditions did not allow them to provide as much effort as necessary or wished for in the programme due to other work commitments. Within the focus group it became for instance obvious that the work involved in online tutoring did generally not get recognised from by their line managers (chapter 4.2.3). The problem here is that such conditions may lead to frustration beside the online tutors and decreasing motivation within the course. The issue of 'time' and 'working conditions' will be picked up and deepened within later chapters within the study.

4.1.3 Teaching and learning online in a multicultural environment

In the following chapter the multicultural aspects of teaching online are illuminated in more detail. First, cultural awareness and perceptions of teaching and learning online in a multicultural environment are addressed before focussing on perceived challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvement when teaching online in a multicultural environment. As a result of developing research questions within the process of analysis the main focus within this chapter is to provide suggestions for online tutors to manage perceived challenges and overcome difficulties. Here both interviews with tutors and students from the CTP programme as well as interviews with external online tutors are part of the analysis.³⁷

4.1.3.1 Cultural awareness and perceptions of teaching and learning

Within this chapter the following codes were generated, which will be explained in the following in more detail:

- *No adaption to multicultural aspect within CTP course*
- *Particular challenge for online tutors teaching in an international environment*
- *Experiences influences awareness for the need of cultural adaptation*
- *Experiences influences degree of cultural awareness*
- *Cultural differences less obvious in the online environment*
- *Available tutoring time influences cultural awareness*
- *Need of cultural adaption depends on subject taught*
- *Experiences influences awareness for recognising benefits arising from multicultural aspect*
- *Multicultural aspect did broaden students' perspective*

No adaption to multicultural aspect within CTP course

Tutor A highlighted that the CTP course design follows a central approach which does not, in his view, involve adaptation to different cultures.

'On the level of how we prepare our material, how we construct our work I still think that we come from a place where we are offering this in Liverpool.[...] We are trying to make education more accessible but pretty much only geographically [...].' (App. E, p.44, l.43)

Nearly all of the tutors who were interviewed within the study and who have experience of teaching online within an international setting strongly suggest that the multicultural issue is an important factor that needs to be considered when teaching online (chapter 4.1.3.2).

To provide an example: Tutor ExK visited a pilot course that focused particularly on the cross-cultural aspect on online education with students from China and the UK. However she was very disappointed by that course since issues such as cross-cultural communication or sensitivity have not been addressed and as a consequence the whole course broke apart.

³⁷ For further details regarding the research process itself see chapter 3.4.

,Only once I participated in a course which specifically was about the cross-cultural aspect of online learning. And that was a project [...]where half participants were UK academics and half participants were Chinese academics. And the purpose of the course was to experience and explore cross-cultural issues in online-learning.[...] It was; it was also completely disasters, absolutely fell apart. Because even though they said that this is a course about online and cultural differences no one ever did anything specific about identifying or discussing cross-cultural communication or cross- cultural sensitivity. And as a result the whole course completely collapsed.’ (App. E, p.74, l.26)

Also if the University promotes itself as an institution within a particular cultural setting, Kingston and Forland (2008) stress that whenever recruiting internationally, the University needs to be aware of educational differences and take into account the possibility of a mismatch of cultural and educational expectations. A lack of cultural adaptation is a leading reason why e-learning fails to work for a globally distributed audience (Dunn and Malinetti, 2002). Also McLoughlin (1999c) points out that such approaches are a particular weakness of institutions offering globalised online education. The researcher suggests that the workload for online tutors might increase if no cultural aspects are considered within the course since it is the role of the online tutor to solve difficulties within the programme (see chapter 2 and 4.1.2.1). Moreover the demands of teaching online might increase since tutors have to compensate for the missing cultural adaptation within the course. For first time online tutors who have no experience in teaching an international audience and who have not received any preparation a challenge like that might not be manageable.

Particular challenge for online tutors teaching in an international environment

Tutor ExK, who has got a large amount of experience of working (online) in an international environment, explained, that globalised online education, is on the one hand rich but on the other hand cultural differences can produce large difficulties.

‘People think that cross-cultural communication is instantly rich and wonderful. In fact it takes much, much longer, it’s often much, much more difficult, it often causes great deals of difficulties, it’s also interesting, very interesting and I think it’s worth a trouble.’ (App. E, p.76, l.10)

Hence, online tutors are faced with particular challenges. The challenge might be even expanded if the course design disregards cultural aspects.

Experiences influence awareness for the need of cultural adaptation

Generally the tendency has been identified that tutors who have little experience of working online within multicultural settings seemed to be of the opinion that there is not much need to adapt to cultural differences since no major diversities have been perceived.

‘[...] the only point I have noticed about that, really, is the fact that not all the students are studying in their native language’. (tutor B; App. E, p.8, l.49)

Experiences influence degree of cultural awareness

The degree of cultural awareness in general seems to depend on the amount of experiences one has made within culturally diverse settings. Student F who has no experience in working in an international environment stressed that he is not considering anything like cultural diversities.

'You know, you are not really thinking of, of this kind of differences.' (App. E, p.53, l.36)

Most of the interviewed students had experiences in working within multicultural or culturally diverse settings (chapter 4.1.1.2) and revealed a particular awareness of potential differences within the multicultural online environment.

'I would be more sensitive to cultural differences and [...] not to assume so much.' (student B, App. E, p.31, l.9)

Limited experiences of students with cultural diverse people might decrease again the demands of online tutors, since tutors do need to compensate for difficulties arising for instance from a missing sensibility towards other cultural habits or misunderstandings arising from language difficulties (see chapter 4.1.3.2). Students who demonstrate cultural awareness might act more carefully within the online environment. Hence, knowing students background in regard to their experiences might be very beneficial for online tutors.

Cultural differences less obvious in the online environment

Moreover one of the culturally experienced interviewees mentioned that within the online environment cultural differences are even less obvious than in a face-to-face environment. However he stressed that it does not change the fact that there are cultural differences in programmes with multicultural students.

'No matter how long the log stays in the river, it never becomes a crocodile. [...] I think that online, if you are a log, you can be much more like you pretend to be a crocodile then face-to-face. I mean online people don't know what nationality I am. But face-to-face they always do.' (tutor ExK, App. E, p.77, l.41)

Available tutoring time influences cultural awareness

But there are definitely other aspects which might have an influence on the missing awareness for cultural differences within the course; as mentioned earlier lack of time online tutors are suffering from might be a reason why online tutors are not having the opportunity to engage as intensely as necessary in the course in order to realise cultural differences.

'I am in fact not aware that there are huge cultural differences between [...] The main problem I have experienced and I have seen is that for all the colleagues it's not enough time.' (tutor E, App. E, p.8, l.17; p. 22, l.33)

Need of cultural adaption depends on subject taught

Moreover, tutor D suggested that in this context the subject being taught influences the self-awareness-of people and therefore the necessity to pay attention to cultural diversity.

'I think the kinds of way we have taught is on the assumption that the people who are gona do this are pretty self-aware people. [...] I think it's because of the topic we are teaching. If we were teaching something like Medicine or more even straight Psychology it would be more of an issue.' (tutor D, App. E, p.22, l.51)

Experiences influence awareness for recognising benefits arising from multicultural aspect

In line with the limited awareness of cultural diversities in the online course most tutors with little or no experience of working in multicultural settings did not mention any particular benefit that arises from the multicultural nature of the course. In contrast, both tutor F and C, who have wider experience in working in an international environment, explicitly emphasized the benefit of the international aspect of the course.

'Having students around the globe it is inspiring, it's great. It's you know it's a good experience to think that [...] the material I teach is going into this country and that country [...] I think it's wonderful.' (tutor C; App. E, p.14, l.10)

Nearly all students (who have experience in working in an international environment) also emphasised that the multicultural aspect of the course was one of the benefits of doing the CTP programme online.

'I think it's extremely valuable, extremely valuable.' (student E; App. E, p.49, l.38)

The researcher suggests that students studying a subject such as 'Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology' might be more interested in cultural aspects arising from the multicultural environment than students studying for instance 'Maths' or a subject where humans are not the main topic of interest. Such a positive attitude to the multicultural environment does motivate students which might make the tutoring in some cases easier. It would be interested to see if students in other subject areas have a similar attitude towards multicultural experiences.

Multicultural aspect did broaden students' perspective

Students underlined that the multicultural aspect did contribute to broaden their perspective.

'It makes one realise that there are other realities, that there are other ways of looking at, at the world, at problems [...] that actually has a direct impact of improving one's ability to actually be able to deal with problems because you realize that, actually I could looked at it in a different way.' (student D; App. E, p.42, l.11)

'Other people have their views, which is ahm influenced by their own culture [...] and that comes across in the forum [...] it does broaden my perspective.' (student A; App. E, p.26, l.47)

The possibility that one's own perspective gets broadened assumes the openness towards differences which might particularly be present within a course where a subject like CTP gets taught.

4.1.3.2 Challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvement

Perceived challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvement when having to teach online in an international environment were investigated and five main categories have been identified:

- A** **Language**
- B** **Cultural background**
- C** **Synchronously communication**

- D Recruitment and admission criteria**
- E Training and preparation**

The main focus within this chapter is, as mentioned earlier, to provide suggestions for managing perceived challenges and overcome difficulties when teaching and learning online in an international environment. These suggestions are particularly the result of interviews with experienced online tutors outside the CTP programme; however all other interviews have been considered as well within the analysis.

A Language

One of the most obvious difficulties in teaching a global audience is the matter of language (Olaniran, 2007). Similarly a central aspect recognised by nearly all tutors as well as students is the language aspect. Most students (A,B,C,D) considered a possible language difficulty for non native speakers. The following codes have been created within this category:

- *Different use of language*
- *Provide protocol with 'language rules' initially*
- *Revise course subsequently*
- *Give special allowance*
- *Make a new discussion point*

Different use of language

Both tutor A and C were of the opinion that the cultural issue influenced their way of expressing themselves in the sense of using English that is more understandable for non native speakers.

'Sometimes I have been a bit more careful in trying to explain my words than I might have been if it was only English speaking people.' (Tutor C; App. E, p.31, l.12)

Tutor ExJ underlined that opinion by highlighting that the multicultural nature of a course forced him to express things clearer.

'[...] it forced me to be more clear.' (App. E, p.72, l.36)

Generally it has been recommended by experienced online tutors and in line with authors as Wang and Reeves (2007) and Eberle et al. (2007) to avoid a language that might cause misunderstandings or hinder the communication process. Tutor ExG suggested that tutors should establish a 'simple language code'.

„Es hat sich bei uns ein eher einfacher Sprachcode eingebürgert.' (App. E, p.64, l.27)
['A more simple language code has been established [at our institution]'].

In this context, tutor A regretted the cost of it when using more standardised English without colloquialism in order to avoid misunderstandings. He realised that he loses the sense of the student who has written the message.

'And so I am tempted sometimes to try and get rid of those colloquialism to try and make the English more standard, more easy to understand for everybody. But the cost is too great. It cost me that I lose that sense of the person who has typed this out.' (App. E, p.4, l.10)

No concrete solution to that matter could have been offered by any tutor; however tutor ExK recommended that in some cases the compromise might be to provide an explanation for utilized colloquialism.

'And then they explained because they knew that there were lots of other students who might not use this convention.' (App. E, p.78, l.20)

Summing up within this code the following sub-codes have been created:

- *Express things clearly*
- *Avoid sarcasm, jokes, colloquialism etc.*
- *Establish a simple language code*

Provide protocol with 'language' rules' initially

Tutor ExK suggested handing out a protocol to students before the class begins which requests students to avoid a language that might cause misunderstandings.

'In general I think there should be protocols about not joking for example. Because I think, I think especially online [...] it can very quickly be misunderstood if you make a sarcastic remark for example.' (App. E, p.71, l.28)

Also if tutor ExK talked about his experiences within a classroom session, his suggestion might be adopted to the online counterpart.

Revise course subsequently

Tutor B was inspired by the interview and mentioned that he might need to go through his course contributions again considering complexity and grammar for non-native speakers.

'But perhaps what it ought to do is make me go through all the notes I have written for the Blackboard system which are fairly extensive and just check on the complexity of vocabulary and grammar. Because it might be that I didn't think in the early stages enough about how no native speakers would find – how accessible they would find the English.' (App. E, p.9, l.10)

This matter is underlying the assumption of tutor ExI (mentioned at a later stage) that the workload finally increases if tutors are not trained and prepared to teach online in an international environment. Moreover tutor ExN added that at his Institution the material for students is checked by 'critical foreign readers' in order to verify the compatibility for diverse cultures.

'Also, da wird auch schon viel Wert drauf gelegt, dass eben aus verschiedenen Ländern überprüft wird, ob das Material auch in dem Land Sinn mach.' (App. E, p.84, l.7)

[It is set value on the checking of the material from [the perspective of] diverse countries, if the material makes any sense within those countries'.]

In this context tutor ExN mentioned that at his Institution the material for students is checked by a 'critical reader' in order to verify its compatibility for diverse cultures.

'Also, da wird auch schon viel Wert drauf gelegt, dass eben aus verschiedenen Ländern überprüft wird, ob das Material auch in dem Land Sinn macht.' (App. E, p.84, l.7)

['It is but a lot of value on it, that it gets checked from diverse countries, if the material makes sense in that country']

An approach like this would not just support the online tutor in regard to the amount of workload, it would rather guaranty learning material which considers cultural differences, a task which a tutor might not be able to fulfill based on limited cultural experiences.

Give special allowance

Both tutor A and B think that it is essential to give special allowance to non native speakers in assignments.

'But clearly it's an additional difficulty that they have to, have to overcome [...] and I think that to a certain extent we have tried to make allowance to that fact. They were not able to express the ideas exactly as a native speaker of English would be able to do.' (Tutor B; App. E, p.8, l.54)

The question in this context arises if native speakers might feel disadvantaged by the fact that non native speakers receive special allowance. Is it only culture which justifies those allowance or has someone for instance with speech difficulties also a demand for it? An answer to those questions has not been given within the study.

Make a new discussion point

Tutor C, who has experience of teaching globally, introduced the 'language aspect' as a discussion point in his class focusing on *'the way which language is evolved in the way we think about the mind'*.

'I made an issue about how important that idea of psychology and language; how important it is.' (App. E, p.12, l.36)

Similarly tutor ExK explained that some culturally specific issues within the class might be very beneficial. Instead of avoiding culturally specific language at all ExK suggested that students might explain the meaning of a particular phrase.

'And then they explained because they knew that there were lots of other students who might not use this convention. They explained what this convention means. So that everybody knew. And that was very useful because then everybody in the course began to explain the assumption behind what they were going to write about.' (App. E, p.78, l.20)

B Cultural background

As mentioned earlier, awareness of cultural issues arising in the CTP programme differed among the tutors in accordance with the spectrum of experiences in teaching or working in an international environment among them. Interviewed tutors with extensive experience of teaching in an international environment explicitly mentioned the importance of considering cultural

aspects in such courses. Less experienced tutors generally showed less multicultural awareness and saw it as a minor influence on their role as an online tutor (see also chapter 4.1.3.1).

The following codes have been created within this category:

- *Being aware of one's own cultural /educational background*
- *Being aware of student's cultural /educational background*
- *Develop 'meta awareness'*
- *Create an open-minded atmosphere*
- *Provide appropriate cultural sensitiveness*
- *Allow to explore one's own culture / educational background*
- *Clarify different meanings of words*
- *Consider additional time required*
- *Allow to explore experience*
- *Allow to explore topic previously*
- *Consider different expectations and needs*
- *Establish rules*
- *Intervene when necessary*
- *Teach with pleasure*

Being aware of one's own cultural background

Student F stressed the general ability of being aware of one's own culture, an issue that has been also strongly suggested by Caroll (2005).

'I guess in the sense you are always having to deal with your own cultural values about [...] how your culture had related to [another] culture and be conscious of those things.' (App. E, p.54, l.2)

The researcher suggests that being aware of one's own culture requires possibly training and an intensive grappling with culture in general which might not be easy if someone has not collected any experiences with other cultures before.

Being aware of student's cultural/educational background

The awareness of student's cultural and educational backgrounds has been discussed previously in the literature review (chapter 2.2). Tutor F stressed that he is always interested in the cultural background of his students.

'I'm always curious where people are from.' (App. E, p.23, l.51)

Tutor E, in contrast, excused himself for not being able to consider students cultural backgrounds within the programme for the lack of time reasons (chapter 4.1.2.3).

'[...] I am not completely aware where the students come from. [...] I know they all have western names but I didn't check; just because I didn't have time to check.' (App. E, p.21, l.13)

As mentioned earlier some online tutors might feel frustrated by the fact that the workload online teaching requires has not been considered appropriately by the University (chapter 4.1.2.3). The researcher suggests that this frustration may additionally hinder the motivation of online tutors

for extra and time consuming tasks in the programme such as identifying the cultural background of students.

In order to be able to better understand the communication situation, both tutors ExH and ExI explained that one must have a basic understanding of the educational situation of their students.

„[...] dass man so eine Kommunikationssituation dann lesen kann ähm wie die ist und dazu gehört ein Grundverständnis der ähm, der Bildungssituation derjenigen, die aus anderen Ländern kommen [...]“ (tutor ExH; App. E, p.57, l.41)

[‘[...] if one wants to understand the situation of the communication, there belongs to a basic understanding of the educational situation of the students.’]

Such an understanding should also be established in the early stages of a course, as tutor ExI suggested, otherwise it might be a barrier to work effectively in the group.

‘So, obviously it will come across all of the in the online environment and that has to be brought with in the early stages before you get onto the information and exchanging knowledge construction work; otherwise it might get in the way of the group working effectively’ (App. E, p.69, l.22)

Considering the just mentioned hindrance of tutor F the recommendation of EXH and EXI can only be met if there is a basis for such time consuming tasks.

Develop ‘meta awareness’

Tutor ExK went even further in this context and recommended that tutors should develop what he calls a ‘meta-awareness’ which includes being aware of the situation considering one’s own culture as well as the culture of the communication partner.

‘So we need teachers [...] to know how to communicate with each other and to become what I call ‘meta-awareness’. [Meta-awareness is a state of understanding about your understanding. You sort of stand outside your awareness] so even as I am talking now, I’m aware of how I am talking and what I am saying; a bit I am thinking ok ‘This woman is a German, she probably has different ideas from -you’ etcetera, for example if you look at you now German culture is supposed to be a ‘high context’ culture [...] and so forth’. (App. E, p.76, l.16)

Create an open-minded atmosphere

Tutor ExN whose e-tutoring experiences come from time at the Open University stressed that it is always the challenge to create an open atmosphere in multicultural groups. An open atmosphere means that there are no prejudices that you are open to new ideas, and that it is meaningful to discuss with each other and to receive new ideas. If there are any prejudices among students in a class it is the task of the tutor to filter them out.

„[...] die Herausforderung ist einfach immer eine offene Atmosphäre zu schaffen. [...] das man eben keine Vorurteile hat, das man immer wieder neue Ideen an sich heran kommen lässt und das es sehr viel Sinn macht, miteinander zu diskutieren, neue Perspektiven zu bekommen usw. Und das ist dann die Herausforderung, falls wo was aufkommt, da die Vorteile raus zu filtern.‘ (App. E, p.84, l.55)

[‘[...] it is the challenge to create an open-minded atmosphere. [...] that one has no prejudice, that one is always again open for new ideas and that it makes sense to discuss things with each other, to receive new ideas tec. And that is the challenge, if something comes up, to filter prejudices out.’]

This is in line with Chan (2002) who found that also students appreciate online tutors who have the ability to tolerate new ideas and different opinions in order to support critical thinking and help students to explore different perspectives (Chan, 2002).

Provide appropriate cultural sensitiveness

Based on the knowledge of students' educational backgrounds tutor ExG recommended that a tutor should be able to try to think and feel how students think and feel.

„[...] jemand sollte [...] ‚cultural intelligence‘ haben. Also, dass man sich so reinfühlen kann und reindenken kann in diese Kommunikationssituation. Also manche sagen ja auch, dass man so eine Kommunikationssituation dann lesen kann ähm wie die ist und dazu gehört ein Grundverständnis der ähm, der Bildungssituation derjenigen, die aus anderen Ländern kommen [...]‘ (App. E, p.57, l.40)

‘[...] somebody should [...] have ‚cultural intelligence‘. So that one can feel and think in this communication situation. So some say that one can read such a communication situation; it involves the knowledge of the educational situation from those who are from other countries.’

