

**Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions Among Industry Practitioners
Taught by Practitioner-Tutors: A Case Study of Part-time MBA Students in Singapore**
Sadanand Varma

September 2019

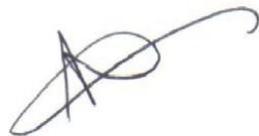
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions Among Industry Practitioners Taught by Practitioner-Tutors: A Case Study of Part-time MBA Students in Singapore
Sadanand Varma

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a large loop and a trailing flourish.

Signature

Sadanand Varma

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Abstract

Private graduate management education in Singapore is an expanding space that is experiencing an influx of students who are industry practitioners pursuing an MBA on a part-time basis. This influx has created an associated demand for faculty, which is largely being filled by part-time faculty, or 'Local Counsellors'. These Local Counsellors are drawn from industry as practitioner-tutors, and are expected to connect theoretical content to local industry practice. This situation has created a new phenomenon where industry practitioners are being taught by industry practitioners, which is distinctly different from traditional teacher-student teaching and learning interactions. Both parties engage in teaching and learning interactions with a wealth of industry experience and knowledge, resulting varying degrees of expectations that contribute to conceptions of teaching and learning effectiveness. This thesis, therefore, is an exploration of the conceptions of these students that combines phenomenography with Bourdieu's metaphorical concepts of social practice, namely, *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa*.

These conceptions of effectiveness ranged from the qualities of the Local Counsellor, the actual experiences during teaching and learning interactions, and learning and development. The research discovered that the structure of the *field* students operated in, and the associated *habitus*, played a primary role in shaping their conceptions of effectiveness. More importantly, *habitus* shaped how students perceived themselves as

individuals in teaching and learning interactions, specifically whether they were industry practitioners engaged in teaching and learning, or students who happened to be industry practitioners. These different orientations have a direct influence on their conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'. From a methodological perspective, phenomenography and Bourdieu's concepts are complementary approaches, where phenomenography lends order to the massive data related to the conceptions, while Bourdieu provides a lens to unravel complexities that might have been masked by the decontextualised nature of phenomenography.

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1 Chapter One Teaching, Learning and the Private Higher Education Landscape

1.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the context within which this research was initiated and conducted, and also serves as a ‘map’ for the reader to navigate the thesis. It will first outline some of the factors in the global higher education landscape that have mooted a thriving private undergraduate and postgraduate higher education industry in Singapore, which has seen an influx of industry practitioners filling the gap in academia in order to support the rising student numbers. These students are themselves industry practitioners pursuing an MBA on a part-time basis for various motivations ranging from better employment opportunities to personal development. This situation creates a unique phenomenon of industry practitioners, who are students, being taught by part-time faculty who are also industry practitioners. As argued in this thesis, this makes for varying conceptions of the effectiveness of teaching and learning interactions, which deserve closer analytical attention. This chapter will then discuss the specific context that motivated the research, the methodological considerations, the use of Bourdieu’s Field Theory as the theoretical lens for examining the findings, and the relevance of this research in the global context of part-time MBA education in Singapore. Finally, the chapter will provide a brief overview of how the thesis is structured for ease of navigation through the chapters.

1.2 The Global Schoolhouse Project

The privatisation and continued massification of the global higher education sector presents higher education as a competitive enterprise, which was seen as being worth US\$2 trillion. A significant proportion of the demand for this international higher education was expected to come from Asia given its demographics and its state of growth (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Yeo, 2003). The potential of this phenomenon was recognised by the Singapore Government as it sought to restructure its economy for the 21st Century through a series of initiatives that was intended to transform what was largely manufacturing-based, to one that was knowledge-based (Olds, 2007). To leverage on the opportunities presented by this changing higher education landscape, the Education Workgroup of the Economic Review Committee initiative in 2003 recommended in its report that Singapore establish a vision of becoming a 'Global Schoolhouse' (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2010). The outcomes of this vision included developing the local universities through collaborative agreements with premier global universities, as well as growing the private higher education market, through internationalised foreign university programmes, targeting one hundred and fifty thousand students by the end of 2015 (Waring, 2014).