However as mentioned within the focus-group there is always a limit to what extend one is able to understand another culture (chapter 4.2.3).

Several students (C, B, D) noticed that they are more sensitive about cultural diversities when communicating in the class.

‘I would be more sensitive to cultural differences and [...] not to assume so much.’ (Student B; App. E, p.31, l.9)

One student even expressed a sense of insecurity on the grade of appropriate sensitiveness. He found himself being oversensitive in some cases.

‘So some of the social niceness I thought too much about it and steered away from them.’ (Student F; App. E, p.36, l.9)

In this context tutor ExK added that it is the task of the tutor to work with cultural aspects in a sensitive way as they arise.

‘[...] and then as these things come up the tutor should be sensitive to it and name it and begin to work with it.’ (App. E, p.75, l.28)

However, a lot of aspects arising from cultural differences are often not visible as it is the case in the just mentioned issue of being oversensible.

Allow to explore and express own cultural/educational background

Tutor A has tried to let students explore their own cultural background by allowing students to present a thesis based on their personal interest.

‘[...] allow people to explore their own culture within the context of this programme [...]. And so a South African student of ours is doing his thesis looking at “South African witch doctors” which is fascinating stuff.’ (App. E, p.4, l.29)

Similarly Ryan (2005), as mentioned in a previous chapter, recommends that international students should get the opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Moreover student A wished to be able to find out more about other students' cultural backgrounds within the course. However the lack of time for addressing the multicultural aspect within the CTP programme in more detail is an issue mentioned by both tutors as well as students. Student A considered that there might not have been enough time for it.

'[...] I would have liked to really have the time to find out more about them [...by] emailing or through the forums. It would have been nice to do that but of course you don't get the time, do you? [...] I was very interested to learn about peoples other cultures, although I haven't.' (App. E, p.26, l.15)

Some external tutors who have experience of teaching online highlighted the exploration of one's own cultural and educational background as an important approach to overcome barriers when teaching in an international environment. In line with that recommendation, tutor ExI, for instance, provided a three step model of how to realise such approaches:

- ➔ Step 1- Allow exploration and expression of one's own culture/identity and to show interest in other peoples cultures

','[...] what you seek to do is to enable each individual to express his or her identity which of course includes their culture and to show interest in that of others.' (App. E, p.68, l.20)

- ➔ Step 2- Try to get everybody to understand each other's cultures

'And what you need to do in a [...] learning group across cultures - I mean I think from a week to a week, I am talking about that - is to trying to get everybody to fully understand everybody else's cultures if possible.' (App. E, p.68, l.23)

As mentioned earlier this is in line with O'Dowd (2004) who suggests that intercultural awareness could be best obtained if tutors *'[...] also through dealing with the realities of their and their partners' worlds'* (p.230) and Doherty (2004), who highlights the positive impact of integrating cultural differences in the course curriculum as a discussion point.

- ➔ Step 3 - Build a third culture, instead of focusing on differences

'What I mean is to build a special culture from that into a cross-cultural group within that environment at that time; so in fact you create your own norms, ways and values how you are going to operate as a group that goes on the best of what people are bringing to it, rather than looking at differences [...].' (App. E, p.68, l.27)

However tutor ExK has a critical opinion about building a 'third culture'. He thought that a third culture might be the one of the dominant cultures in a particular setting.

'I don't think it's possible.[...] I don't believe there is such a thing as an international culture. [...] I think there are everybody who is individual stands it but they can become beware of other people's differences and communicate across that.[...] what you usually find when people think that is happening is that the one dominant culture has won the argument.' (App. E, p.76, l.38)

In this case it is not exactly clear if both tutors ExK and ExI mean the same thing when talking about a 'third culture'.

Clarify different meanings of words

Tutor ExK mentioned that the word culture might cause difficulties in multicultural groups since its meaning differs among different cultures. In this sense it is important in his opinion to clarify what is meant by 'culture'.

'The first thing is that the word culture is a very difficult one. [...] So the word culture has to be defined and dealt with it in much more detail. So that we know when we are arguing with the world culture we are using the same word to mean the same thing.' (App. E, p.75, l.23)

Additionally tutor ExK suggested clarifying what it is understood by the word 'learning' since the meaning of it might differ as well.

'So maybe if we are doing learning together we should have some chance to say: 'Yeah, when I say learning what do you mean by learning? What do I mean by learning? And that will be very different in different academic culture.' (App. E, p.76, l.7)

There might be other words which might differ in their meaning within diverse cultural settings. The recommendation of tutor ExK can possibly be understood as advice to clarify the meaning of any key word in a course which might cause misunderstandings.

Consider additional time required

Tutor ExK stressed that all of the previously mentioned recommendations of 'letting students explore their culture' do take time. Hence, through his opinion doing a task online in an international environment takes longer than in a class with students having the same cultural and educational background.

'And if we are supposed to do some task online with each other, then it will take us longer to do the task because these things [cultural discussions and understandings] will have to happen as well.' (App. E, p.76, l.22)

This aspect might cause a particular conflict since a lack of time when having to teach online has been mentioned earlier by tutors and a student of the CTP programme (chapter 4.1.2.3).

Allow to explore experience

Tutor ExJ, who is experienced in teaching international students face-to-face, supplemented the idea of providing students with the opportunity to express their experiences of studying in a foreign country within the virtual learning environment.

'And actually I want to use it for the [...] the international students this year because I want them to share the learning experience that they are having here.' (App. E, p.73, l.51)

To a certain degree this idea might be adopted for an online course in order to identify difficulties for students learning (online) in a particular cultural setting. Tutor ExJ explained that Malaysian students, for example, had difficulties working within the British, more independent study mode since they are used to having more guidance.

'In Malaysia it's a lot more directed learning. They were going in the class for three or four hours and they were told exactly; whereas here they will be in a classroom for two hours and then they will go away and do their own research. And that is something they find difficult to adjust to do.' (App. E, p.74, l.3)

Within the CTP programme it is possible that an activity like that would be appreciated by a lot of students since some mentioned that they would have found out more about other cultures (chapter 4.1.3.2).

Allow to explore topic in advance

Tutor ExG was of the opinion that a rational online discussion with such diverse groups is not possible without any preparation. In order to enable a successful learning process online students are asked to prepare a topic prior to attending a session in order to bring more objectivity and focus the discussion. Encouraging students to explore a topic before being discussed is to engage them through reflections, group work and leading questions.

„Ich glaube eher, dass es im Regelfall nicht gelingt ohne gezielte Vorbereitung bei solch unterschiedlichen Lerner-Gruppen, eine vernünftige Diskussion zustande zu bringen. Haben sich aber alle vorab mit dem Thema, [...]intensiv beschäftigt, bringen sie einfach mehr Sachlichkeit und Zielorientierung in die Diskussion. [...] Diskussionen müssen über solche Fragestellungen, Reflektionen oder Gruppenaufgaben gut vorbereitet werden. Und dann haben sie eine echte Chance, dass die Lernprozesse erfolgreich sind.' (App. E, p.63, l.23)

[I think, that it usually does not work within such diverse learner groups without any targeted preparation to get a discussion. If all of them have worked intensively on a topic [...]they bring more targeted orientation and objectivity in the discussion.[...] Discussions need to be well prepared by questions, reflections and group work. And then they have a real chance, that the learning process is successful']

Considering different expectations and needs

Tutor C had the impression that issues of diverse expectations relating to student's cultural background caused some problems within the class. He also mentioned that he would have liked to know more about the issue of different expectations than he does.

'I think they had the wrong kind of expectation about what we offer. [...] But as far as I can tell all the English students have understood that; so there are some European ones who haven't. So maybe the kind of education at this level they used to might be different. I don't know, I don't know enough about that. I feel I should know but I don't know.' (App. E, p.12, l.7)

A study of Venter (2001) came to similar conclusions, revealing that differences in attitudes towards power distance can be seen in different expectations of the student-teacher relationship. The issue of different expectations within online and multicultural classes has also been mentioned in different chapters within the literature review (chapter 2.1.2, 2.1.3.1/2, 2.2.2/3, 2.3.1). A possible way to treat those challenges has been provided by Stevenson et al (2006) who investigated an expectations-led quality assurance process in online education (chapter 2.1.2).

In this context ExK stressed, that tutors need to be aware of diverse cultural needs of students. He experienced that Chinese students for instance do need social interaction before being able to

start to work on a topic in contrast to UK students who can go down to work straight away (similar issues have been discussed in chapter 2.2.2).

[...] it was very, very obvious that the Chinese students needed [...] much more social interaction and chat before they could get down to the work. Whereas the UK students just got right down to it and went to work. And it was very, very aggravating, you could feel the aggravation of the UK students with these Chinese students endlessly greeting and chatting away about social things rather than getting down to the work. And so what happened was that the UK postings got longer and longer and longer and more and more work focused and the Chinese postings got shorter [...] and finally disappeared altogether.’ (App. E, p.75, l.15)

Establish rules

Tutor ExG recommended agreeing on some general ‘ground rules’ with students before a course starts and taking responsibility as a tutor that these rules are followed consequently.

„Man muss am Anfang gewisse Spielregeln vereinbaren, die man auch am Anfang offen diskutieren muss. Wenn der Tutor dann entsprechend drauf achtet dass diese Spielregeln tatsächlich eingehalten werden, dann kann das sehr gut funktionieren.’ (App. E, p.63, l.14)

[‘You have to agree upon some rules, which have to be discussed very openly at the beginning. If the tutor cares for those rules, it can function quite well.’]

In this context, as mentioned earlier, tutor ExK suggested providing guidelines before the course begins. He explained that these guidelines should be explicit without making students worry about contributing and making a mistake.

[...] without becoming like a policeman, so that the students don’t feel that they are so worried that they might do a mistake that they don’t do anything, you know.’ (App. E, p.78, l.31)

Intervene when necessary

Some students occasionally perceived insecurity about how to continue discussions addressing ‘sensitive’ issues referring to students’ cultural diversity in the course. The result was that discussions did not develop; an aspect that has been mentioned by tutors earlier; however it might be that these sorts of problems are more or less an exception.

[...] we had some discussion which were inconclusive in the sense that really we weren’t able to develop [...] some people in the class had quiet strong Christians perspectives; and you know these were being challenged by a more sort of participatory perspective. [...] I would have liked to see that you know gone further without, without causing anybody discomfort, or offending anybody.’ (Student D; App. E, p.45, l.23)

It is taken as the task of the online tutor to moderate the discussion and to keep the discussion on track (chapter 2.3.2). Tutor ExG added that the tutor needs to follow this task consequently in a multicultural environment, when, for instance, the way of description goes in the wrong direction because of a misunderstanding.

„Der Tutor ist mehr oder weniger zum Moderator geworden. An den Stellen, an denen er gemerkt hat, dass entweder inhaltlich oder vielleicht auch einmal vom Umgangston oder von der Art der Darstellung in die falsche Richtung geht, hat der Tutor dann immer rein gegriffen.’ (App. E, p.63, l.21)

[‘The tutor is more or less a moderator. At the points, when he realized that the content or perhaps the casual conversation or the way of the demonstration goes in the wrong direction, then has the tutor always encroached’.]

The way of intervening should also follow a positive approach as tutor ExK suggested.

'Then the tutor should [...] begin to name and comment on it in a positive way, how students are interacting, what students are doing. So it should become a topic of discussion in its own light as well as the content of what is being discussed; so that students can begin to talk about and comment on.' (App. E, p.75, l.12)

And tutor ExN added that in a case a conflict arises the tutor should intervene as a sort of mediator.

'[...] wenn Vorurteile der Studenten untereinander, also Konflikte aufkommen, [...] als Mediator dazwischen zu stehen. [...] wichtig darauf hinzuweisen, wir sind hier in diesem internationalen Umfeld um zu studieren. Und wollen ja, die Andersartigkeit als Chance sehen, ja.' (App. E, p.84, l.56)

'[...] if prejudices among students, so conflicts appear, to stand as an mediator between it. [...] It is important to indicate that we are in this international environment in order to study. And we want to see the differences as a chance.'

Teach with pleasure

ExN moreover stressed that it is in his opinion important to have fun teaching and also to use humour.

'Mit Spaß dabei zu sein; Humor setze ich wie gesagt sehr gerne ein.' (App. E, p.85, l.30)

'[Having fun while doing it; as said before I like to use humor.]'

The issue of using humour has been addressed previously (code: 'different use of language') and it has been shown that there needs to be a balance between not being too formal and not causing misunderstandings. However, if the circumstances for online tutors are difficult, as for instance standing under time pressure (chapter 4.1.2.3), the need of teaching with pleasure might be difficult.

C Synchronous Communication

Since synchronous communication in online courses follows its own rules in some ways (chapter 2.1.3.2) tutors identified particular influences on their way of teaching online with regard to the multicultural aspect. Within this category the following codes have been created:

- *Less use of synchronous communication*
- *Teaching at different times*
- *Consider fast exchanges*
- *Repeat meanings in other words*

Less use of synchronous communication

Since students of the online CTP programme are based in places around the world with different time zones tutor A explained that he is not able to conduct as much synchronous communication as he would have liked to.

'One is because of they are from all over the place with different time zones we don't do as much synchronous stuff as we like.' (App. E, p.3, l.39)

Teaching at different times

Online education offers the possibility to teach from anywhere and at any time as long as asynchronous communication is involved. As soon as synchronous communication is part of the

curriculum even more time flexibility has to be considered by the online tutor. Tutor A tried to offer the possibility to most students to attend to a chat by offering a session at Sunday afternoon.

'I have taught online chat sessions on Sunday afternoon because that's the only time when anybody else you know more than one time zone is involved.' (App. E, p.5, l.17)

This indicates again the input some online tutors are willing to bring within the CTP programme.

Consider fast exchanges

Tutor F mentioned moreover that the fast exchanges in synchronous sessions might be difficult for non native speakers. He stated that this needs to be considered by online tutors.

'Things got tricky once in an online chat-room when a foreign language speaker felt a little overwhelmed by the rather fast exchanges. This is something to consider.' (App. E, p.23, l.45)

Repeat meanings in other words

Additionally tutor ExJ remarked that he is repeating himself quite often by saying the same thing in different words when teaching in an international environment.

'I suddenly realised I started saying things three times; I would say the first time I would say how I would normally say it, and then the second time I would rearticulate it, say it very differently and then I would say it differently again.' (App. E, p.72, l.9)

It was not clear within the interview if tutor ExJ meant to adopt such a communication method for synchronous online communication. However, it might be a useful approach to be more understandable for non-native speakers in a virtual classroom session. Here is a parallel towards the code 'considering additional time required' since this way of communication requires additional teaching time.

D Recruitment and marketing criteria

A few tutors of the CTP programme perceived an influence on their tutor role in relation to recruitment and marketing criteria. Both tutors C and D developed the idea within the interview of reconsidering recruitment and marketing criteria of the programme.

'That's an issue for us to look at again in terms of are we putting the right material out there in terms of our marketing which is an issue.' (tutor C; App. E, p.12, l.8)

'[...]we don't have any black students; so kind of African black students. Oh they are not applying but then there is the question of are we advertising ourselves in such a way as to be attractive to you know other countries [...]' (tutor D; App. E, p.20, l.47)

Furthermore, tutor C mentioned that classical admission procedures cannot be applied for international students such as a face-to-face interview. However he valued an interview as a very useful recruitment approach and questions himself how he could virtually interview students.

'Students who may be unstable or not so good in interacting with others they can cause problems in terms of the dynamic of the group and also problems in terms of the stuff. [...] If you don't interview them then you

can't pick it up. So if you got students from America, South Africa, in the far East how you are gonna interview them?'. (App. E, p.13, l.55)

E Preparation and training

Interviews with online tutors opened up the question if a particular training for online tutors teaching in a multicultural environment is necessary.

Tutor C, for instance, added that he is missing particular knowledge about different cultures which he thought is important for his role as an online tutor.

'So maybe the kind of education at this level they used to might be different. I don't know, I don't know enough about that. I feel I should know but I don't know.' (App. E, p.12, l.10)

Therefore the last three interviewees were questioned about their opinion concerning a particular preparation for online tutors. Tutor ExI (as the most experienced one in teaching how to teach online) strongly advised that every online teacher, even if he had many years of experience of teaching face-to-face, needs to be prepared when teaching online. In his opinion, if tutors are not prepared it takes too much time to achieve very little. He further outlines the necessity of having a lot of practice.

'[...] they need all the skills of working online and through my view no teacher should be let anywhere near the online environment without the benefit of training and development; and that happen far too much and should never happen again. [...] because what happen is, that it takes people far, far too much time to achieve very little. [...] All I think is the main thing is that they do understand phenomena of training and development in the online environment so and a lot practice.' (App. E, p.68, l.43)

Within some subjects it might not be possible to recruit experienced online tutors since the subject taught is very specific, as it is for instance the case within the CTP programme (chapter 4.2.2), and there are not many teachers who have the subject competence for instruction.

Focusing on the multicultural aspect of the course tutor ExK (as the tutor with the experience of teaching (online) in an international environment) clearly recommended that online tutors need to be prepared when having to teach in such an environment.

'Of course! Both students and teachers.' (App. E, p.75, l.7)

Tutor ExN and ExK have adopted a particular preparation for the multicultural aspect within online education. Tutor ExN added that at his institution new tutors always receive an introduction in which diversity is one of the topics. Moreover, tutors receive material about this topic to work with. It should be noticed that his Institution has its focus on distance learning; it is not a traditional face-to-face University where pure online courses are the exception.

'Also das ist noch Teil des Einführungsprogrammes für neue Tutoren. Und es gibt dann auch ähm verschiedenste Materialien, also die man dann zugeschickt bekommt, die sich damit auch beschäftigen.' (App. E, p.83, l.52)

[,That is a part of the introduction programme for new tutors. And then there are diverse materials one gets send, addressing that']

Moreover tutor ExK provided some suggestions about how online tutors need to be prepared to teach a multicultural audience online which reflect some of the just mentioned issues.

Tutors should...

- Have experience in being in multicultural / cultural diverse courses
- have experiences as teachers
- have developed / have started to develop 'cultural sensitivity' and 'communication strategies' (for face-to-face communication)
- have some models and examples of effective online tutoring

'Well, first they should have the experience themselves [...] in courses with people from many places with many faces. Secondly, they should have already developed cultural sensitivity in face to face communication or at least started to do so. ; These kind of cross-cultural sensitivity and communication strategies are very well known. So you know what happened in a face-to-face world also happens in the online world. And they should see some models of effective online tutoring, they should see some examples and they should work with experience as teachers.' (App. E, p.75, l.33)

As mentioned earlier ExK stressed that students should also be prepared when having to learn in an international environment. Details about such a preparation and training have not been discussed within the interviews; however have been substantial part of the focus group which will be discussed in the next chapter. In contrast, Tutor ExN added that in his opinion students did not necessarily need to be prepared within his courses since students have a general openness and interests towards this topic. Within other subjects, he added, it might be different.

Die Studierenden nicht unbedingt. In dem Fach, das ich unterrichte, ist seitens der Studenten sowieso eine generelle Offenheit oder Interesse für das Thema'. Researcher: ‚Ihrer Aussage entnehme ich, dass es ggf. in anderen Fächern, wie z.B. Biologie anders sein könnte.' ExN: ‚Ja, das könnte ich mir gut vorstellen'.(App. E, p.85, l.16)

['Students not necessarily; within the subject I teach there is a general openness or interest beside the students for that topic.' Researcher:' I extract from you proposition that it might be different in other subjects? 'ExN: 'Yes, I could imagine.']

This is something that has been suggested earlier by tutor D (see chapter 4.1.3.1). He suggested that the subject taught influences the self-awareness of people.

'I think the kinds of way we have taught is on the assumption that the people who are gona do this are pretty self-aware people. [...] I think it's because of the topic we are teaching. If we were teaching something like Medicine or more even straight Psychology it would be more of an issue.' (App. E, p.22, l.51)

In summary, figure 9 provides an overview of most identified categories addressing tasks, challenges and suggestions for improvement of teaching online in a multicultural environment which have been just presented within this chapter. Thereby tasks, challenges, and suggestions for improvement cannot be clearly separated from each other hence are summarised together in one figure. The category 'Consider fast exchanges' (chapter 4.1.3.2), for example, presents on the one hand a task, since tutors should consider the fast exchanges in synchronous sessions; on the other hand it comprises a suggestion for improvement when teaching in an international

environment. Tutors might react in the way that they repeat important information or conclusions or they asked English native speakers to slow down when speaking or typing a message. Overall that task might be a challenge for a tutor who has never worked in an international environment.

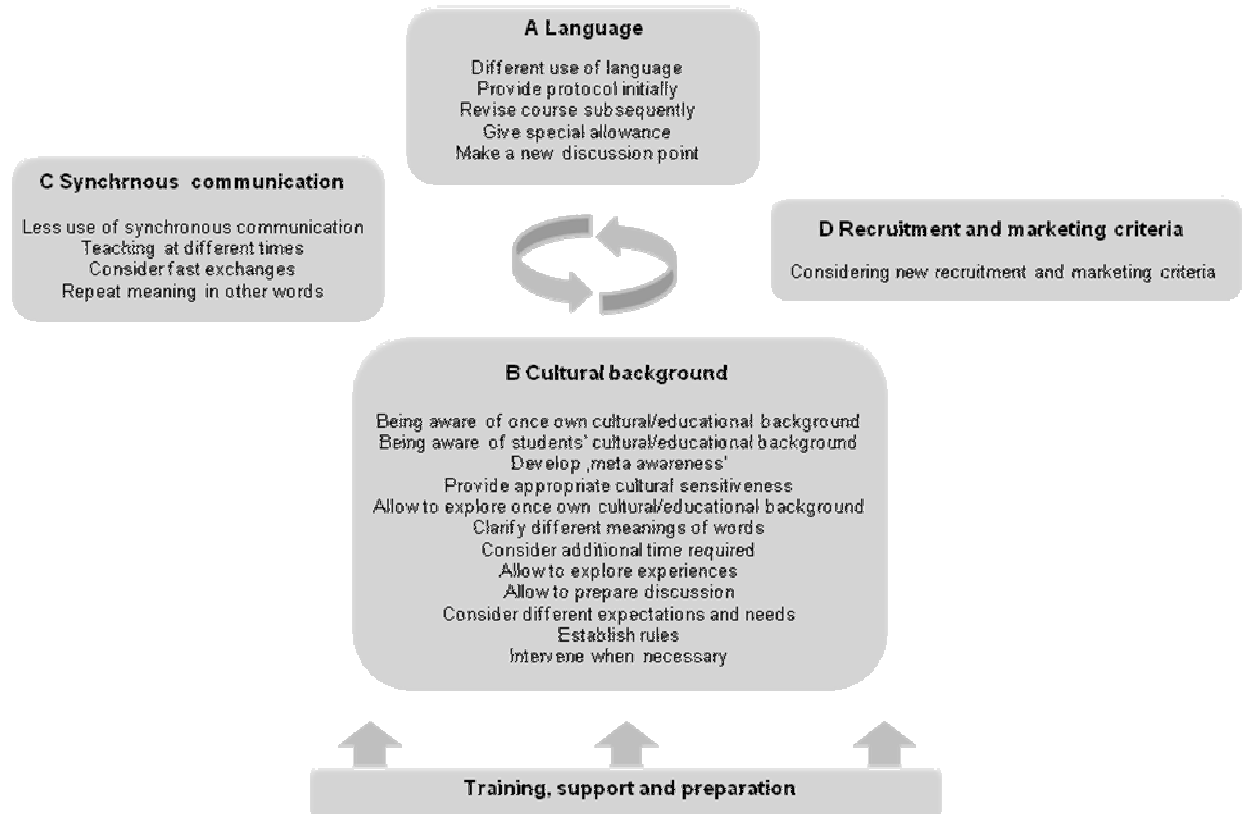


Figure 9: Categories and codes addressing tasks, challenges and suggestions for improvement of teaching online in a multicultural environment.

4.2 Analysis and results of Focus Group at LMU

The development of the focus group discussion will be highlighted and summarised in the first instance after a brief overview of the background of the participants has been provided. Then the categories and codes that have been generated which relate to the training and preparation of online tutors at University will be addressed (chapter 4.2.1.-4.2.3). It has been decided to keep the analysis of the focus group within this chapter largely separate, since the research questions that guided the discussion were a result of the analysis of previous interviews. However, reflecting the circularity of the research process results from the focus group have also been considered in previous chapters. Within the discussion a minor shift occurred from the initial question 'How online tutors should be trained and prepared?' towards 'What is the right way to prepare and support online tutors?' and 'Is a training the right way to go at all?' (see appendices D and F).

Participants started to collect answers to these questions which go beyond the initial question provided by the researcher.

The discussion was initiated by the researcher with an introduction into the topic and the following questions (appendices D):

- a) How should online tutors, working at a traditional face-to-face University, be effectively prepared or trained to teach in an international online environment?
- b) Could you suggest any solutions / provide more details addressing:
 - Pedagogical aspect
 - Organizational aspect of such preparation/training

In the first instance participants generally tended to talk about their own experiences of either teaching online or teaching online a culturally diverse/multicultural environment. At a later stage one participant began to focus the discussion towards the initiated topic about training and support of online tutors by repeating the first research question. No concrete answer could be provided; participants gave the impression that they do not have a concrete answer. It became clear that there is a conflict between a possible need or wish for preparation/training or support and missing resources. At the time of the focus group, support came from peer-to-peer guidance in some cases and new online tutors received their training by learning on the job. A particular training programme was not mentioned although the integration of such points into existing courses such as a PG-Cert in teaching was considered. With regard to handbooks or documentation it became obvious that tutors need something clearer and briefer than what it is provided at the moment. Since every course is different a very general guide might not be very useful. Participants hence came to the agreement that the sharing of knowledge and experiences might be the solution to chose. The problem at the moment is that there is no central organisational unit that would have an overview of all e-learning activities at University and that might initiate such networking top-down. How this sharing and peer-to-peer support work has not been solved but it has instead been raised as an issue to think of in the future.

The following categories and codes have been created which will be highlighted after the experiences of research participants as well as the situation in regard to training of online tutors at LJMU will be briefly presented.

Requirements / suggestions for improvement:

- *Need for training*
- *Provide technical support*
- *Considering entrance Requirements*
- *Need for top down guidance from central point*

- *Sharing and peer-to-peer guidance*
- *Place for sharing and peer-to-peer guidance*
- *Remain resources*
- *Need for targeted guidance*
- *Knowing eLearning activist at University*
- *Line manager does understand demands of e-learning*
- *Enough resources*
- *Considering limits of dealing with cultural differences*

4.2.1 Experiences of focus group participants

Table 11 presents an overview of the institution or school of the participants and their experience in teaching online and teaching in an international environment. Two participants (FD, FE) were from the Business School at LJMU, one of them has extensive experiences in both, teaching online and teaching in an international environment, whereas the other one has taught on diverse distance learning programmes. Two other participants were from the School of Psychology at LJMU, working as an online tutor in the CTP programme from the date of the initiation of the programme. One of those has developed that programme. The fifth participant is part of the Learning and Technology Team at LJMU and has no experience in teaching online, however provides staff with support and advice concerning technology.

Name	School/Institution at LJMU	Task / role at LJMU in regard to e-learning
		<i>Experiences</i>
FA	Learning Technology Team	Experience of teaching but not online, providing support and advice for staff who want to use technology in their class, brings in new technology
FB	School of Psychology	Worked as an online tutor in the CTP online programme since initiation, has done the PG-Cert
FC	School of Psychology	Worked as an online tutor in the CTP online programme since initiation, has developed the programme
FD	Business School	Has been developing online courses for many years, taught in online situations in approximately twelve countries
FE	Business School	Taught online on diverse distance learning programmes

Table 11: Background of focus group participants

At the moment there is no particular training for online tutors who have to teach online in a multicultural environment and participants asked whether there should be or not.

FD: 'And where do we prepare the tutor for this?'

FA: 'That's a good question'.

FD: 'So there is no training required?'

FE: 'No, the question is whether there should be. But the point is - there isn't. Should that be?'

(App. F, p.92, l.15)

Participant FC mentioned in this context that the culture at University has changed. Years ago there was no training for teachers at all and nowadays people can take professional qualifications such as the PG-Cert, like participant FB has done.

'[...] now things have changed since then. So, someone like [FB] does the PG-Cert, right. [...] traditionally there wasn't training for anything at University. And that's changing [...] it's a changing culture what I am talking about.' (App. F, p.95, l.6)

Participant FD described the situation at LJMU as follows:

- The process works through learning from each other.
'[...] you all learned from each other. So the people who are delivering online courses share that knowledge about possible cultural issues. And that's the way it is done. It's not done through any process of training and the question is: is there any need for training? Because that's the way the process works.' (App. F, p.95, l.48)
- People might think that you have the skills to teach online, to teach in an international environment and therefore you get ask to teach in an online programme.
'It's based on whether or not somebody else thinks you can do it because of your subject knowledge and your probabilities in technology or whatever. [...] And that's the reason that there is no training because of that process. Take that one that further into cultural dimension because that person has not necessarily received any training, and it's in that position because somebody else believes on their capabilities to deliver, then that person [...]' (App. F, p.95, l.39)

4.2.2 Requirements and suggestions for improvement

Need for training

Participant FB added that he would like to have some sort of training. He was surprised by the benefit he had from learning about new tools and techniques within the PG-Cert. He would have liked to have a similar toolbox of techniques and ideas for both running and designing an online course. From his perspective, there was nobody to learn from when he was designing the course some years ago. As a consequence the start of the course actually differs from later modules which were designed based on collected experience.

'I would like some training I think. Necessarily, I am one of these people who did the PG-Cert and I got actually quite a lot out of it. [...] a whole toolbox of techniques and ideas and theories that I have never heard of [...] we launched ourselves into that programme [...] we were all completely new to this, to distance learning [...] we had no one to learn from. So I would have liked to have access to that sort of ideas about a toolbox of techniques of ideas, of approaches that we could have involved in both in [...] running the sessions and also in the design of sessions. Because the modules that we have designed since the programme launch, [...] a couple of years later we designed a couple of more modules on top of that ended up being quite different.' (App. F, p.95, l.51)

This reflects the outcome of previously presented interviews. Some online tutors were missing answers to particular questions and difficulties arising in the course (chapter 4.1.2.3). Also if learning by doing is an effective and important method, previous information about how to do it might have helped to increase the workload. Here participants FB mentioned that the starts of the course defers from the end which indicates the need to overwork the course sometime. A tutor of the CTP course noticed a similar fact about his notes he did within the course without having any

preparation or experiences (chapter 4.1.3.2). He considered of overworking his notes again in order to consider language issues which he has not done in the first time.

However the need for proper training has been also discussed from a more critical perspective. Participant FD raise the exception that general guidance might not be relevant, rather too generic considering the diversity of each course.

'[...] there is no guidance for online tutors as such and because each course is different the guidance might not be relevant. You know its gona be generic.' (App. F, p.93, l.48)

This aspect has not been further pursued within the discussion. However it indicates first approaches one way training could be designed: less generic with more individual margin.

Moreover in the opinion of participant FD the design of support and guidance, training and preparation depends on the course design itself. In this sense a fundamental question to be asked is: What is the role of the online tutor in a particular class/course?

'Is the role of the tutor to actually teach or is the role of the tutor to guide and support and direct and be a consultant.' (App. F, p.87, l.9)

This goes slightly in line with the suggestion by tutor D (chapter 4.1.3.1) who mentioned that the need for cultural adaptation depends on the subject taught.

Also participant FC supported this view and stressed the need to have more clarity about the approach than is needed in a face-to-face course.

'There has to be probably greater clarity then it is normally the case within attendance teaching [...] clarity about that for the tutor and also for the students.' (App. F, p.87, l.24)

Provide technical support

It is participant FA's job to provide technical support for online tutors. Participant FE added that a basic minimum technical support is required.

FA: ' [...] Well, could you do what you we're trying to do without any technological support? You couldn't do it at all, could you? [...]'

FE: 'You need a basic minimum technological support.' (App. F, p.90, l.1)

Consider entrance requirements

Participants FE and FD raised the general question in the discussion: How do teachers become online tutors? Currently, at LJMU, people who want to act as an online tutor do not have to demonstrate any skill or ability (in a formal way). In participant FD's view they just need to be innovative, know their subject and talk that through.

FE: 'But how do online tutors get to be online tutors?'

FD: ' [...] they are not developed at all. I think they don't have to demonstrate anything. They just have to, have an attitude for innovation and, and talk that through in order to become an online tutor [...] they know obviously there subject area. But on top of it, they are innovative.' (App. F, p.93, l.39)

Participant FE added that tutors might be asked if they have the relevant subject knowledge to a course.

'You are asked because you have an expertise in the area that an online course requires.' (App. F, p.94, l.50)

Participant FC explained that subjects of the CTP programme are very specific and there are not many staff who can teach it, teachers there become online tutors who want to teach that subject because it is the main way they are offering it.

'We teach courses that are based on Psychology; and basically anyone who [...] wants to be, to teach that area of Psychology -which aren't a lot of people, it is very specialized [...] they will teach on that programme because that's the main way we are teaching it.' (App. F, p.94, l.23)

As a consequence the mentioned demand of one of the cultural experienced participant Exk to have experienced online tutors within a course might not be able to be fulfilled in praxis.

ExR: Well, first they should have the experience themselves [...] in courses with people from many place. (App. E, p.75, l.33)

Need for top down guidance from central point

The previous discussion about who makes the decision about necessary skills for online tutoring lead participant FC to suggest that there needs to be a central e-learning organisation which gives guidance from above to all. This central organisation should be aware of what is happening with regard to e-learning at the University and can connect people with each other (see code 'Sharing and peer-to-peer guidance'). Moreover, it can send the recognition of what it means to be enrolled in an online programme through to the School (This aspect is closely connected to the code 'Chief does not understand demands of e-learning').

FC: [...] there needs to be some central point in the University where the recognition of what it means for staff to be enrolled in this way comes down through you, to the School, through the line manager. [...] is of not knowing who is doing it, because it's not sent through top down kind of presence about this. And I think [...] we need the top down presence.' (App. F, p.89, l.53)

FD: 'Your course existed when the MBS course was validated and set up. Did anyone from the MBS course come to you to get any information?' (App. F, p.96, l.53)

FC: 'Yeah, over the years I had a few people come to me and ask - I don't know whether it was through you [...] that raises the same point that there should be a central organization and they would know.' (App. F, p.96, l.55)

Sharing and peer-to-peer guidance

The group came to the conclusion that some sort of sharing of ideas, experiences, and best practices would be a solution to provide peer-to-peer guidance to people who are involved in e-learning programmes at the University. This goes in line with other researchers such as O'Dowd (2005) as well as Cifuentes and Murphy (2000) who suggest a close working relationship between online teaching staff.

In some cases a sort of sharing is already happening through conferences, for example, as participant FB mentioned.

FC: 'Yeah, but it's a question of sharing.'

FA: 'But it's not a formal course it's sharing.'

FD: 'Yeah it's sharing, yeah.'

FA: 'And as much sharing about what didn't work or what did work; all the things that go wrong and things that—'

FB: 'Well, there is something happening [...] [A colleague] and myself have a module which we get students to produce an online peer reviewed journal. [...] she gave a talk in one of the Teaching and Learning conferences a few years back and [...] [we wouldn't have thought about it [...] some sort of making available, availability of good practices.'

FD: 'Best practices, case's

(App. F, p.96, l.26)

Moreover as participant FC mentioned earlier, peer-to-peer guidance also occurred in some cases within the University, as some people came to him asking for guidance directly because the CTP online course was the first pure e-learning programmes at the University.

FD: 'Your course existed when the MBS course was validated and set up. Did anyone from the MBS course come to you to get any information? [...]'

FC: 'Yeah, over the years I had a few people come to me and ask.' (App. F, p.96, l.53)

Participant FD mentioned that people also share their knowledge for instance about cultural aspects with each other. Experienced tutors leave their notes for new ones, said participant FB or introduce each other, added participant FD. It is a sort of culture at the University, noted participant FB. Participant FD concluded that the process of how it works at the moment at LJMU is based on group learning, based on learning on the job. It is the institution that is responsible for what knowledge is passed onwards to others.

FD: '[...] and you are right to say before about the fact that you all learned from each other. So the people who are delivering online courses share that knowledge about possible cultural issues. And that's the way it is done.'

FC: 'There is no, there is no training as such, but we, you know, we train each other.'

FB: 'That's what it does- it is the culture. And it's probably always programme-specific that you learn how to be an electronic tutor [e-moderator?] because the person who is doing it before you ahm leaves you a set of notes or-'

FD: 'Or shows you [...] you all learned from each other. So the people who are delivering online courses share that knowledge about possible cultural issues.'

FD: 'Isn't that based on your group learning? It's not based on a course; it's based on your group learning from what you know about the course.[...] And therefore, and its learned on the job and its developed it and the developments and the way things go forward is what the institution can manage from the knowledge base of the people who are delivering it.'

(App. F, p.95, l.47)

Participant FA, who is from the learning and development unit, pointed out at the end of the discussion that the way the sharing and peer-to-peer guidance could happen within the University needs to be clarified in the future.

'I think we are making this particular conversation up to pick up on sharing and trying to encourage. Not sharing theories but practical tips and things that need to be passed on to different people practicing at the moment. I mean that could help to help other people. So how do we do that? I don't know, we need to think about it.[...].But we need to think about some other way of sharing then. [...] it's something very early.' (App. F, p.99, l.53)

Remain resources

Since the aspect of sharing and peer-to-peer guidance has been considered as quite relevant, participant FC stressed that, in this context, it is essential to retain manpower at the University.

'[...] they should remain resources [...] someone like [FA] set things up but also we feed it - so the resource grows, so that's how you prepare tutors.' (App. F, p.92, l.17)

The safekeeping of jobs at University does not just enable and support the process of knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer guidance it possibly increases moreover the motivation of staff in general.

Place for sharing and peer-to-peer guidance

Participants discussed how additional sharing of knowledge, experiences and good practice might happen at LJMU. Participant FE questioned whether a discussion forum could be a solution. Participant FB reminded that there is a distance learning forum offered to staff from the University but he has not posted on it for two years.

'There is a distance learning forum. I haven't posted on it for about two years.' (App. F, p.100, l.1)

Participant FA explained that this forum is not meant to be a discussion area rather a place to arrange meetings for instance.

'[...] but it's not used as sort of interactive sort of discussion area. It's more about we arrange a meeting and come along to it.' (App. F, p.100, l.3)

Obviously the spirit and purpose of such a forum has not been clear to online tutors. A proper 'place' for knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer guidance has to be created.

Need for written targeted guidance

Participant FD mentioned that existing staff handbooks and similar material are often not read. Participant FC explained that he does not read them because they include a lot of material he does not need. He raised the point that written guidance like that needs to be more targeted than it is at the moment. He said that he might provide something like that based on his years of experiences in the field of online education. The offer of participant FC to provide such guidance indicates his motivation to accomplish a contribution to the issue of knowledge sharing. Moreover such a written guidance might provide a long-lasting solution in keeping knowledge and experiences.

FD: 'Fine. But we have staff handbooks. Whoever reads them? [...]'

FC: 'The reason we don't read things is because one half or three quarter of it I don't need. [...] What we need is something really, really well targeted so that you will read it.[...] I reckon from my experience that I could put something together which would be really targeted you know.'

(App. F, p.92, l.20)

The discussion about such guidance has not been further pursued within the focus-group. As a consequence of the study outcomes a guideline has been created within this study based on many fruitful suggestions for improvement which have been provided by interview and focus group participants (chapter 5). This guideline might go in the same direction as suggested by participant FC: A basis for ongoing knowledge exchange.

Knowing eLearning specialists at University

Participant FA mentioned that they are not totally aware within the teaching and technology team what is going on at the University with regard to distance learning. Therefore it is difficult to get e-learning activists together. Participant FC added that it was an issue that has been raised within the distance learning forum.

'And who is gonna make that decision? [...] my line manager [...] I mean he is very supportive and all that kinds of stuff [...] he doesn't really understand the demands of this way of teaching.' (App. F, p.89, l.50)

An overview about other e-learning activists at University would support the process of knowledge exchange and sharing and of peer-to-peer guidance.

Enough resources

The aspect of not having enough resources in the sense of time and staff has been raised within the discussion and at many other parts within the study (chapter 4.1). Participant FC explained that he won't be able to attend all of the e-learning events because of not having enough time.