Following this initiative by the Singapore Government, numerous Western universities leveraged on this phenomenon of massification of higher education by internationalising many of their higher education programmes through collaboration with local private higher education institutes (PHEI) to provide much sought after

quality Western higher education (Altbach et al., 2009). These PHEIs present alternative higher education options for students who are unable to gain a place in the local higher education institutes due to the limited capacity. This access to a basic degree also acts as a pipeline to post-graduate education, which is viewed as a means for career advancement (Tight, 2012). The local post-graduate education market has also seen a similar influx of internationalized Masters level and MBA programmes, both full-time as well as part-time. MBAs in particular, which fall within the realm of graduate management education, are considered by potential students as 'elite' academic qualifications that carry the promise of career advancement and attractive emoluments. For the PHEI's, MBA programmes are regarded as cash cows that unfortunately lead these institutions towards a market-driven rather than academic orientation (Ghoshal, 2005; Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004). A market-driven approach also means that bottom lines determine strategy, and curriculum is not spared in this respect as Universities adopt a cookie-cutter approach where the nuances of culture and diversity are not fully integrated into these programmes, or in the worst case completely left out (Kelo, 2007).

The emergence of Singapore as a higher education hub also triggered an increase in undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolment, with an associated demand for faculty in these higher education institutions. In order to fill this demand for academic staff, higher education institutions have had to look outside academia and seek professionals with industry background (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2010; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). This has led to a slew of industry professionals entering the higher education space, teaching part-time as a career. Although these

part-time faculty, who are industry practitioners, bring valuable industry experience, they are at the same time perceived as being less skilled or schooled in teaching as they are not required to have any formal training in teaching (Abbas & McLean, 2001; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Wagoner, 2007). This raises questions related to quality of delivery and its impact on student learning. The measure of their professional competence is their academic qualifications as well as their industry experience, while the measure of their effectiveness during teaching and learning interactions are derived through post-module feedback from students, which is largely an indication of students' level of satisfaction with the teaching and learning interaction. In this instance students' perception of effective teaching and learning is important since potential MBA students, who now tend to be more discerning, quite often make their decision to enroll in an MBA programme based on the advice and information provided by past students (Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke, & Sims, 1995).

1.3 Context of this Research

1.3.1 Overview

The experience of part-time MBA students in Singapore is a relatively under-researched area, and particularly so where teaching and learning interactions occur between part-time MBA students and part-time faculty, both of whom are industry practitioners. This context is different from traditional higher education teaching and learning interactions at the post-graduate level, or for that matter similar interactions that occur in professional education like medicine, nursing and law. Professional education, which perhaps closely resembles the context of the MBA is focused on

specialist education. Teaching and learning interactions during an MBA programme, however, fall within the realm of graduate management education, also sometimes referred to as business management education, which adopts a generalist approach focusing on delivering a suite of broad-based subjects that enable students to become better managers at the workplace. Hence, the learning for MBA programmes is a product of contextualization and synthesis of theoretical management concepts to local workplace application. While there seems to be a substantive amount of literature on teaching and learning effectiveness from varying perspectives, as well as literature on professional education, the same cannot be said for graduate management education; thus this research seeks to fill this important gap. In doing so, the aim is to provide a unique, phenomenographic approach that can yield insights into part-time graduate management students' conceptions of effective teaching and learning, focusing on the particular relational dynamic in which both parties are industry practitioners. My interest in this research was mooted by my own experiences as a Local Counsellor (tutor) for the University of Strathclyde part-time MBA programme conducted in Singapore by the YMCA Education Centre, which is a local PHEI. I was interested in what these students desired from their teaching and learning interactions, and how that knowledge could be deployed to improve their teaching and learning experience.

1.3.2 Structure of the Part-time MBA Programme

The part-time MBA programme has a total of four compulsory modules, covering eleven subjects, with students required to select another two electives. The

theoretical content, suggested pedagogy, as well as assessment requirements, are designed by the University. Assessments generally comprise an examination and a work-based assignment, each carrying fifty percent of the marks for the subject, while three of the modules are assessed primarily on course work. Examinations are set and marked by the University, while prerogative is given to Local Counsellors to customize the work-based assignments and course work, as long as the changes fulfil the learning outcomes established by the University. Local Counsellors also mark these work-based assignments, with second marking done by the University. The MBA programme delivery is carried out through a combination of intensive weekend module seminars, and local counselling sessions that are the equivalent of tutorials.