'I don't think there are resources.[...] We don't get the resources we need and then you know there is a forum. So I can make it one time but next time I can't make it because I haven't got the hours to do it.' (App. F, p.96, l.51)

Moreover participant FB explained a situation that opened up the problem of not having enough manpower within the team. It is not possible for them to update the whole CTP online programme based on their emergent experience in teaching online. Hence, the modules which have been developed at the beginning of the programme start differ from those that have been created at a later point (see also code 'Need for training').

'Because the modules that we have designed since the programme launch, [...] a couple of years later we designed a couple of more modules on top of that ended up being quite different. Ahm but the original modules haven't changed because we haven't been paid the amount of hours that would require to.' (App. F, p.96, l.11)

Having enough resources would help to improve the course on the one hand on the other hand it would help online tutors to decrease their workload and have extra time to implement on for instance just provided time consuming suggestions for improvement (chapter 4.2).

Considering limits dealing with cultural differences

Conclusively there are limits, as both participants FB and FC stressed, of being aware of cultural aspects within the class. The just mentioned point of missing resources might have some

influence on it but participant FB further explained that it is impossible to totally understand a different culture also when living for a couple of years in that country.

'I wonder also, I wonder also when you picked up on that I mean what else is there going on. Ah my father worked in Middle East for a few years and ahm he came up and reckons to the day left he was still learning stuff about Middle Eastern society. So ahm what are you not picking up as well.' (App. F, p.91, l.49)

Participant FC stressed in this context that there are limits to what reaction can be expected by an online tutor to answer to cultural differences.

'My view is we are a resource you know, they want to do this course great, we want to teach them great. That's all very good. And this is the way it operates you know. [...] it is very enriching to experience cultural difference. That's good but in terms you know what steps we take to respond to it I think there are limits to it.' (App. F, p.92, l.9)

However he has not defined those limits. Rather raised the question to what extent someone needs to be aware of that?

'But the question is to what extend do we have to be aware of that?' (App. F, p.91, l.54)

Participant FB wondered how to become aware of cultural differences which have been reported within the discussion by participant FC.

'How do you become aware of these things?' (App. F, p.91, l.42)

In this case participant FC explained that they become aware of those things particularly when they are actually travelling to the country where the students come from. Hence participant FC is not talking about a programme with an extended multicultural audience, rather a course with one or two different cultures.

This aspect raises again the assumption of participant FB, of possibly not having the right tools for teaching online (see code 'Need for training'). Some helpful techniques that gave an answer to the question of participant FC might have been raised by other interviewees presented in chapter 4.1.3. In this context the idea of sharing not just within but above the University might be something to consider, however this has not been explicitly addressed within the focus-group.

Summing up, codes and categories presented in figure 10 have been created which provide further suggestions for improvement by addressing the situation of online tutors at University with the focus on tutor preparation, support and training.

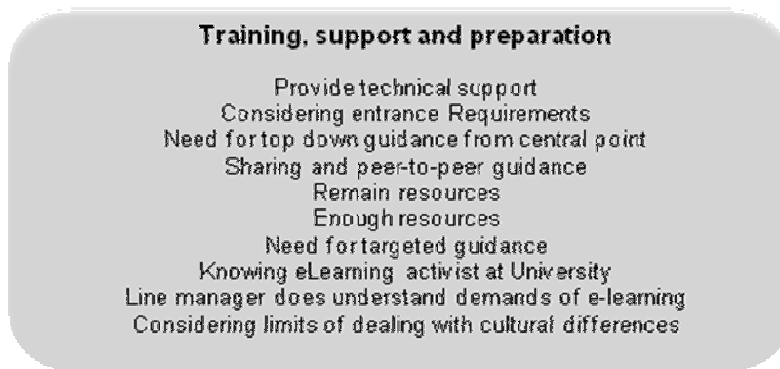


Figure 10: Training, support and preparation of online tutors at LJMU: Suggestions for improvement

4.3 Emerging Theory

A set of well developed codes and categories were created which highlight difficulties as well as suggestions for improvement when having to teach online in an international environment (chapter 4.1, 4.2) in order to provide quality online tutoring. Moreover, in some cases a conflict between the current situation at LJMU on the one hand and suggestions for improvement provided by research participants on the other hand became apparent. For example: A huge amount of suggestions for improvement have been provided by research participants, particularly by experienced online tutors (chapter 4.1.2.3, 4.1.3.2, 4.2.2). However, a lot of these suggestions do require an extra amount of time on the side of the online tutor in order to be realised. As highlighted in many places within the study, online tutors within the programme are suffering from not having enough time (for instance chapter 4.1.3.2, 4.2.2). Another example: Participant ExK suggested that online tutors who teach in an international environment do need to have experiences with people from other cultures.

ExR: Well, first they should have the experience themselves [...] in courses with people from many place. (App. E, p.75, l.33)

However as revealed within the focus group very specific subjects, like the CTP programme, cannot be taught by many teachers at LJMU. The choice of the online tutors at University has to be predominantly with a focus on the subject competence and it is very rare that they have online teaching experiences as well as experiences with other cultures (chapter 4.2.2). It has moreover been recognised that teaching a multicultural audience does require more time than teaching a cultural homogenous group (chapter 4.1.3.2). As already mentioned some tutors expressed that teaching time is very limited. Hence the question arises: How to create a situation that enables a constant process of quality insurance of an international online course where provided suggestions for improvement might be realised? Therefore it seems necessary to better understand influencing factors of online tutoring and their interconnections. Within the present

study some of those influencing factors and their connections emerged. On a more abstract level, within the process of selective coding, those factors form the basic theory for better understanding the situation of online tutors at University (figure 11). In this context it should be mentioned that the theory does not form an entire demonstration and explanation of phenomena. Influencing factors are examples and options; there are often many others influencing aspects addressing the fact of cause and effect which have not been considered or investigated more deeply within the study. Additional research (for instance as suggested in chapter 5.3) is essential and will help to expand and refine the present theory by considering additional influencing factors and connections. The present theory does form a starting basis for ongoing research in a field where not much research has been undertaken so far by the time of starting the investigation: Understanding the situation of online tutors in order to assure a constant process of quality insurance of international online courses at University. Figure 11 provides an overview about the emerging theory.

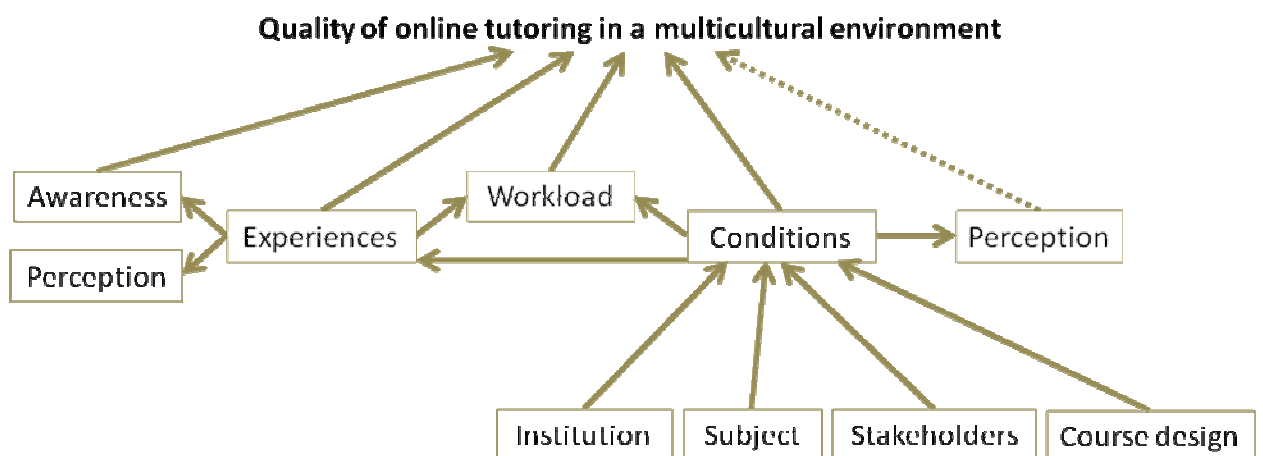


Figure 11: Emerging theory: Quality of online tutoring in a multicultural environment

As explained in chapter 4.1 the theory is the result of a process of constant comparison and a circular process of investigation. Through the constant refinement of codes and categories, a shifting from nvivo codes towards a more abstract level (following the coding sequence open, axial and selective) a set of codes and categories have arisen which form the present theory. The theory is the final result of returning to the underlying research aim: Understanding the situation of online tutors teaching in a multicultural environment at University, specifically at LJM within the CTP course. The emerging theory presented in figure 11 will be explained in more detail step-by-step in the following. In order to make the process of theory building more transparent, selected codes and categories of previous analysing steps (chapter 4.1, 4.2) will be explicitly

addressed. Here it should be added that the repetition of particular codes indicates the complex and comprehensive connection between categories of the emerging theory.

A) The experiences of online tutors influence their perception and awareness towards teaching (online) in an international environment (figure 12).

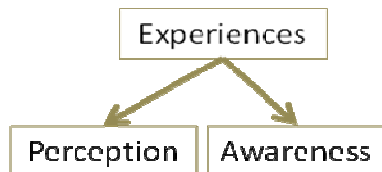


Figure 12: Experiences influencing awareness and perceptions of online tutors

All online tutors of the CTP programme seemed to generally prefer teaching face-to-face (see code 'prefer teaching/learning face-to-face, chapter 4.1.2.2). Their experience in teaching online is limited to that of the online CTP course. It might be the reason that online tutors do prefer to teach face-to-face since this is the way they are used to teach, that is their general profession at University and where they are experienced in. Moreover they might prefer to interact with students face-to-face rather than using written words. They have not received any training or particular preparation in how to teach online (chapter 4.1.1); as mentioned by some tutors within the interviews as well as within the focus group: online tutors are missing answers to particular questions when having for instance to deal with difficulties within an online class (chapter 4.2.2, 4.1.2, 4.1.3). By the time that more programmes have been initiated at University no one has an overview about: who is offering an online course in order to obtain support from peers. Focus group participants mentioned that they are missing a central point at University which has an overview about such issues. Additionally it became obvious that online tutors have the impression that the demands and time spent on that sort of teaching does not get recognised by their line managers. Moreover there is no appropriate written guidance which has been perceived as useful in order to prepare for online teaching (chapter 4.2.2). In general, online tutors tend to miss recourses (time and pay) which may lead to frustration (for instance chapter 4.2.2, 4.1.3.1). These are just some examples of experiences online tutors have selected which might have contributed to the fact that online tutors at University do prefer teaching face-to-face. Additional circumstances at University which might have an influence on that fact will be highlighted in more detail later on. Also the fact that the student group is multicultural - some tutors explicitly mentioned such fact as benefit of the course (chapter 4.1.3.1) did not change their preferences in teaching. Additionally all, except one, interviewed students mentioned that the online version was not their first choice; rather other commitments prevented them from doing the face-to-face programme in Liverpool (chapter 4.1.1.2). Here it could be suggested that the experiences of

students do influence their attitude towards online learning as well as all interviewed students have not participated any other online course in the past (chapter 4.1.1.2).

The data suggest that with growing experience tutors might recognise more of the benefits of teaching online.. One of the new, inexperienced online tutors within the programme explicitly mentioned that he is not aware of benefits arising from the online study mode (see code 'not aware of benefits arising from online study mode', chapter 4.1.2.2'), whereas online tutors (and students) who have experience with cultural diversity recognise benefits of the multicultural aspect of the course (see code 'experiences influences awareness for recognising benefits arising from multicultural aspect', chapter 4.1.3.1). Students, for instance, who have collected experiences in living or working within other cultures, explicitly mentioned that the multicultural aspect is one of the benefits of the course. And they explained that they would have liked to learn more about this fact. However the subject they have chosen, Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology, could indicate a general interest in people and their behaviour. The awareness and the attitude might be different with students studying another less human based subject such as Computing for instance.

Nearly all of the tutors who were interviewed within the study and who have experience of teaching online within an international setting strongly suggest that the multicultural issue is an important factor that needs to be considered when teaching online (chapter 4.1.3.2). However, the course design of the CTP course follows an approach which does not consider any cultural adaption (chapter 4.1.3.1). The course has been created by more or less inexperienced online tutors who have not received any training or instructional support from peers since it was one of the first programmes at LJMU offering a pure online version. This is in line with the fact that people who have experiences with people from different cultures do have a higher degree of cultural awareness in general (see code 'experiences influences degree of cultural awareness', chapter 4.1.3.1). An interviewed student for instance who has no experience in working in an international environment stressed that he is not considering anything like cultural diversities.

'You know, you are not really thinking of, of this kind of differences.' (App. E, p.53, l.36)

In contrast, students who have collected experiences with other cultures mentioned that they tend to act more sensibly towards cultural issues within the CTP course. In this context it should be noted that there are certainly other factors that influence the possibility of tutors (and students) to be culturally aware, as for instance the matter of missing time. It has been suggested that the limited amount of time online tutors can spend on teaching reduces their possibility to

get more deeply involved in the course and this limits their ability to become more culturally aware (see code 'Available tutoring time influences cultural awareness', chapter 4.1.3).

B) The conditions for online tutors are affected by the Institution, the subject taught, the stakeholders, and the course design (figure 13).

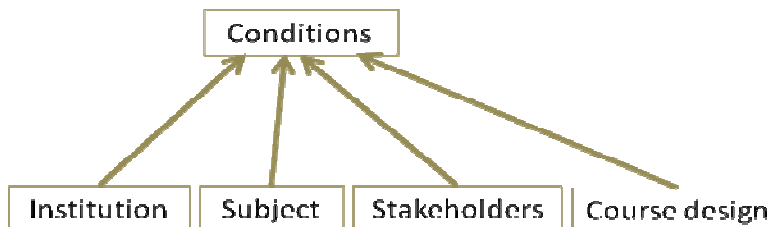


Figure 13: Institution, subject, stakeholders, and course design influencing conditions for online tutors

Institution

The Institution in many ways affects the conditions of online tutors. Training, support and preparation of online tutors has been addressed and suggested within the study many times. Online tutors are missing answers to particular questions and are curious about unknown tips and suggestions in regard to teaching online in an international environment (see for instance code 'need for training', chapter 4.2.2, chapter 4.1.2, 4.1.3). E-learning experts recommend consistently that first time online tutors need to be prepared when having to teach online (in an international environment). A focus group participant mentioned that the culture at University is changing. A couple of years ago there has been no training for teachers such as the PG Cert at all (4.2.1). The openness towards such developments like preparing online tutors has probably grown since the CTP course has been launched. Since the number of experienced staff within online tutoring (in a multicultural environment) is growing the basis for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer guidance is growing which has been strongly suggested by focus group participants consistently (chapter 4.2.2). The openness towards such an approach goes in line with the just mentioned (changing) culture at LJMU. One way of knowledge exchange could happen in a written form within a targeted guidance (see code 'need for targeted guidance', chapter 4.2.2). Within the focus group one participant explicitly offered to compose such guidance which indicates the supportive culture at LJMU among teaching staff (chapter 4.2.2). If there would be a central point at University (see code 'need for top down guidance from central point', chapter 4.2.2) which provides guidance and distributes written guidance to online tutors the process of peer-to-peer guidance could be supported very effectively. Otherwise online tutors are not aware for instance of other e-learning activist at the Institution (see code 'Knowing eLearning activist at University', chapter 4.2.2) and knowledge and experiences get easily silt up. The conditions for

online tutors are moreover affected by facilitated resources through the Institution. As indicated at many places within the study online tutors are suffering from not having enough time for instance (chapter 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3). If the University cares for enough resources (see code 'enough resources' chapter 4.2) the conditions for tutors could be improved in a supportive and motivating way. Moreover logically it should be sought to remain existing human resources (see code 'remain resources', chapter 4.2) in order not to lose precious knowledge and enable the strongly suggested approach of peer-to-peer guidance which depends on the experiences of staff. Another aspect that has been revealed within the study is that online tutors have the impression their boss does not understand the demands of e-learning (see code 'line manager does not understand demands of e-learning', chapter 4.2). Hence, he cannot see for instance the workload involved in online teaching and designing of online courses which may again end up in a frustrating situation for online tutors. A further interesting aspect discussed within the focus group is the matter of entrance requirements for online tutors (see code 'Considering entrance Requirements', chapter 4.2). It has been clarified that it is often not possible to provide experienced online tutors as recommended by one experienced research participant. However such situation could be recognized and considered by the line manager and a central e-learning point at University which seeks for appropriate conditions at the Institution.

Subject

The analysis suggests that the subject taught in some ways influences the conditions for online tutors at the Institutions. It has been discovered that the need for cultural adaptation depends on the subject taught (see code 'Need of cultural adaptation depends on subject taught', chapter 4.1.3) in the way that the subject being taught influences the self-awareness of people and therefore the necessity to pay attention to cultural diversities. Within the CTP programme people are considered as being generally quite self-aware (chapter 4.1.3). The situation might differ as mentioned above within courses where the human being as such is less of the study focus. This certainly influences the way online tutors have to teach and design a course. Students' general interest and openness to considerations of culture (see codes 'experiences influences awareness for recognising benefits arising from multicultural aspect', 'Multicultural aspect did broaden students' perspective, chapter 4.1.3.1) imply that there could be an additional focus on the multicultural aspect itself within the course. Motivated students are having definitely a positive impact on the conditions for teaching staff (see further down). The matter of entrance requirements has been discussed before (see code 'Considering entrance Requirements', chapter 4.2). The choice of teaching staff who can teach a specific subject depends on the subject taught itself. There are on the one hand very specific subjects, as for instance CTP, where there is not

much staff who instructs it; other more general subjects such as business administration for instance could be probably taught by much more tutors. It might be more possible to find within such a general subject a teacher who has above subject knowledge, experiences in teaching online and teaching a multicultural group.

Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders which might have an influence on the conditions of online tutors. Within the study predominantly the following have been revealed: Students, peers, line manager, and an e-learning center. As mentioned above motivated and satisfied students do impact the working conditions for teaching staff immensely. They motivate and inspire other students and online tutors and won't for instance disturb the course as frustrated students might do. Apparently the cultural background of students does affect the working conditions for staff in the way that online tutors are face with new challenges (see code 'particular challenge for online tutors teaching in an international environment', chapter 4.1.3) and a situation which can be on the one hand motivating and inspiring however on the other hand difficult and time consuming (see code 'consider additional time required', chapter 4.1.3.2). Moreover as explained above the background of students in regard to their experiences and hence their ability to be cultural aware impacts the conditions within a course tutors have while teaching, considering for instance challenges and workload. If there is a line manager who knows the demands of online teaching and learning he can care for motivating and adequate working conditions (see code 'line manager does understand demands of e-learning', chapter 4.2). Supportive peers who are open to the suggested approach of peer-to-peer guidance could help to compensate gaps in knowledge and experiences of teaching online and teaching in an international environment (see code 'sharing and peer-to-peer guidance', chapter 4.2.2) and help to work on targeted guidance (see code 'need for targeted guidance', chapter 4.2.2). The research process itself of the present study has been in a way a process of knowledge sharing. As an answer to the need of a targeted guidance and with exemplary character provided suggestions for improvement have been therefore collected and prepared in a form written compact guideline (chapter 5.2).

Course design

The researcher decided to place the course design within the context of conditions for online tutors based on study outcomes. Logically the course design is a central aspect with many direct influencing aspects on the quality of online tutoring in general and the workload for instance. However on the course design has not been a particular research focus. It is rather a huge topic within the context of teaching online in an international environment which requires an

independent research focus. Within the study (see code 'No adaption to multicultural aspect within CTP course' chapter 4.1.3.1) it became obvious that there has not been any cultural adaption within CTP course design. Indecently for the reason of not considering cultural adaptation as such a course for a multicultural audience that has not considered anything like cultural diversities does constitute a particular challenge for online tutors. Online tutors do have to compensate for the missing adaptation; it should be noticed that all experienced participants within the study strongly suggested a need for adaptation (chapter 4.1.3.2); also if the amount of necessary adaptation might depend on other conditions such as the background of students and the subject taught itself (chapter 4.1.3.1).

C) The workload of online tutors gets influenced by the conditions for online tutors and the experiences online tutors have made (figure 14).



Figure 14: Workload of online tutors gets influenced by the conditions for online tutors and experiences online tutors have made

The conditions for online tutors within a programme have an effect on their workload. If the Institutions offers for instance training and preparation programmes for online tutors the staff might save a lot of time in regard to revising existing material and courses again (see codes, 'revise course subsequently', chapter 4.1.3.2; 'need for training', chapter 4.2.2). Two online tutors of the CTP programme mentioned that based on missing experiences in teaching online and teaching in a multicultural environment they probably have to revise their postings/the course itself again. In this context findings of Harasim (2001) (chapter 2.1.1) should be mentioned which state that the workload of online teaching decreases with growing experience. Findings have shown (see above) that the awareness of people might depend on their amount of experience; hence experience protects online tutors from making for instance cardinal mistakes which may lead to difficulties within a course and hence an increasing workload. Supportive conditions in general, as suggested above and within other chapters of the study (for instance see codes 'enough resources', 'remain resources', boss understands demands of e-learning', 'guidance from a central point at University') cause an decrease of the workload of online tutors. It has been mentioned many times within the study that this is an aspect teaching staff suffers from which in turn impacts the quality of online tutoring. The quality of online tutoring will be highlighted within the study context later in more detail.

D) The conditions for online tutors have influenced perceptions of online tutors and their experiences (figure 15).



Figure 15: Conditions for online tutors influencing experiences and perception of online tutors

As explained above many issues have been uncovered within the study, which have an influence on the conditions for online tutors. These conditions may influence the experiences online tutors have made within the programme and their perceptions. As highlighted above some of the conditions of online tutors at the Institution might have the effect that they prefer teaching face-to-face. To give an example: Online tutors are confronted with difficulties within the course (see codes 'build and moderate the discussion', 'pursue the discussion', 'deal with students complaints', 'make the experience more personal' (see figure 9). and do not know how to solve those difficulties possibly because they have not received any training or peer-to-peer support for teaching online in an international environment; it has been highlighted within the literature (chapter 2.1.1) review that teaching online to a certain degree follows its own rules and principles. However there were also a few online tutors of the CTP programme who explicitly mentioned that they do enjoy teaching online (see code 'enjoy teaching online', chapter 4.1.2.2). Their perceptions are possibly the result of appropriate conditions which have not been further investigated within the study. A tutor just praised the fact that the University has purchased the teaching and learning platform Blackboard which has been perceived as very useful by teaching staff.

'So we have been very well supported by the Blackboard learning environment which the University invested in.' (Tutor C, App. E, p.19, l.16)

The focus of the study has been on challenges, difficulties and suggestions for improvements. Moreover students as well as tutors explicitly expressed their fascination of studying and working in an international environment.

'Having students around the globe it is inspiring, it's great. [...] I think it's wonderful.' (Tutor C, App. E, p.13, l.9)

Hence the multicultural aspect of a course may have additionally a motivating effect on (participants and) online tutors. The online environment as well as the multicultural aspect of the programme do constitute however a particular challenging experience for online tutors (see code 'particular challenge for online tutors teaching in an international environment', chapter 4.1.3.1). One of the cultural experienced interviewee mentioned that cultural differences can produce large difficulties which may impact again the perceptions of online tutors in a more negative way. The challenge might be even expanded if the course design disregards cultural aspects.

Difficult working conditions (see code, 'difficult working conditions', chapter 4.1.2.3) do lead to congruent experiences as for instance that students are not satisfied with some aspects within the course (see code 'minor tutor contact on a personal basis', 'not aware of contact person', chapter 4.1.2.2). If the Institution provides online managers who understand the demands of online teaching and if there is guided support beside a central point for e-learning at the Institution (see codes, 'line manager does understand demands of e-learning' 'need for top down guidance from central point', chapter 4.2.2) online tutors may have experienced an environment which is much more supportive and motivating which in turn has an impact on their perception when teaching online in an international environment.

E) The experiences, the workload, the awareness and the perceptions of online tutors as well as the conditions for online tutors affect the quality of online tutoring in a multicultural environment (figure 16).

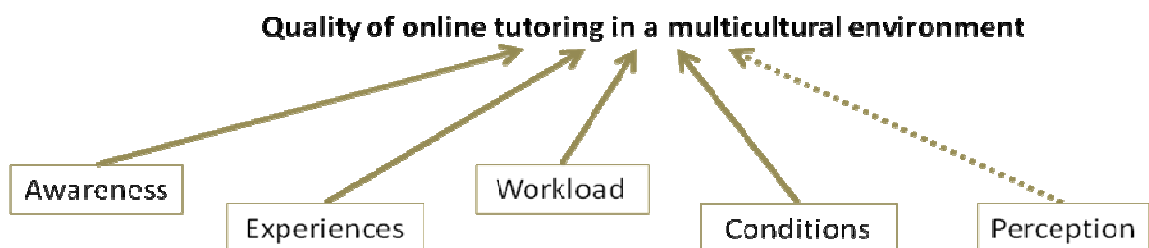


Figure 16: Experiences, workload circumstances, and perceptions of online tutors influencing the quality of online tutoring in a multicultural environment

The quality of online teaching within a multicultural environment has been indicated as an aspect which resonates throughout the whole research process (see above). On a higher level of abstractions research questions such as 'Did you perceive in the past any challenges when you were teaching in the multicultural online environment?', 'Did problems occur while you were teaching within the CTP course?', 'Do you have some suggestions for improvement?' (appendix E)³⁸ do all converge in quality. The overall aim of the study to understand the situation of online tutors implicates the focus towards the quality of online teaching. Therefore it has been placed as the overarching topic of the emerging theory. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, provided categories (figure 16) do not represent a complete list of aspects which have an impact on the quality of online teaching. Those categories are the result of the present investigation, results which are grounded in data. Moreover they facilitate the path towards a quality assurance process where identified suggestions for improvement within the study could be realised. In the following sections examples will be provided addressing the influencing matter of experiences

³⁸ For an overview about the core research questions within the study see chapter 3.4.2 and 4.

online tutors have made with teaching online in an international environment, the workload and awareness they are having within a course, the conditions provided for online tutors and online tutor's perceptions.

Study results have indicated that the **workload** of online tutors does affect the quality of online teaching (and learning) within a multicultural environment (chapter 4.1., 4.2). Within the CTP programme online tutors claimed that they are not having enough resources, particularly not enough time (for example chapter 4.2.2). If their workload would decrease, for instance by providing additional supportive staff, online tutors could better adopt some of the provided suggestions for improvement; for example 'being aware of student's cultural/educational background' (chapter 4.1.3.2) or to engage in training and preparation approaches in order to get answers to problems and difficulties arising in the course. As mentioned above the workload might be affected by the experiences online tutors have. With growing experience the workload of online tutors decreases (see findings by Harasim (2001), chapter 2.1.1). This is one more reason which underlines the importance of the provided suggestion for improvement to 'remain resources' within a programme (chapter 4.2.2).

There are many reasons based on study outcomes why the **experiences** tutors have made with teaching online and teaching in a multicultural environment does have a significant impact on the quality of the tutoring. Addressing for instance the awareness online tutors have for cultural differences. With the growing experiences in being with cultural diverse people the cultural awareness increases (see code 'Experiences influences degree of cultural awareness', chapter 4.1.3.1). As strongly recommended by experienced research participants (see for instance codes 'provide appropriate cultural sensitiveness', 'Consider different expectations and needs' chapter 4.2.1) and exposed within the literature review (chapter 2.2.3) cultural **awareness** is an essential quality factor for teaching (online) in a multicultural environment. How should for instance an online tutor consider different expectations and needs of his students if he is not aware of any cultural differences (and if he is not having enough time to get involved in an expectations led approach)? Different expectations and needs of students have however arisen as one difficulty within the CTP course (see code 'Considering different expectations and needs', chapter 4.1.3.2). Within the literature review it has been highlighted that culture is one reason for diverse expectations and needs beside students (see McCargar (1993), chapter 1.3). The importance of cultural adaption has been mentioned previously. Online tutors within the CTP programme added that based on collected experience while teaching within the CTP programme they have designed the online course differently (in the sense of more appropriate) compared to when they started to design the course without having any experiences (see code 'No adaption to multicultural aspect

within CTP course', chapter 4.1.3.1). To provide another example: As mentioned above, the experiences online tutors (and students) have does have an impact on the ability to recognise benefits arising from the online and multicultural aspect. That fact does as well have an influence on the quality of online tutoring. If online tutors do see a benefit they are probably more motivated and enthusiastic about teaching in such an environment. Within chapter 4.1.3.1 it has been explicitly mentioned by one of the experienced participants that teaching with pleasure is one of the suggested quality factors when working as an online tutors. It should be mentioned that the connection between perception and quality online teaching in a multicultural environment within the emerging theory has been indicated by a broken line (figure 11). The connection between those two aspects stays rather implicit and suggestive within the study in comparison to other categories (workload, experiences, conditions, where the connection is more explicit (see above). It has been indicated in many ways above that the conditions for online tutors do significantly influence the quality of online tutoring. A closing example: If there is a basis for the often alluded peer-to-peer guidance and knowledge exchange among colleagues online tutors at the Institution online tutors could obtain ad-hoc recommendations when difficulties arise within a course.

4.4 Limitation of the study

There are several limitations to this research; some have been indicated in the previous chapter 4.3. For instance findings of this study are not generalisable due to the nature of the qualitative approach used. Moreover results are always subject to the researcher bias (Merriam, 1998). Therefore the researcher's background including his personal view on aspects addressing research questions has been outlined in chapter 3.3. Additionally memos have been written which help the researcher to reflect on personal bias in order to control distortion during analysis (Elliot, 2005).

Within this investigation selected issues of triangulation have been realised in order to validate research findings (chapter 3.4.4). However certain aspects of triangulation, for instance in the sense that other researchers were involved in the data analysis, have not been realised since no resources for this were available. As will be discussed in chapter 5.3, additional research addressing other issues of triangulation could add valuable perspectives to the present findings. Additionally, research participants might have been biased, especially when being engaged in a focus group where the anonymity is even reduced compared to a one-to-one interview (chapter 3.4.4). In this context the aspects of misunderstanding should be mentioned. Misunderstandings might have appeared while undertaking the interviews and the focus group. As a consequence of

misunderstandings the researcher and participants may have directed the discussion in another directions as they would have without misunderstandings for instance. Hence, important answers to the research question might be unconsidered. An additional source for misunderstandings is the fact that the researcher is not an English native speaker. Based on language difficulties statements of English speaking participants might have been misunderstood, possibly influencing follow up questions. It has been tried to reduce some misunderstanding by sending all transcriptions to the participants for revision before beginning to analyse the data.

It should also be considered that the focus in this study has been primarily on the multicultural aspect. However taking the variations in the definition of culture into account there might be also other indicators which influences for instance perceived challenges which have not been considered here. As Jun and Park (2003) emphasise factors other than cultural values, such as the level of technology proficiency as well as the experience with the educational system affects the online learning experience. Additionally the perspective from students within this study has been particularly one-sided in the sense that only students from GB have been investigated, despite all efforts to involve students with different cultural backgrounds (chapter 3.4.2). The integration of other perspectives of students with different cultural backgrounds, also non English native speakers, would have enriched that data. It also needs to be considered that the study reflects an extensive engagement with the research questions over a long period of time and that during the, course of the study environmental and institutional circumstances may have changed or evolved. The theory of yesterday might not fully reflect the today in a complete form. Hence, the theory would benefit from continued testing and supplementary investigation through, for instance, additional triangulation. However it is not the aim of the grounded theory approach to provide a generalisable and extensive tested hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). It is rather the aim of this study to provide a theory that serves as a model which makes a valuable contribution to the area of online education which should subsequently further be analysed. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe, theory is never finished, it is rather always evolving.

5 Discussion and conclusions

The present research offers a set of well-developed and interrelated codes and categories which form a theoretical framework in order to explain the situation of tutors at University who have to teach online in an international environment. As the initial aim of the research indicated, results provide a profound basis for ongoing discussions and issues worth pursuing in the future by providing guides to action.

The following section (chapter 5.1) highlights and discusses the emerging theory (chapter 4.3) as well as some of the findings which, in the researcher's view, have particular relevance or exemplary character (chapter 4.1, 4.2). A brief summary of key findings will be presented initially. The significance and relevance of research findings will then be illuminated in more detail and the amount of newly evolving knowledge through the emerging theory will be presented. Based on the results of this study a guideline for online tutors has been developed (chapter 5.2) as research participants emphasised that they would like to have a targeted and compact guideline (chapter 4.2.3). Research findings provided such a rich base of pedagogical approaches and suggestions for improvement when teaching online in an international environment, which might provide useful foundation for ongoing theoretical and practical work. It should be noticed that the guideline presents an example on how such a work might be conditioned. Such a guideline might help to overcome the often criticised gap in preparing and supporting (first time) online tutors (chapter 2.3, 4.2) at University. Finally, the chosen methodology for this study as well as research worth pursuing in the future will be discussed in chapter 5.3.

5.1 Emerging theory and findings with particular relevance

Different ways of improving online teaching in an international environment have been presented and suggested by research participants; from training to creating a culturally sensitive atmosphere. Figure 17 provides an overview of the identified tasks, challenges and suggestions for improvement in order to offer effective online tutoring at University in a multicultural environment. Codes and categories are overall connected with each other and determine each other (indicated by two circular arrows). To provide an example: The consideration of 'different use of language' implies definitely 'provide an appropriate cultural sensitiveness'. Within the study training, support and preparation can be moreover seen as instruments which are the basis for suggestions A-D (indicated by arrows). Some codes and categories presented in figure 17 can be underpinned by other research findings. Taking recommendations from the literature, for

example Gorski (2004) recommends a self-directed possibility of teachers developing a supportive cohort among colleagues in order to exchange ideas and experiences. Levy (1997) argues that ‘without a working knowledge of students’ homelives and cultural backgrounds, teachers risk misunderstandings which can damage the educational experience for all involved.’ (p.50). To provide one more example: Ryan (2005) suggest that international students should get the opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

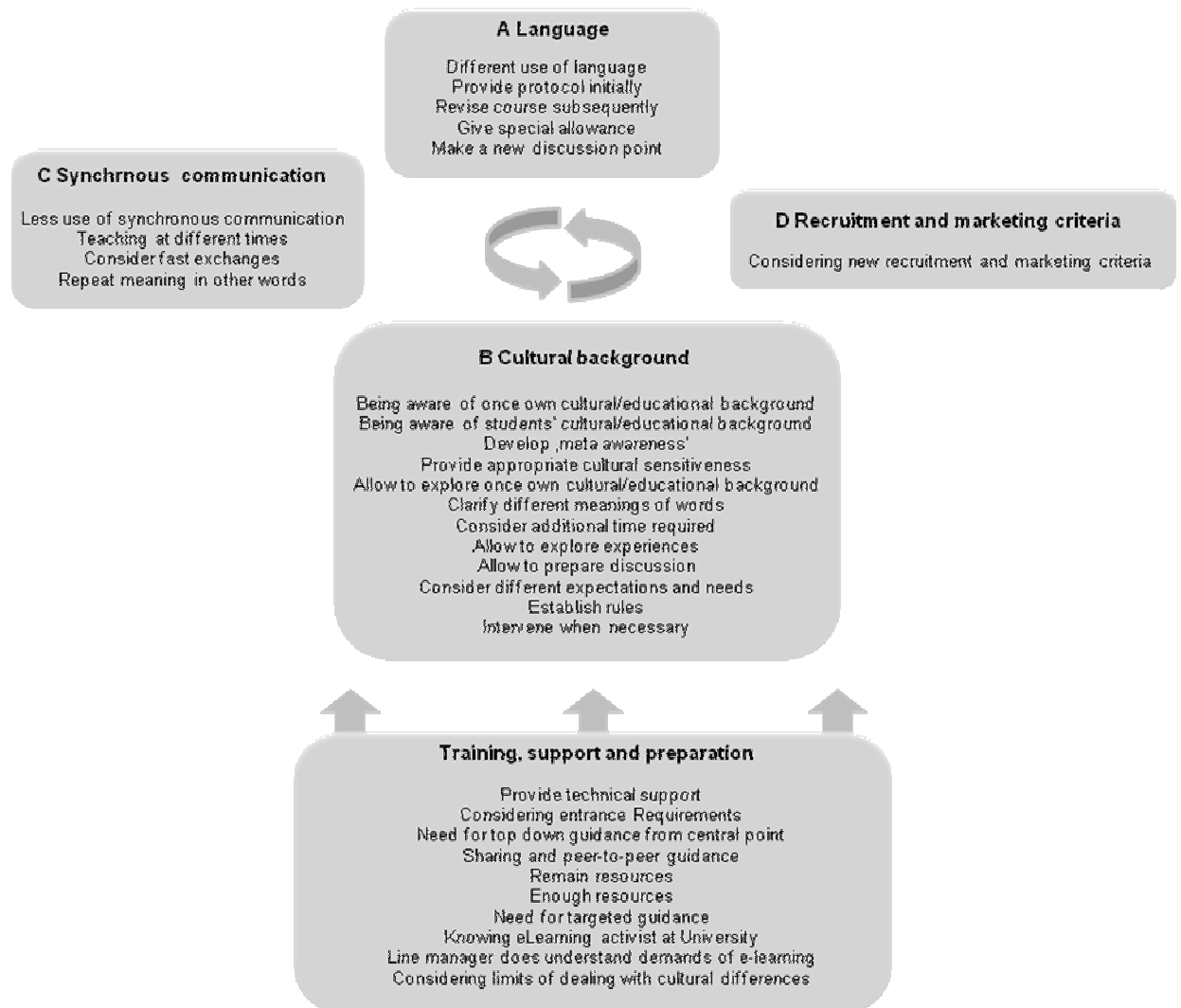


Figure 17: Effective online tutoring at University in an international environment (adjusted figure 9, p. 96)

It has been mentioned in different parts of this study that there remains a conflict in providing and making use of such suggestions and recommendations. Tutors of the CTP programme stressed for instance that they are missing time and resources within their team (chapter 4.1.2.3). Hence the following questions might arise for instance: How could online tutors spend their time participating in training or share their knowledge of teaching online in an international environment?; How can communication barriers be taken down if they are time consuming?; How

could cultural adaptation take place if online tutors do not have enough resources to provide the basic requirements of running such a course?

The emerging theory of the study (figure 18) may serve as a first step in the sense of providing answers to those sort of questions, or to a certain degree the overarching question ‘How to provide quality online tutoring within a multicultural environment?’. There are many different aspects which have an effect on the quality of online tutoring, however the results of this study indicate five main categories in the matter of quality: awareness, experiences, workload, conditions, and perceptions, as well as three sub-categories: Institution, subject, stakeholders, and course design.