The seminars focus on theoretical module content delivery, with some in-class practical applications such as case studies, and are conducted over a Friday to Sunday weekend session. Friday sessions are usually in the evening after work, while the weekends comprise eight-hour full day sessions. Local counselling sessions usually comprise three to four two-hour sessions on weeknights, where the focus is on the work-based assignments. These local counselling sessions are voluntary but students generally attend all local counselling sessions unless they are not able to due to work commitments. The local counselling sessions serve as a platform for theoretical content to be contextualized to the nuances of the local workplace context, through the framing of the work-based assignment requirements, the guidance provided by the Local Counsellors through the facilitation of discussions during these sessions, and provision of support for students' assignments. Although there might be some incidental clarification of theoretical content during these local counselling sessions,

this is not the primary task of the Local Counsellor as the time afforded for tutorials is barely sufficient to guide the students on their workplace assignments.

The University uses the unique term 'Local Counsellor' to describe all local tutors who support their internationalized MBA programmes. These Local Counsellors are drawn from the local industry because of their experience and track record, and are industry practitioners who are current in their respective domains. These industry practitioners, who will also be referred to in this thesis as practitioner-tutors, possess a minimum education qualification of a Masters Degree or MBA or equivalent, with some Local Counsellors holding PhD qualifications. The Local Counsellors are approved and appointed by the University, based on their academic and industry qualifications, and are therefore considered as part-time faculty. There is one Local Counsellor appointed per subject, although, in some instances, a single Local Counsellor may take on two subjects, which brings the pool to about ten to thirteen Local Counsellors. The Local Counsellors are responsible for conducting the local counselling sessions, which is a term the University uses for tutorials, to complement the academic contact time provided by the University lecturers who fly into Singapore to conduct weekend intensive module seminars.

The students who embark on the MBA on a part-time basis are also industry practitioners with between eight to ten years of working experience in the industry, in various executive and management capacities. The students generally come from a number of undergraduate disciplines, some with business backgrounds while many come from the hard sciences, with little or no theoretical business knowledge. Some

students have multiple industry experience, while on the rare occasion there will be students who are professionals such as doctors and lawyers. Common to all these students is their level of maturity and industry experience. Their industry experience, in many instances, may position them as subject matter experts in their domain, within teaching and learning interactions, sometimes on par with or greater than the Local Counsellors. This creates a unique situation where part-time MBA students and part-time faculty, who are both industry practitioners, interact during local counselling sessions in what is referred to in this thesis as teaching and learning interactions. The maturity and experience of these students will result in varying conceptions of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as being 'effective'.

At the end of each series of local counselling sessions, the students are expected to return a hard copy class evaluation form on the Local Counsellor's performance (please refer to Appendix One for the sample Local Counsellor Class Evaluation Form). A similar student feedback is also provided for the lecturer from the University of Strathclyde. The survey-style feedback form, using Likert Scale indicators, with some space provided for qualitative feedback, is intended to provide a quantitative semblance of students' views on whether they felt that teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor was 'effective'. The quantitative scores provide a single cumulative score on eight areas: class organization; effective communication; explaining concepts and ideas; engaging students; stimulating students on thinking about practice; responsiveness to students' learning needs; timely assignment feedback; and, overall satisfaction with the Local Counsellor. Most, if not all, of the qualitative feedback sections of the evaluation form are usually left

blank, so I have a 'score' for each of the areas assessed by the students but no further information that might inform my practice for improvement. The feedback is also conducted at the end of the module when it is not possible to use the feedback for mid-module adjustment. Furthermore, feedback at the end of the module is not viewed as benefitting the students, hence their response of just providing quantitative indicators without qualitative inputs. What is not quite clear from the feedback is what part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, actually want from their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, when it comes to the teaching and learning interactions that occur in the local counselling sessions. In short, little is known about the particular practitioner-to-practitioner dynamic of this teaching and learning interaction.

Hence, this study aims to enhance the limited literature on part-time graduate management education, focusing particularly on students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions and the extent to which these are deemed 'effective'. The key significance of this study is that the resulting knowledge can surface factors to design part-time lecturer induction or qualification programmes, or faculty development programmes, as well as provide a basis to develop and review existing teaching effectiveness frameworks, so that teaching can be scoped to address students' needs and expectations, without compromising academic integrity.