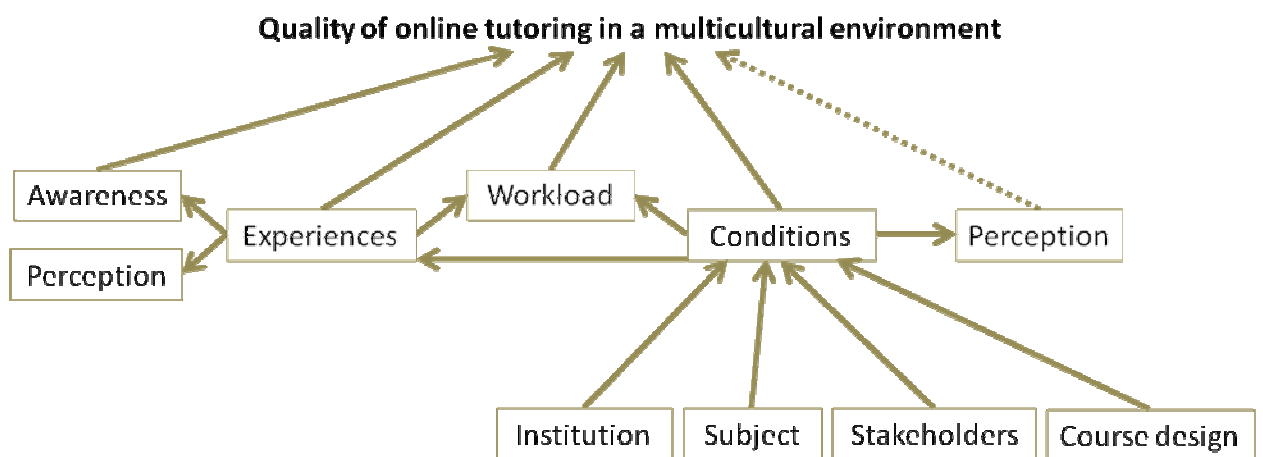


Figure 18: Emerging Theory: Quality of online tutoring in a multicultural environment

All five categories are directly related to the quality of online teaching in a multicultural environment. In other words: If online tutors have for instance collected experiences with other cultures, they have a better starting basis to fulfil the needs of a multicultural student group; also to be more aware of cultural differences. Research participants who have experiences with people from other cultures rate experiences of online tutors with other cultures as one essential assumption to conduct such a programme. Globally experienced instructors agree moreover on the point that educators who aim to develop cross-cultural skills, knowledge and competence, need experiential learning with people with different cultural background (Merryfield, 2001). Growing experience may furthermore decrease the workload of online tutors, which in turn supports the quality of online tutoring. Online tutors may require additional time to deal with the difficulty of communication barriers which have been perceived by students as well as online tutors within the CTP programme. The perceptions of online tutors in relation to a particular programme do logically effect the motivation and the effort online tutors invest in a programme. If there are supportive conditions at the Institution for online tutors the quality of online tutoring

can increase as for instance by line managers who are informed about the demands of online tutors. These conditions are influenced by four sub-categories: Institution, subject, stakeholders, and course design. The Institution for instance may provide a supportive environment where first-time online tutors receive preparation and training. An aggravating factor in this context is that knowledge about cultures and online education is currently limited. There are cultural dimensions and categories, such as those presented by Hall and Hofstede (chapter 2.2.1), that may offer some support but, for good reason the need for research in this area is frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g. Edmundson, 2007). Also Wang (in Edmundson, 2007, p. 13) mentions that '*it would be desirable to illustrate the relationship between cultural dimensions and design principles*'. A first approach has been presented by Richards and Ross (2004) (chapter 2.3.1). The situation in a cross-cultural course with students of two or three different cultural backgrounds is furthermore something totally different from courses where the students' cultural background can vary from homogenous to heterogeneous. These are just a few examples which highlight some aspects of the emerging theory, its categories and subcategories and associated relations (chapter 4.3). Those categories and relations help to better understand the situation of online tutors at University. They highlight aspects which might not just hinder the realisation of (provided) suggestions for improvement or more general quality online teaching, they rather imply aspects which should be pushed and mentioned in order to support a constant process of quality improvement. As mentioned above there are many other aspects which might be relevant in the way of describing the situation of online tutors which need to be uncovered by continuous research. The course design for instance might have other influences on conditions for online tutors than those mentioned in chapter 4.3. as for instance a suitable pedagogy for a course. To give one more example: There are possibly other stakeholders who do affect the quality of online teaching than listed in chapter 4.3 (students, peers and the line manger). Other facilities at the Institution such as technical staff might remove technical barriers which emerge when working in the online environment.

The theory however presents a model on a very abstract level which is grounded in the selected data, presenting the unique situation at LJM within the online CTP programme. The whole research process itself with its influencing factors such as research participants and the researcher himself for instance present rather a snap-shot of the situation which form the uniqueness of the theory. Through the process of triangulation the researcher has tried to expand that picture (chapter 3.4.4). When the research has been initiated no similar theory has been found which aims to explain the situations of online tutors teaching in a multicultural environment. On the one hand the theory is very specific, accordingly difficult to apply 1:1 to other situations. On the other

hand it provides a useful and possibly inspiring basis for ongoing research within diverse subjects worth pursuing in the future, reaching from psychology and educational studies to cultural anthropology, which will be illuminated within chapter 5.3. In this context Gaskill and Mills (n.d.) shall be cited: *'our tutors are the most important people for distance education students and we need to support, develop and extend their teaching skills in the most effective ways possible.'* They further add that online tutors may need more support than is required for face-to-face education.

5.2 Guideline for online tutors teaching in an international environment

Introduction

Based on presented research findings, a guideline for online tutors teaching in an international environment has been created. Findings indicate the need for such a guideline (chapter 4.2.2), since Universities are recruiting more and more internationally and often teachers are suddenly confronted with the challenge of teaching online in a multicultural environment (chapter 4.1.1, Morris et al., 2005). Tutors participating in this study indicated that they probably would not have sufficient time to engage in a training course on top of their already high workload. This situation was the challenge while creating a guide that educates and informs online tutors teaching in an international environment. It had to be something short and compact, in order to cope with the lack of time online tutors often suffer from; something tutors would use. Present research findings uncovered that materials which are too comprehensive are often not studied (chapter 4.2.2). At the same time the materials need to offer a reasonable and helpful basis for online tutors, not too cursory, which enables individuals with more time to delve into the topic in more depth. Compromising between these requirements the following guideline was developed. In line with the GT approach, the guideline represents a particular situation that is open to new input and refinement in order to broaden the perspective on the complex picture of the task an internationally orientated online tutor has to fulfill. The guideline, which has exemplary character, could be supplemented by existing literature covered in the literature review (chapter 2.2, 2.3). However the risk of creating something which is in its results too voluminous should be avoided, since it decreases the chance of getting studied by online tutors (chapter 4.3).

The guideline particularly aims at inexperienced online tutors working in an international environment; it might also provide some useful recommendations or inspirations for more experienced tutors. The focus is clearly on the multicultural nature in an online environment; online teaching in general will be addressed only briefly since extensive literature focusing on

online tutoring in general exists. The online tutor engaging with these guidelines can choose to study the suggested literature based on their own knowledge and experience. Since the present research has addressed online programmes at University the guideline is particularly designed for online tutors working in similar environments.

There are different ways of distributing such a guideline to online tutors. First, consideration should be paid to the person responsible for introducing the guideline as they can increase the chance of it being studied. As recommended by participants of the present research (chapter 4.2) the ideal case would be that there is a central point at University for top down guidance. Such a central point could present the guideline; the line manager is another option. When presenting the guideline, emphasis should be placed on the importance of studying and working with the guideline and the importance of preparing oneself for teaching online in an international environment.

To ensure that the guideline can be consistently revised and updated, an easy method for adding content should be chosen. Therefore the text might be placed online within the central learning platform of the Institution (Blackboard, Moodle, OLAT etc.), a wiki for example, so that users can add their own insights. As it is the work of an online tutor to teach within diverse online communication and collaboration tools, they should be familiar with the handling of a wiki. Moreover, as discussed within the focus group (chapter 4.2), peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and experiences among online tutors (at University) might be realized by a discussion board placed within the learning platform. Such an exchange might also deliver valuable input for the guideline which needs to be mentioned by somebody else, for instance the recommended central point at University. Another idea is to make use of a social network and micro blogging service such as 'twitter'³⁹. Online tutors can network and easily exchange ideas ad hoc. There are examples of successful networks at University which make use of twitter⁴⁰. The way of distributing and maintaining such a guideline has not been tested hence needs to be evaluated and steadily improved.

Recommendations

The role as an online tutor

Online teaching is both an intercultural as well as an educational challenge.

³⁹ For more information about twitter see <http://twitter.com/>.

⁴⁰ See for example http://www.ucdavis.edu/social_media/twitter.html

In many cases the success or failure of online education depends to a high degree on the competence of the online tutor. However teaching online is a complex function (Anderson et al., 2001). To a certain degree teachers can build upon experiences gathered through classroom teaching (Anderson, 2004), but both students and teachers are challenged by a set of new roles and functions in an online environment (Stodel, 2006). One crucial difference is that the traditional teacher can utilize both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, whereas the online tutor has to concentrate on the verbal, nowadays still predominantly asynchronous, form of communication (Walters-Coppola et al., 2002).

Examples of roles of the online tutor are:

- **Course Designer:** It is the task of the Course Designer to structure and design the module. He needs to collect, prepare and provide the learning content as well as build assessment.
- **Course Manager/Administrator:** The Course Manager/Administrator has to administer and evaluate the programme. He is responsible for recruiting new students and represents the University.
- **Direct Instructor:** The Direct Instructor is responsible for the introduction of the provided learning material. It should be noted that within the online environment the role of the online tutor is changing from traditional teaching towards moderating and facilitating (Berge, 1995; Salmon, 2004). It is his task to moderate and pursue discussions, conduct chat and mark assignments.
- **Learning Coach:** The Learning Coach has the more social role, he supports students in difficult personal circumstances and encourages a student to participate. He should also make the learning more personal.

It should be mentioned that not all of these roles need to be carried out by the same person; they rather intersect each other. Roles may vary depending on the institutional organisation and the course design. Therefore it is recommended to possibly use the presented roles as inspiration, however be sure to identify which of those roles need to be carried out from case to case. Simple questions such as:

- What is your particular role in the programme?
- What are your tasks?
- What might be challenging and cause problems? And who or what might provide support with regard to facing challenges and solve potentially evolving problems?

may help to identify newly evolving tasks and challenges. There are many courses that prepare (inexperienced) tutors in how to teach online. A theoretical basis can be achieved through an existing amount of literature as for instance:

- Anderson, T. (2004). Teaching in an Online Learning Context. In T. E. Anderson, Fathi (Ed.), Theory and Practice of Online Learning (pp. 273-294). Athabaska: Athabaska University.
- Berge, Z. L., Collins, M. P. (2001). The role of the Online Instructor/Facilitator. Available: http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/teach_online.html
- McFadzean, E., McKenzie, J. (2001). Facilitating virtual learning groups. A practical approach. Journal of Management Development, 20(6), 470-494.
- Palloff, R. M., Pratt, K. (2003). *The Virtual Student: A profile and guide to working with online learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Salmon, G. (2004). *E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online* (2. ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer. Gilly Salmon offers moreover an online course for e-moderators (<http://www.atimod.com>).
- Yu, C., Brandenburg, T. (n.d.). I Would Have Had More Success If ...: The Reflections and Tribulations of a First-Time Online Instructor. *The Journal of Technology Studies*, 43-59.

It should be noticed that practice of online teaching is as vitally important as the theoretical basis.

Teaching online in a multicultural environment

In addition to the general adjustments described above, which need to be considered when teaching online, cultural differences in internationally recruiting programmes constitute a further challenge (Bründl-Price, 2004, Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Researchers highlight the importance of culture to e-learning (e.g. Edmundson, 2007, Selinger, 2004). To give an example, the social position of teachers and students may differ, and there might be a difference in profiles of cognitive abilities or differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. Additionally, there is always the risk of cultural gaffes that may cause learning and teaching barriers, such as the often cited example of using red as an attention sign in a class with Chinese students, while red is considered a lucky colour in China (Quigley, n.d.). The openness of classrooms to an international audience brings about new tasks (roles) and relationships between the teacher and the students, the teacher and the administrator as well as among teachers and students. Many researchers agree: the consideration and integration of cultural factors is an important aspect for the quality of online education (e.g. Liu, 2007, Zaltsmann, 2007). A lack of cultural adoption is a leading reason when e-learning fails to work for a globally distributed audience (Dunn & Malinetti, 2002).

The transfer of training techniques for cross-cultural use is accompanied by difficulties for both students and tutors (Gilleard, 1998). Cultural differences might be even more salient in online classes given that *'it is the information and the ideas rather than the students that are mobile'* (Doherty, 2004, p.6). It needs to be considered that there is a difference between international attendance students and those studying exclusively online. Attendance students, for instance, will have more opportunities to adapt to the cultural context the University is placed in or at least will probably be more aware of cultural differences than online students.

Previous research has identified the tendency that particularly inexperienced online tutors, who have not taught a multicultural group before, seem to be of the opinion that there is little need to adapt to differences since no major diversities have been perceived. Similarly it has been discovered that there is a tendency for students who have rarely had contact with culturally diverse people to not consider anything like cultural diversities. In contrast, experienced online tutors agree that 'the cultural aspect needs to be considered'. Moreover students with experiences of being with culturally diverse people highlighted the benefits of multicultural study groups.

,Having students around the world is inspiring' (online tutor at LJMU).

,I think it's (students with diverse cultural background) extremely valuable (...) it makes one realise that there are other realities, other ways at looking at the world' (students of an online programme at LJMU).

One of the most obvious difficulties in teaching a global audience is the matter of language (Olaniran, 2007).

The following section presents a set of recommendations which relate to the stages of an online course: Before the course starts (Pre-Course-Start), just before the course starts, within the course and at the end of the course. These recommendations might vary with regard to their relevance depending on the course, the subject taught, and the cultural background of the students.



PRE-COURSE-START...

Revise course

Always, before a class starts, take into account the diverse cultural backgrounds of the new student group. If necessary, go through your contributions again in order to check the comprehension of your language for non-native speakers. It might be also valuable that the course-material is checked by ,critical foreign readers'.

Check / revise recruitment and marketing criteria

When recruiting internationally, recruitment and marketing criteria might need to be revised: On the one hand in order to place advertisement, which addresses the target group, on the other hand in order to adjust the recruitment process since methods such as face-to-face interviews are not always feasible.



PRE-COURSE-START until END OF COURSE...

Develop awareness of cultural / educational background

Be aware of your own cultural and educational background; how your culture relates to another culture. Moreover it is recommended that you are aware of your students' cultural and educational background. Unawareness within a class might get in the way of effective group work. Therefore, it might be useful to study resources which address cultural and educational differences in general, for example:

- Geert Hofstede has developed a set of 'dimensions of culture'. Further information can be found in: Hofstede, G. Geert Hofstede™ Cultural Dimensions, [Webpage]. itim International. Available: <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>; Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differencing in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 302-320.
- Hall distinguished between 'high and low context communication'. Further information can be found in: Hall, E. T. (1985). *Hidden differences: studies in international communication*. Hamburg: Gruner&Jahr.

There is also an amount of literature that presents several face-to-face learning activities designed for a multicultural audience. These methods may be studied and used as a helpful basis in order to create methods which fit within the online environment and particular situation. Suggested literature:

- Seelye, H.N (1996). *Experiential Activities for Intercultural Learning*. Intercultural Press: Boston, London.
- Hofstede, G.J., Pedersen, P.B., Hofstede, G. (2002). *Exploring Culture. Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*. Intercultural Press: Boston, London.

It should be mentioned that culture in general is too complex to be understood exclusively on the basis of a limited number of dimensions and descriptions, but they can be very helpful in understanding and explaining differences. It should be considered that there is always the risk of stereotyping.

Consider additional time required

While reading the recommendations above the fact that teaching in an international environment might be more time consuming than teaching in culturally homogenous groups has probably been realised. Consider that a task within a multicultural setting takes longer than in a class with students having the same cultural background.

Consider different expectations and needs

Expectations and needs may vary particularly among students with diverse cultural backgrounds. Be aware of those differences; an expectation-led quality assurance process might help to avoid difficulties occurring from unknown needs and expectations.

Consider use of synchronous communication

Synchronous online education to a certain degree follows its own rules. Consider that when students in your class are living in different time zones, it might be difficult to conduct synchronous sessions through a chat or a virtual classroom. A scheduled date might exclude some students since it is in the middle of the night when the sessions takes place; moreover a lot of distance learning students are involved in a job during the day. It might be a solution to offer sessions at the weekend if possible.

Support sharing and peer-to-peer guidance

Support some sort of peer-to-peer guidance in the sense of sharing ideas and best practices among online tutors at the University or general networks for instance. Such a knowledge exchange is very usable in both directions; above all you might have the possibility to receive qualified answers and support for upcoming questions and difficulties while teaching.



JUST BEFORE COURSE START...

Provide protocol

It might be beneficial to hand out a protocol to students before the class starts which asked them to consider the aspects mentioned under ‚Consider different use of language’ and ‘Establish rules’. Such a guideline should be explicit without making students to worry about contributing or making any mistakes.



COURSE START...

Make a new discussion point

In order to support the multicultural awareness and sensitivity in a class introduce the language aspect in multicultural classes as a discussion point in relation to the course subject.

Establish rules

Agree on a couple of general ground rules within class with students at the beginning of a course and make sure that these rules are followed throughout the programme. These rules might be

part of a guideline for students which they receive at the beginning of a course (see provide protocol).



COURSE START UNTIL END OF COURSE...

Consider different use of language

In order to avoid misunderstandings, use language that is more understandable for non-native speakers. Try to express things clearly and establish a simple language code in class which avoids sarcasm, jokes, colloquialism et cetera. As informal language might sometimes be beneficial with regard to the class atmosphere, always explain those expressions when used and ask students to do the same. Such a process might boost the multicultural awareness within the class (see 'Allow to explore one's own culture / educational background').

Give special allowance in assignments

In agreement with colleagues, give special allowance to non-native speakers for language aspects on assignments in certain cases. It is important that fellow native-speaker students do not feel disadvantaged, since other barriers might influence the language quality as well, such as somebody who is dyslexic.

Allow to explore one's own culture / educational background

The exploration of cultural and educational backgrounds is important for overcoming barriers when teaching online in an international environment. The process of exploration might be supported by:

1. Allow students to explore and express one's own culture /identity and to show interest in other people's culture.
2. As a process in class: Try to get everybody to understand each other's culture (to a certain degree).
3. Build a third culture instead of focusing on differences.

Students might also have the opportunity to express their experiences of studying at a foreign University.

Provide appropriate cultural sensitiveness

Based on the knowledge of student's cultural background, try to think and feel the way your students might feel. With the growing cultural awareness there is always the risk of being over

sensitive (also among students). It is your task to work with cultural aspects in a sensitive way as they come up.

Develop ,meta-awareness'

In the ideal case try to develop a meta-awareness', which considers the situation, your own cultural background and that of your communication partner.

Clarify different meanings of words

The meaning of words within a culture may vary tremendously. Therefore clarify the meaning of any key word in class which might cause misunderstandings. This process also supports the previously mentioned aspect ,Allow to explore one's own culture / educational background'.

Create an open-minded atmosphere

Try to create an open-minded atmosphere in multicultural groups. An open-minded atmosphere means that there are no prejudices, that everybody is open to new ideas, and that it is meaningful to discuss with each other and to receive new ideas. If you are aware of any prejudices within a class filter them out by doing something such as making a discussion point about it.

Allow to explore topic

In order to enable an effective online discussion ask students to explore a topic before 'coming to a synchronous class' for instance, as in having them do some preparation by, for example, providing reflections, group work and leading questions.

Intervene when necessary

It is your task to moderate the discussion and to keep the discussion on track. The tutor needs to follow this task consequently in a multicultural setting, when for instance the way of description goes in the wrong direction because of a misunderstanding. It is important that the intervention is made in a positive way without decreasing motivation among students. In a case of a conflict you should act as a mediator.

Teach with pleasure

Teach with pleasure while finding a balance between not being too formal and not causing misunderstandings.

Consider fast exchanges

The fast exchanges within synchronous online communication might be difficult for non-native speakers. It might be valuable to repeat meanings in other words in some cases.

The presented recommendations for an online tutor who teaches in an international environment are summarised within figure 19.

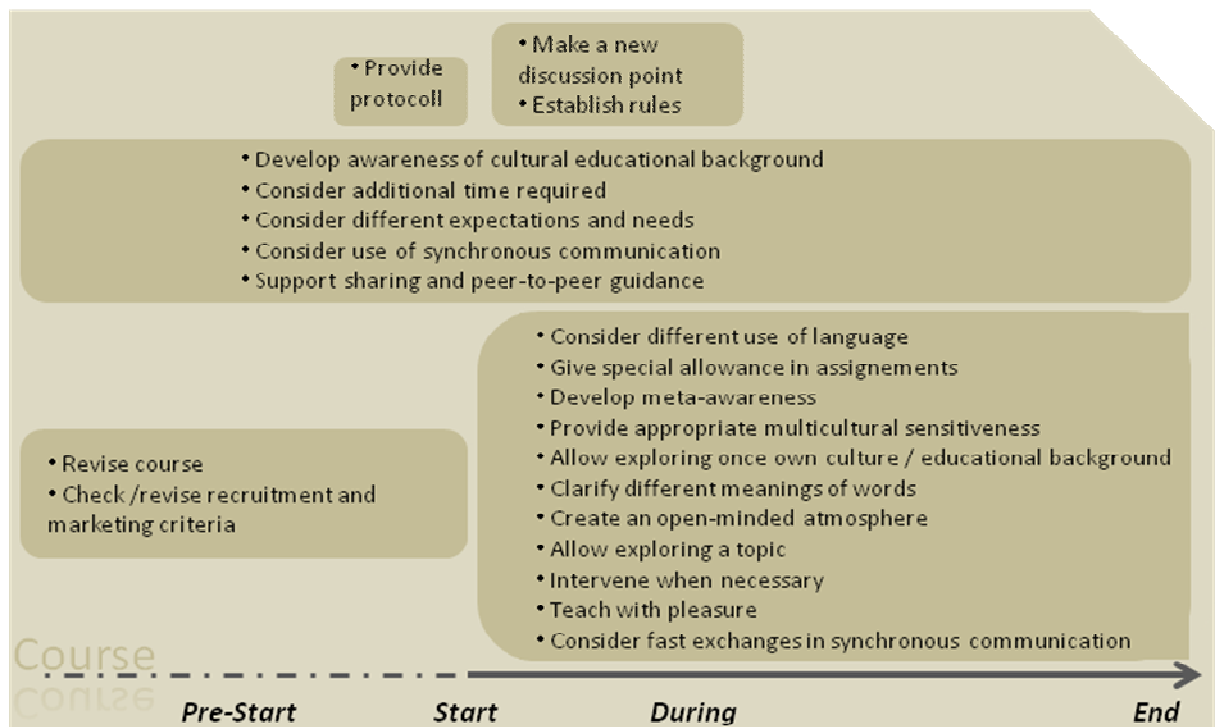


Figure 19: Tasks and considerations of an online tutor in a multicultural, online course

Technical tips for realisation

Examples of how some of the tasks mentioned (figure 13) might be realised within the online environment are listed briefly and to conclude below:

- 'Provide protocol': The protocol is sent via e-mail to students and stored within a discussion board within the learning platform in order to make sure that it is accessible all the time for every student.
- 'Make a new discussion point': The discussion about, for example, 'how language shapes our mind' is situated asynchronously in the discussion board or synchronously in a chat session.
- 'Establish rules': The rules might be part of the above mentioned protocol. The tutor alludes to the importance of such rules particularly at the beginning of the course.

- ‘Allow exploring one’s own culture / educational background’: For example, students are asked to write a learning journal within a blog, which can be read by everyone enrolled in the course.
- ‘Clarify different meanings of words’: This is a task which might be set up as a group work. Students with the same cultural background explain the meaning of words within a wiki. The wiki might be expanded by students of the next programme and accessible for other online tutors (of the University) who want to increase their multicultural competency.
- ‘Sharing and peer-to-peer guidance’: Online tutors might use a discussion board to exchange ideas, as well as questions and answers. As mentioned within the present research, such a platform might not be used (chapter 4.2). However a discussion board generally needs a proper moderation. Moreover a microblogging service might be used. Regular face-to-face meetings within the University might be another option; however results should be documented somehow.

5.3 Methodology and research worth pursuing

Reflecting on the research process itself, the GT has provided a very useful and supportive way of dealing with a topic where little research has been carried out to date, as tutor ExK has highlighted:

‘I think it’s very good that you are investigating this. Because I don’t think this is an area that people have really made visually and discussable.’(App. E, p.35, l.78)

The methodology offers a very structured approach on the one hand while enabling a flexible adaption to the assumption of the circumstances. Hence it is possible to describe the reality of a particular environment with relatively little data, as it is usually the case for the individual researcher. The GT also provides a very useful approach based on the discipline of the methodology, the coding, the constant comparative analysis, the sampling and the composing of memos in order to produce a theory as explained in chapter 3.2.3. Enabling a process which provides answers to identified questions and a process of reflection and appropriate decisions about samples and methods has been perceived as one of the benefits of this methodology, particularly the circularity of the GT process. Hence, the researcher could follow particular issues that arose, moving from an open towards a more specific perspective. Moreover it was hoped, and in the researcher’s perspective to a certain degree achieved, to support tutors and students to reflect on their research impact in ways that would help them to become more culturally sensitive and possibly inspire tutors for pedagogical improvements. Tutors of the CTP programme, for example, mentioned that they decided while doing the interview to possibly reconsider

recruitment and marketing criteria of the course (chapter 4.1.3.2). In some other cases issues were raised that had been inspired by interviews and within the focus group, a process that can already be regarded as 'some sort of sharing'. The challenge of this method is to concentrate on just a few emerging questions that came up within the process of data collection and analysis since research time and resources were limited.

However many other issues worth pursuing in the future have arisen from the data. As mentioned within chapter 4.3 the emerging theory needs to be further tested, adjusted, and refined. Further research could for instance (in the sense of further triangulation) investigate the situation of online tutors teaching another course as CTP at LJMU or at another Institution. Moreover the investigation of the CTP online programme by another researcher or by utilising another research approach might lead to theory-enriching results. Addressing the matter of 'quality online teaching in a multicultural environment' a research question could directly elaborate which (additional) factors do impact the quality of online teaching. Within the study the convergence towards the quality factors happened within the research process rather implicit. Considering, moreover, the limitation of this study (chapter 4.4) it would be interesting to further investigate the student's perspective, particularly with diverse cultural backgrounds, addressing the online tutor. The student's perspective might enable valuable recommendations for more cultural sensitivity in teaching online. In combination with Hofstede's and Hall's cultural dimensions, guidelines for online tutors could be provided. The analysis of discussion boards might also provide insights in the sense of: What (other) difficulties and problems have arisen? Furthermore it would be interesting to find out how other Universities are supporting and preparing their online tutors since there might already exist answers to 'other ways of sharing knowledge and best practices' that suit the needs of LJMU online tutors. Addressing the presented guideline (chapter 5.2), it would be interesting to evaluate the implementation, utilisation and maintenance of such a guideline.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Ethical Approval



Ref. 0721

Kerstin Nilsson
Oelkersallee 25 a
22769 Hamburg
Germany

Friday 26th January 2007

Dear Kerstin,

With reference to your application for Ethical approval titled:

The role of the online tutor in a multicultural environment

Thank you for correspondence responding to the proviso and I am happy to confirm your application is fully approved.

The Ethics Committee approval is given on the understanding that:

- (i) any adverse reactions/events which take place during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately;
- (ii) any unforeseen ethical issues arising during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately;
- (iii) any change in the protocol will be reported to the Committee immediately.

Please note that ethical approval is given for a period of five years from the date granted and therefore the expiry date for this project will be **July 2011**. An application for extension of approval must be submitted if the project continues after this date.

I am enclosing form EC5 and would be grateful if you could spare the time to complete the questionnaire and return it to me.

Yours sincerely

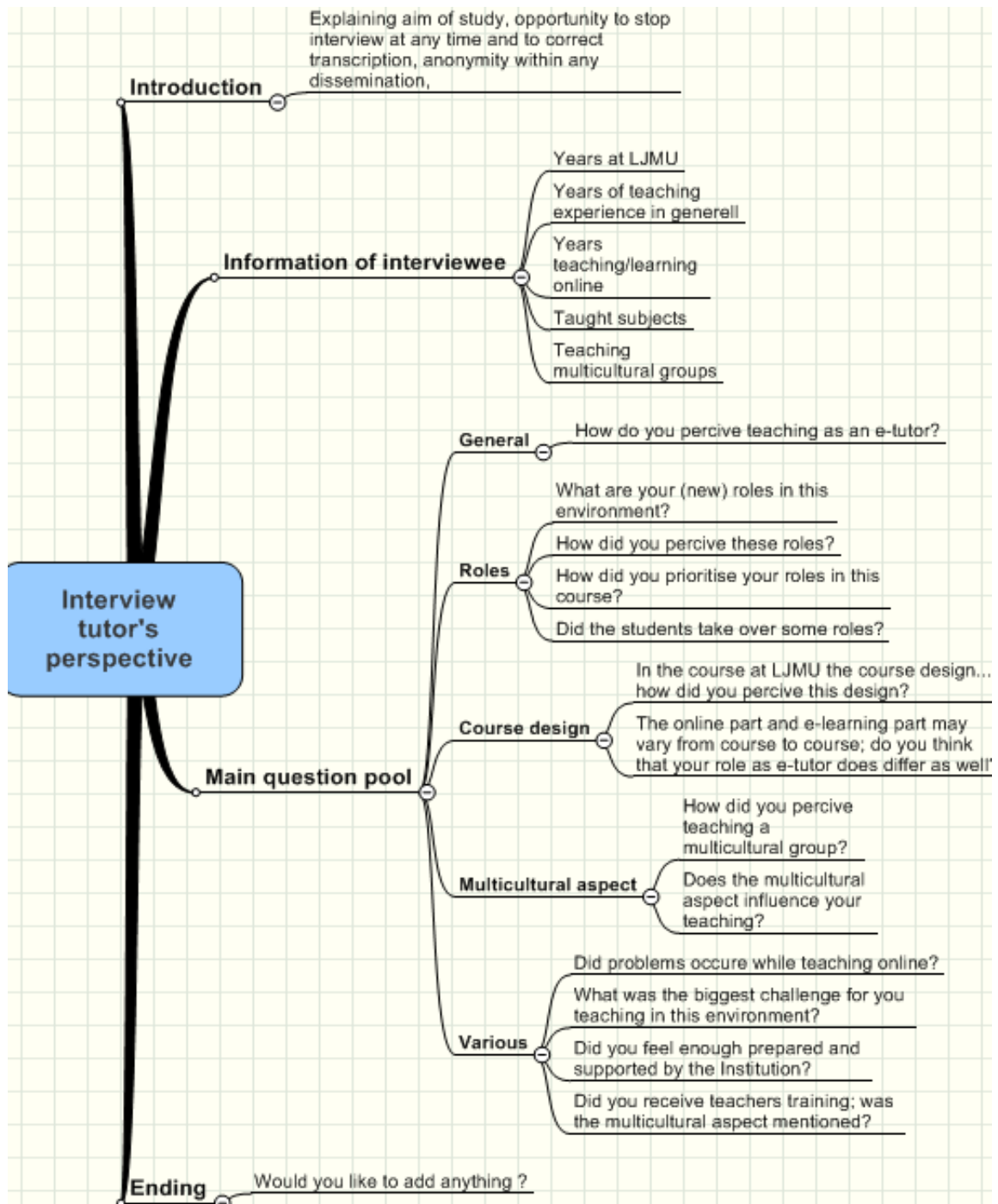
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo McWatt", is written over a faint, circular stamp or watermark.

Jo McWatt
Graduate Research Administrator
Tel: 0151 231 3119
E-mail: j.m.mcwatt@ljmu.ac.uk

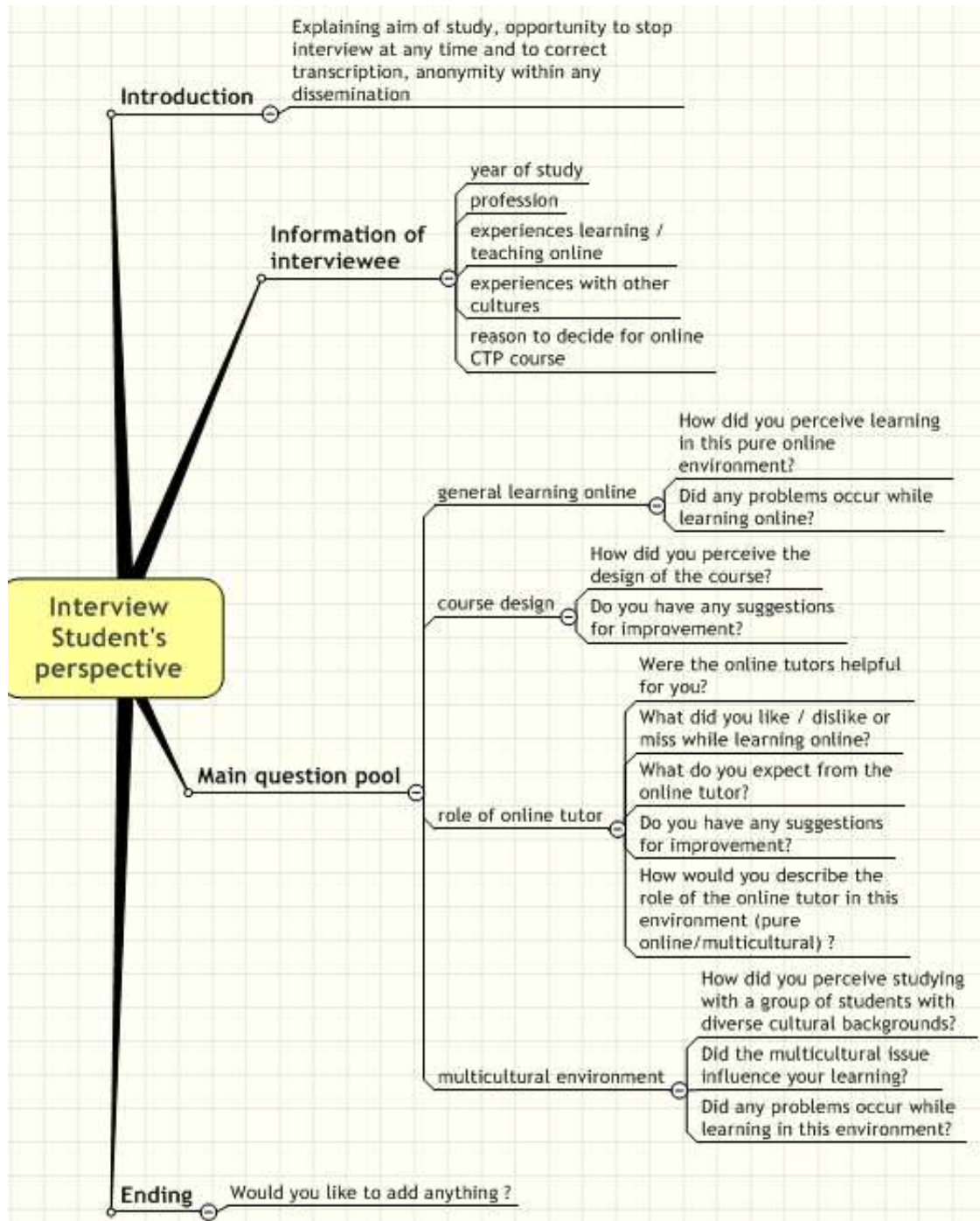
Research and Graduate School Office

Top Floor, Rodney House, Liverpool. L3 5UX Facsimile +44 (0) 151-231-3742 http://www.livjm.ac.uk/research_and_graduate/

Appendix B - Example of interview guideline –tutors



Appendix C - Example of interview guideline – students



Appendix D - Focus group guideline

Date: 24.11.2008 at Kingsway House, Hatton Garden, in Meeting Room 3

I) Welcome & refreshments

Thank you very much for coming today and joining the focus group! Within a PhD research I am investigating the field of 'online tutoring in an international environment'; so far I have conducted interviews with both students as well as online tutors. And this is the first focus group – I am very happy to have the opportunity today to get to know your perspective based on your experience. Since you are all working at University, all having experience in teaching online!

A few words now addressing the frame of the focus-group today: We will have 1-1,5h time to discuss. Please note that your contribution will be treated confidentially and anonymous and for sure you can always stop to join the discussion.

I would like to add also a few guidelines: it would be very helpful for the transcription process – if you could speak clearly, one person after another and not to fare away from the microphone. And I would also ask you to stay confidential with what has been said within this group. Please note, that there are no right and wrong answers and questions - it is your opinion, your ideas that count; different views is both acceptable and wanted.

II) START RECORDING

a) Introduction round

Since not all of us do know each other – let us just start with a quick introduction round adding a few words in regard to your experience in teaching online / multicultural students

b) Discussion start

Outcomes of the study indicate: As announced in my first e-mail the main aim of the focus group is to field opinions and generate ideas how tutors can be effectively prepared to teach in an international online environment. This field of interest is the result of previous investigations I have conducted. However it is a newly evolving topic.

I would like to ask you to start to discuss now and to provide your view, your ideas on:

- c) How online tutors, working at a traditional face-to-face University, should be effectively prepared/trained to teach in an international online environment?
- d) Could you suggest any solutions / provide more details addressing:
 - Pedagogical aspect
 - Organizational aspect of such trainings?
- e) Outcomes also indicate that it might be necessary to prepare also **students** when having to learn in an international environment. What do you think? What is the role of the tutor in this case?
 - c) Moreover there were suggestions that teaching in an international environment takes longer/**requires more time** as when teaching in a national environment. How to handle that issue?
 - d) Idea –next to training **peer-to-peer exchange among tutors**- What do you think?

III) End discussion

We are coming to the end – We had very interesting points coming up, as for instance...

Would you like to say or add anything before we finish?

Thank you very much again. And if you are interested I can send you a copy of any publication in the future. Have a nice afternoon.

Appendix E - Transcriptions of interviews

See enclosed CD-ROM

Appendix F - Transcription of focus group

See enclosed CD-ROM

Appendix G - Examples of data analysis within NVivo

Node Explorer - Interview_LJMU_TPP
 Node Set Tools View

Browse Properties Attributes DocLinks NodeLinks Edit Set Assay Search

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Node Explorer - Interview_LJMU_TPP

Node Set Tools View

Browse Properties Attributes DocLinks NodeLinks Edit Set Assay Search

Nodes

- Recently Used
- Free (144)
- Trees (285)
- Cases (0)
- Sets (12)

All Trees

Title	No.	Passa...	Created	Modified
S_CourseDesigner	1	2	22.08.2007 ...	25.10.2007 ...
S_DirectInstructor	2	0	22.08.2007 ...	16.10.2007 ...
S_LearningCoach	3	0	22.08.2007 ...	22.08.2007 ...
S_CourseManagerAdmin	4	0	22.08.2007 ...	09.10.2007 ...
S_PerceptionLearningOnline	5	0	23.08.2007 ...	09.10.2007 ...
S_PerceptionLearningMCEEnvironment	6	0	03.09.2007 ...	09.10.2007 ...
T_S_E_Face-to-Face Meeting	7	4	03.09.2007 ...	10.09.2008 ...
T_I_Support from Uni	8	8	09.10.2007 ...	09.10.2007 ...
T_CourseDesign	9	0	15.10.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
T_CourseManagerAdmin	10	0	15.10.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
T_Direct Instructor	11	0	15.10.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
T_LearningCoach	12	0	15.10.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
T_E_PerceptionTeachingOnline	13	0	15.10.2007 ...	24.06.2008 ...
T_E_PerceptionTeachingMCEEnvironment	14	0	15.10.2007 ...	24.06.2008 ...
F_Training and preparation	15	0	03.03.2009 ...	17.03.2009 ...
F_To consider in online education	16	0	11.03.2009 ...	17.03.2009 ...

Node Explorer - Interview_LJMU_TPP

Node Set Tools View

Browse Properties Attributes DocLinks NodeLinks Edit Set Assay Search

Nodes

- Recently Used
- Free (144)
- Trees (285)
- S_CourseDesigner
- S_DirectInstructor
- S_LearningCoach
- S_CourseManagerAdmin
- S_PerceptionLearningOnline
- S_PerceptionLearningMCEEnvironment

Nodes in /S_PerceptionLearningMCEEnvironment

Title	No.	Passa...	Created	Modified
Un- ~ expected issue	1	0	03.09.2007 ...	11.12.2007 ...
Not much of an issue	2	0	03.09.2007 ...	09.10.2007 ...
Challenging ~ difficult	3	0	03.09.2007 ...	11.12.2007 ...
Inspiring ~ enriching	4	0	03.09.2007 ...	03.09.2007 ...

Node Explorer - Interview_LJMU_TPP

Node Set Tools View

Browse Properties Attributes DocLinks NodeLinks Edit Set Assay Search

Nodes

- Recently Used
- Free (144)
- Trees (285)
- S_CourseDesigner
- S_DirectInstructor
- S_LearningCoach
- S_CourseManagerAdmin
- S_PerceptionLearningOnline
- S_PerceptionLearningMCEEnvironment
- T_S_E_Face-to-Face Meeting
- T_I_Support from Uni
- T_CourseDesign
- T_CourseManagerAdmin

Nodes in /T_CourseManagerAdmin

Title	No.	Passa...	Created	Modified
administrating the program	1	5	01.03.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
representing the University	2	4	01.03.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
Recruiting and Assessing new students	3	3	02.03.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
answer enquiries concerning the prog	4	1	02.07.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
marketing program	5	3	15.10.2007 ...	15.10.2007 ...
Guiding other programs	6	2	27.06.2007 ...	23.11.2007 ...
evaluating teaching and assessment	9	4	01.03.2007 ...	23.11.2007 ...