1.4 My Methodological Approach

My epistemological assumption in this research is that when people experience a phenomenon, they make sense of their experiences. They do this by assigning meaning to these experiences, which include understanding of artefacts such as practices associated with that phenomenon. In some sense they construct meaning through interaction with the phenomenon and the external world that contextualises that phenomenon (Gray, 2013). Therefore, in order to understand what people do or how they feel about a phenomenon, we need to understand how they interpret or make meaning of that phenomenon. Every person experiencing that phenomenon will make meaning of it in different ways, depending on past experiences and current perceptions, which would then result in multiple conceptions or qualitatively different variations in meaning for the same phenomenon.

Using these assumptions as a background, I framed the following research questions to unearth the data I needed to find:

- a. How does a phenomenographic approach illuminate how part-time industry practitioner MBA students in Singapore conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as 'effective'?

- b. How do the conceptions of these teaching and learning interactions compare with (i) phenomenographic studies on conceptions of effective teaching, and (ii) literature on professional learning?

- c. How do the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu illuminate the social and cultural complexities of industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners, which phenomenography cannot?

The term 'teaching and learning interactions' in these research questions represent any interaction students experience as a result of interacting with the Local Counsellor during the local counselling sessions that have an influence on shaping their perceptions of teaching and learning as being 'effective'. The notion of effectiveness of teaching and learning interactions has also been described using a number of adjectives ranging from 'good', 'effective', and 'quality' rather interchangeably but for the purpose of this study the adjective 'effective' will be used as the descriptive benchmark (Alhija, 2017). The term 'professional learning' has been used to describe the learning that occurs during teaching and learning interactions, which contribute directly or indirectly to workplace practice.

The first question is phrased within the framework of phenomenography and is concerned with exploring the qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, understand and define their teaching and learning interactions with their practitioner-tutor Local Counsellors as being 'effective' (Marton, 1994; Marton & Booth, 1997). An important assumption in

this research question is the interdependence of teaching and learning, which suggests that these two phenomena are more suitably explored in relation to one another rather than as separate, mutually exclusive phenomenon (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Fernández-Río, 2016; Haerens, Kirk, Cardon, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2011). Also a key context in this research question is one of industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners. The object of this research, however, was the Local Counsellor, and therefore the focus was on how students' views of the Local Counsellor, and the manner in which he or she conducted teaching and learning interactions, influenced conceptions of teaching and learning interactions as being 'effective'.

The second question aimed to discover how students' qualitatively different variations in conceptions of teaching and learning interactions were in congruence or dissonance with literature on phenomenographic studies on conceptions of teaching and learning interactions, as well as literature on graduate management education and postgraduate education in general.

The third question uses Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *doxa*, and *capital* to illuminate the complexities of the conceptions that phenomenography, due to its decontextualised nature, cannot. An assumption here is that teaching and learning interactions are socially-situated practices that are more complex than students' conceptions suggest.

This was an empirical research, conducted as a phenomenographic study of a purposive sample of twenty-four participants, who had graduated from the part-time

University of Strathclyde MBA programme conducted in Singapore. All students were current industry practitioners. I selected phenomenography as it has proven to be an effective approach for seeking variation because my intention was to capture the range of understandings across the sample, and not the conception of any particular individual, where the “structure and essential phenomenon of the differing ways of experiencing the phenomenon are retained” while the “specific worlds of the individuals have been abandoned” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 114). The analysis focused on deriving conceptions from a pool of meanings describing teaching and learning in ways these part-time MBA students in Singapore have experienced it (Åkerlind, 2005b; Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005). These meanings were codified as categories of description and then further analysed to determine structural and referential relationships in the form of outcome spaces to provide a framework to represent their structural and referential relationships (Åkerlind et al., 2005; Ashwin, 2005; Yates, Partridge, & Bruce, 2012).

Although phenomenography provides a certain level of order to the generally voluminous and ‘messy’ data, its decontextualised nature may obscure complexities that might provide a deeper understanding of the conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being ‘effective’ (Säljö, 1996; Webb, 1997). Nevertheless, a phenomenographic approach was deemed an appropriate choice for this research since it has already been widely used as an established methodology in higher educational research (Prosser, Bowden, & Walsh, 2000; Tight, 2012; Yates et al., 2012). To mitigate any potential loss of insights arising from the decontextualised nature of conceptions, Bourdieu’s social practice concepts were employed in the analysis as an

additional lens to understand these conceptions, as socially-situated practices, set within specific cultural and contextual nuances. The intention was to leverage on complementary approaches to enhancing understanding of the knowledge that was unearthed in this research (Åkerlind, 2018).