Node Explorer - Interview_LJMU_TPP

Node Set Tools View

Browse Properties Attributes DocLinks NodeLinks Edit Set Assay Search

Nodes

Nodes in /T_E_PerceptionTeachingMCEEnvironment/E_Suggestions to overcome barriers

Title	No.	Passa...	Created	Modified
Moderating the discussion	1	2	29.04.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Allowing to explore topic previously	2	3	29.04.2008 ...	29.04.2008...
understand each other culture	3	2	24.06.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Building a third culture	4	6	24.06.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Awareness of educational background	5	2	24.06.2008 ...	24.06.2008...
Allow explore own culture~identity	6	9	15.10.2007 ...	10.09.2008...
need for teacher training	7	7	20.11.2007 ...	10.09.2008...
Provide guidelines previously	8	4	10.09.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Develope meta-awareness	9	1	10.09.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Explaining cultural specific issues	10	2	10.09.2008 ...	10.09.2008...
Intervene when necessary	11	1	20.01.2009 ...	20.01.2009...
develop an open athmophere	12	3	20.01.2009 ...	20.01.2009...
teaching with humor and fun	13	1	20.01.2009 ...	20.01.2009...

Recently Used

- Free (144)
- Trees (285)
- S_CourseDesigner
- S_DirectInstructor
- S_LearningCoach
- S_CourseManagerAdmin
- S_PerceptionLearningOnline
- S_PerceptionLearningMCEEnvironment
- T_S_E_Face-to-Face Meeting
- T_I_Support from Uni
- T_CourseDesign
- T_CourseManagerAdmin
- T_Direct Instructor
- T_LearningCoach
- T_E_PerceptionTeachingOnline
- T_E_PerceptionTeachingMCEEnvironment
- Un~expected issue~Challenge 2
- Rich~inspiring
- E_Suggestions to overcome barriers

Appendix H - Example of methodological/theoretical memos and charts

Example of methodological memo

After having coded the first interviews and examined the generated categories, I realise that I have to code the interviews again. In the first round of data analysis I relied too much on the interview guide and its questions on the one side; on the other side on existing theories about the role of the online tutor, which narrowed the opportunities of finding additional aspects as I was too much focused to find aspects fitting to existing data. My experiences and knowledge about the investigated topic influenced, in my view, the process of analysis too much at a too early stage. Therefore, I decided and tried to be more open when coding the transcribed interviews by using particularly INVIO codes.

Example of theoretical memo

Language issues are perceived as being particularly influenced by cultural differences. Instructors tend to use a different style of English in order to make it more accessible for non-native English speakers. Moreover, a new discussion point about 'How language shapes our mind' has been established in the online CTP programme.

Further influences were recognised in relation to:

- Offering synchronously communication:

'It is hard to get all students from all time zones in a chat; hence the offer of chat sessions is less often as if students were all from the same time zone [...].'

- Teaching at different times:

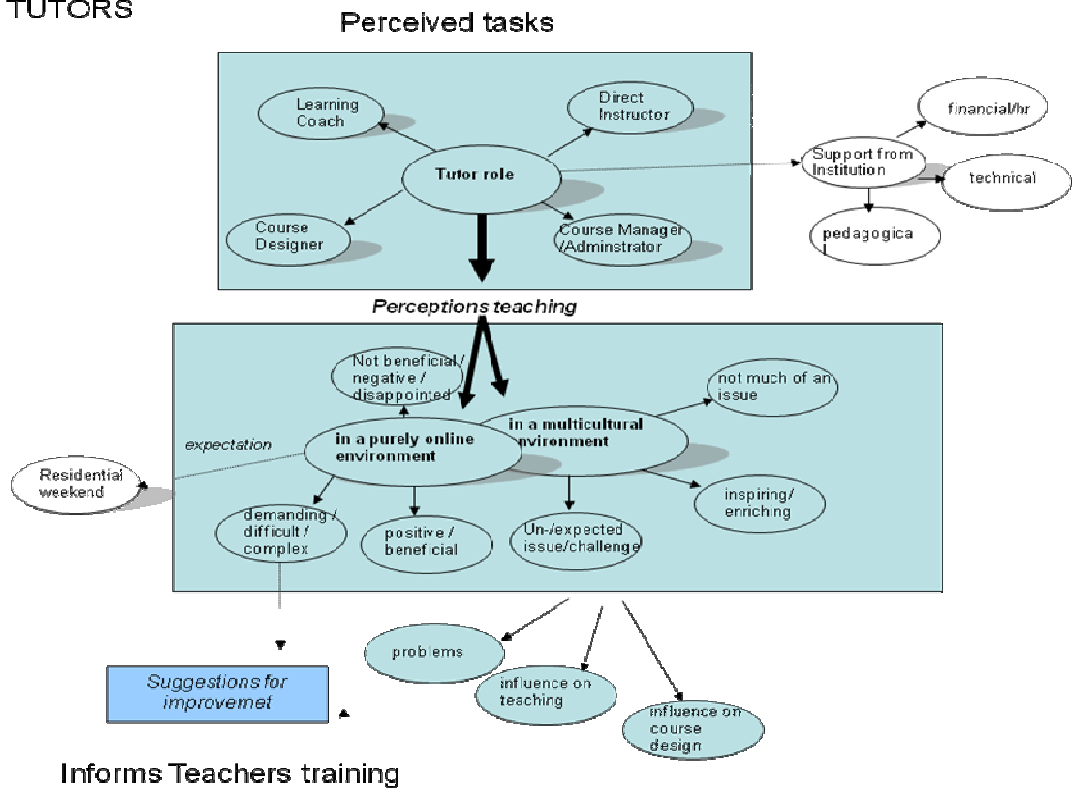
'[...] as teaching online can be done anywhere and at any time and students living in different time zones are participating; additionally asynchronous communication allows working at any time [...].'

- Giving special allowance to non-English native speakers:

'[...] for example in assignments concerning the way of expressing things [...].'

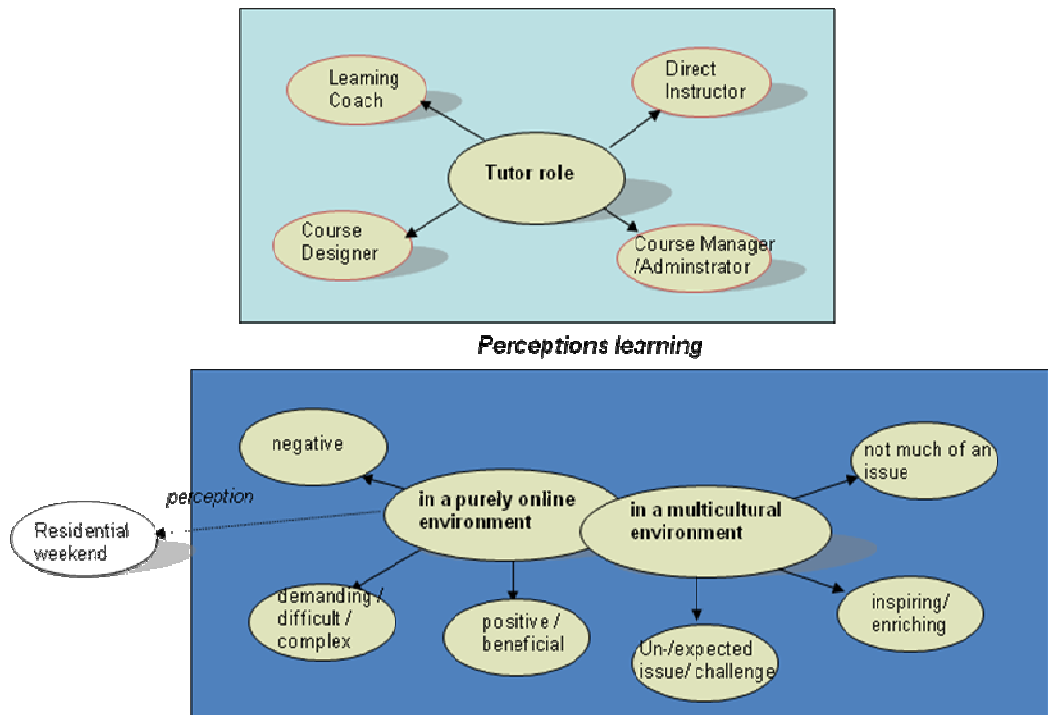
Examples of research charts

TUTORS

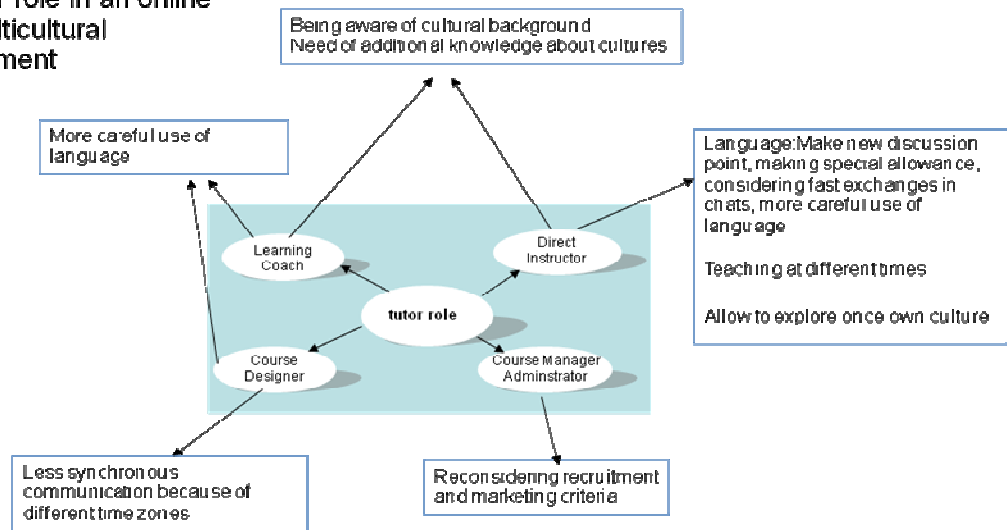


STUDENTS

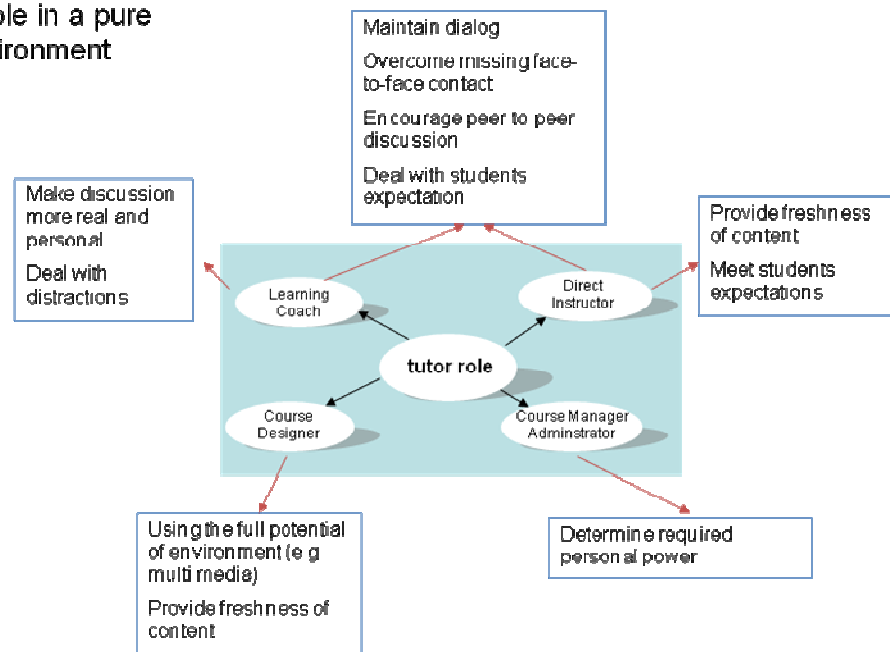
Expectations – suggestions for improvement

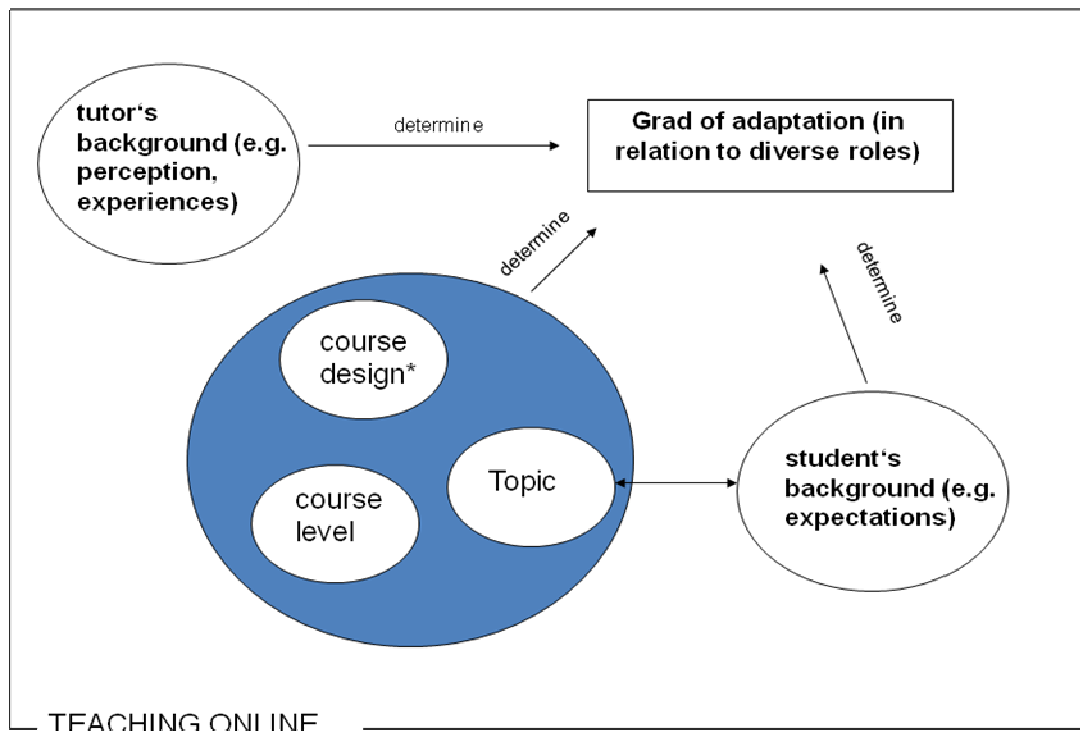
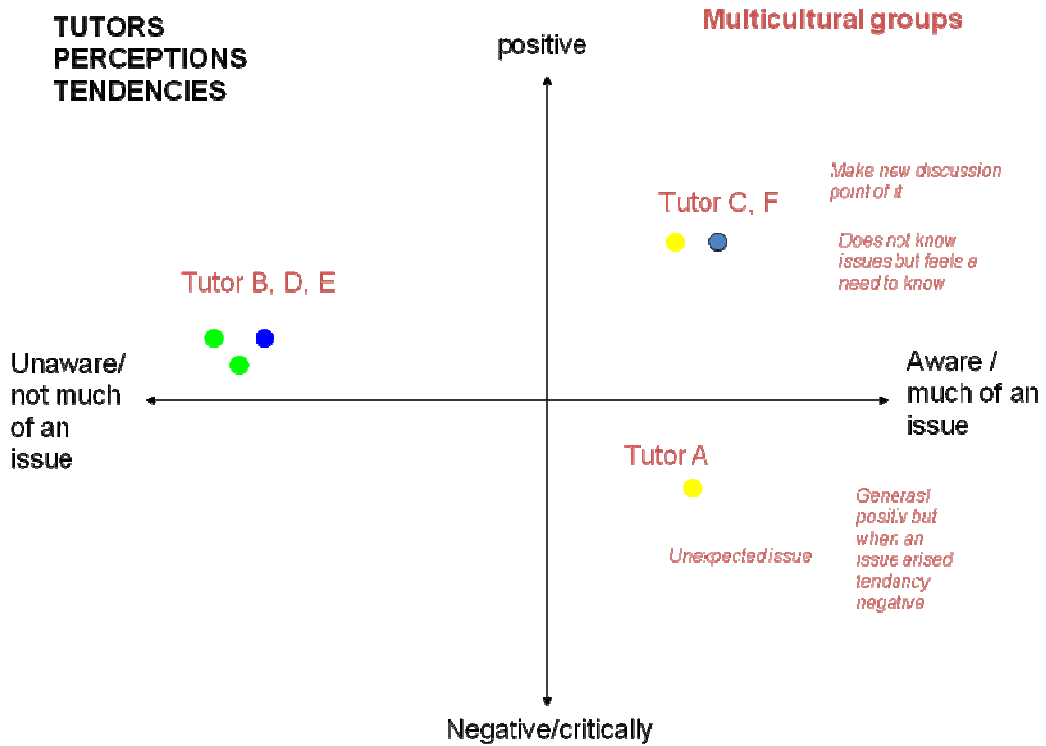


Challenging influence on the tutor role in an online and multicultural environment



Challenging influence on the tutor role in a pure online environment





*by Andrea Edmondson, 2007

Appendix I - Dissemination within research process

Poster presentation at the 'Teaching and learning conference' at LJMU, May 2007,

Multicultural Aspects of E-Learning: Focus on the Tutor Role



Kerstin Nilsson
Liverpool John Moores University, School of Psychology

Introduction

Web-based distance learning programmes without any face-to-face contact between staff and students are offered more and more widely. Although many online courses recruit internationally, multicultural aspects of this learning and teaching situation have so far received only little attention.

Here we present first results of our ongoing research project – a qualitative exploration that investigates the role of the online tutor within an international and multicultural environment, focusing on the tutor perspective, their perceptions and attitudes of teaching in a multicultural environment.

Our questions:

How do multicultural aspects of the student group influence teaching strategies?
What problems and challenges do the tutors perceive teaching in this environment?

Method

- Open, inductive qualitative approach
- Semi-structured interviews with tutors teaching online
- Recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed with help of NVIVO software.

The sample

Interviews were carried out with six tutors of the online MSc Course "Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology" at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), the first purely web-based programme of its kind at LJMU, recruiting students from all over the world.

Data analysis

- Grounded Theory approach...
 - Open coding to build indexing system, capturing detail, variation and complexity of basic material
 - Moving from descriptive to more theoretical levels by grouping sets of basic categories and forming core categories

Results

Teaching purely online:

Challenges:

- choosing the right language
- ensuring relevance for students
- getting used to changing working time
- creating the learning space
- pursuing the discussion
- meeting students expectations
- communicating with students
- staffing issues

Problems:

- students complaining
- not enough pay
- social barriers
- losing students behind the screen
- encouraging people to communicate
- no insight to students well-being, communication
- students expectations

Teaching in a multicultural environment:

Arising problems:

- Studying in a foreign language
 - Misunderstandings or lack of vocabulary
- Different cultural/religious background
 - Behaviours may differ and may be experienced as alien or even offending
 - Student expectations differ
- Synchronous communication (chat)
 - Disadvantages for students from some time zones
 - Problems with speed of exchange for non-native speakers

Perceptions of teaching in a multicultural environment:

I didn't think that this is gonna be a problem. And that's a couple of time where it has been...

... the only point I have noticed about that ... is the fact that not all the students are studying in their native language.

I am in fact not aware that there are huge cultural differences between.

I'm always curious where people are from ... and diverse backgrounds make the whole experience very rich and exciting.

Having students around the globe is inspiring... you know the material I teach is going into this country and that country and other countries. I think it's wonderful.

You made me think about the multicultural thing actually from your questions. Because as I said it's something that we kind of considered so it might be an issue but actually hasn't really become an issue.

Influence of the multicultural environment on ...

... teaching

- Language issues
 - Tutors tend to use different style of English to make it more accessible to not native speakers
 - Discussion forum on "how language shapes our mind" has been established
 - Giving allowances to non-native speakers in assignments
- Offering synchronous communication
 - time zone limitations
- Teaching at different times
 - Largely asynchronous nature of the programme
 - allows teaching at any time

On the level of how we prepare our material, how we construct our work I still think that we come from a place where we are offering this in Liverpool... I think the assumption has always been that this is an English University teaching in English to English speakers.'

... course design

- Allowing to explore ones own culture within the programme
- Making education (geographically) more accessible
- Adjusting admission procedures and criteria
- Recruiting and marketing criteria
 - Students on the programme are "Western, American, Anglo-American"

Conclusions & Further Research

- Interviewed staff show some awareness of multicultural aspects and these have been taken into account in design and delivery of the programme
- Language issues have been recognised as being particularly influenced by the cultural background of the learner
- Identified key areas will be used to guide further research



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