Conventional thinking suggests that there are clear explicit practices associated with teaching and learning interactions, but this assumption is challenged by the individual circumstances of the Local Counsellor and the part-time student, formed by their respective past experiences, as well as the cultural context of the part-time MBA environment. The students in this research were industry practitioners with a fair amount of working experience and expertise. Their conceptions were shaped by past experience with higher education, as well as the cultural nuances of the workplace, both of which shaped the psyche of the students as they entered this shared space. The Local Counsellors were also industry practitioners with relevant academic qualifications to teach as practitioner-tutors, engaged by YMCA on a contract basis to conduct local counselling sessions for the part-time MBA programme. Although the Local Counsellor was expected to understand the rules associated with conduct, behaviour, delivery and engagement with students during teaching and learning interactions, his or her psyche was also shaped by past educational experiences and their individual workplace practices and experiences. The confluence of these conditions and experiences result in a set of social practices, some of which are considered as expected practices during teaching and learning interactions, based on conventional norms established by the University, but may be challenged when

expectations of the students do not match the practices established by the University or Local Counsellor.

These dynamics are eloquently articulated by Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990b, 1993; Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2014; Vvacquant, 1989; Wacquant, 1998), which resonates with my understanding of the social practices in teaching and learning interactions. Bourdieu uses the metaphors *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa* to enable understanding of these practices. *Fields* denote specific spaces, such as the workplace and the classroom, in which student and Local Counsellor, also referred to by Bourdieu as agents, operate. Both student and Local Counsellor bring with them experiences and cultural nuances that form their psyche, which then shape their behaviour in these *fields*; these experiences and nuances are described as *habitus*. Expectations of rules, both implicit and explicit, of how one should operate in a *field*, also referred to as *doxa*, are shaped by each agent's *habitus*. Each agent's influence within a *field* is dependent on their ability or power to influence, through possession and employment of *capital*, which may take the form of experience, knowledge or even authority. When all of these factors interact, there is either congruence, which suggests various levels of satisfaction and conceptions of effectiveness, or dissonance, which results in dissatisfaction. A key principle in social practice theory is that all phenomenon related to teaching and learning are not independent of each other and actually exist in relation to each other (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Bourdieu's Field Theory, therefore, provides a useful framework to understand teaching and learning

interactions within such a social practice setting, which eases making sense of the link between theory and practice (Grenfell, 2014).

1.5 Relevance of this Research

The phenomenon investigated in this thesis, where industry practitioners are taught by practitioner-tutors, will likely be a mainstay in private graduate management education, and this body of work contributes to the limited literature that is available. The results of this research are immediately targeted at the main stakeholders of the University of Strathclyde part-time MBA programme in Singapore, namely the Strathclyde Business School that is the originator of the programme, YMCA Education Centre as the PHEI that runs the internationalised programme in Singapore, the University module coordinators who are responsible for the design of the curriculum and the associated pedagogy, as well as other Local Counsellors who tutor on the programme. More than this, however, the results will also be significant for the ways they will influence student feedback design, in terms of customisation in relation to specific modules, and the potential of these insights being ploughed back to curriculum and delivery design, and also influencing Local Counsellor selection and re-engagement. In the same vein, these results might effectively be utilised in the design of future induction and continuous training programmes for Local Counsellors, and eventually influence operating guidelines and policies for Local Counsellors.

This research also has usability and value beyond the University of Strathclyde part-time MBA programme. Although the actual results are based on the University of

Strathclyde part-time MBA cohorts in Singapore, most other part-time MBA students on other internationalised programmes in Singapore that are in the same band as the University of Strathclyde, are likely to have similar expectations. Hence the findings presented in this thesis will have value and usability amongst scholars of internationalisation, and other internationalised programmes that may benefit from the findings and conclusions stated in this thesis.

1.6 Structuring the Thesis

This section will provide a brief overview of the remaining chapters to facilitate ease of navigation through the thesis for the reader.

Chapters Two, Three and Four may be viewed as three separate parts of a whole that examine the breadth of literature that is relevant to this research. Chapter Two examines the changes in the global higher education landscape that have mooted a proliferation of internationalised Western MBA programmes in Singapore, an associated influx of part-time academics with industry experience to fill the gaps in academia as a result of this rising student numbers, and a general shift to focusing on students in teaching and learning interactions. These factors have created a phenomenon in part-time MBA programmes, where mature students, who are industry practitioners, are being taught by part-time practitioner-tutors drawn from the industry. Given the unique circumstances of such teaching and learning interactions, it is important to understand what teaching and learning mean to these mature students. Hence, the use of phenomenography to understand the qualitatively

different ways in which these students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as being 'effective'. The use of phenomenography as an approach to understand these variations are then discussed in Chapter Three, which will further explore phenomenography as a methodology and method in its ontological and epistemological forms, the major critique surrounding its use as a research approach, and a justification of its relevance as an approach in this thesis. The decontextualised nature of the conceptions discovered through phenomenography, however, may not adequately illuminate the complexities behind these conceptions. Chapter Four will then discuss how Bourdieu's metaphorical concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *doxa*, and *capital*, can complement phenomenography to understand the complexities behind the conceptions of teaching and learning interactions experienced by students from a social practice perspective (Bourdieu, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1990b; Grenfell, 2014). A key assumption in Chapter Four is that the teaching and learning interactions are socially situated practices where part-time MBA students and the Local Counsellor are viewed as actors or agents operating in a space with implicit and explicit rules, enacting practices based on their past experiences and their inherent ability to influence that space (Reckwitz, 2002). The discussions in Chapters Two, Three and Four, therefore, suggest a reasonable examination of literature related to phenomenography, teaching and learning interactions, and Bourdieu's Field Theory, rather than a comprehensive analysis of all available literature in these fields of study.

Chapter Five explains how the research was designed and conducted in light of the insights gained from the literature review, including paths not travelled, the design

considerations, as well as challenges that I had experienced. The design adopted a phenomenographic approach, which allowed the discovery of variations of conceptions of effective teaching and learning. The subjective and non-dualistic ontological assumptions of phenomenography imply that industry practitioner students' experience of teaching and learning interactions with practitioner-tutors in graduate management education are conceptualised through those very exact interactions that result in varying conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'. These conceptions, which are the research object of phenomenography, are also its central form of knowledge. Hence, phenomenography's ontological assumptions are also its epistemological assumptions (Marton, 1981, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997). The decontextualised nature of these conceptions, however, tend to obscure complexities associated with cultural nuances, and this is where Bourdieu's metaphorical concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa* enable a deeper understanding of teaching and learning interactions as socially-situated practices (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990b; Grenfell, 2014; Säljö, 1997; Webb, 1997). The Chapter rounds off by reflexively engaging in some of the key challenges in the research design and process, such as power asymmetry between my position as the researcher and the students as participants, memory and experience recall by students, my own objectivity as a researcher since I am very much an insider, and finally the generalizability, or more appropriately the usability, of the results.

Chapter Six examines the key findings that were derived from the data that was collected. Teaching and learning were understood by part-time MBA students in Singapore in four qualitatively different ways: the qualities of the Local Counsellor; the

provision of adequate information and knowledge to address students' knowledge gaps and concerns; enabling students to become self-directed learners through interactive dialogue and peer learning during teaching and learning interactions; and, mobilizing students' ability to apply classroom knowledge within and beyond the workplace. Each of these conceptions are discussed in detail with supporting quotations that provide a flavour of the context of these conceptions. The structural relationships between these conceptions are then described in the form of an outcome space that describes teaching and learning as being effective as a function of the qualities of the Local Counsellor, students' experiences during teaching and learning interactions, and students' conceptions of learning.

Chapter Seven is a dialogue between the conceptions described in the outcome space derived in Chapter Six, and the literature reviewed in Chapters Two, Three and Four. Students' *habitus*, developed through past workplace, educational and cultural experiences, was a key determinant in shaping conceptions of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors being 'effective'. Notions of the Local Counsellor being the role model, qualities such as accessibility and responsiveness, and the learning through the sharing of leadership, and particularly management practices, may be mapped to what these industry practitioners may expect of a superior in a workplace environment, hence the continued presence of power distance even when students expected to be treated as fellow industry practitioners. Students' *capital portfolios* add value to teaching and learning interactions, through peer sharing, similar to the manner in which knowledge is gained and exchanged at the workplace. It was instructive to note that students expected all of the qualities to

be prevalent in all of the Local Counsellors all of the time, which in practice is a near impossibility. Nevertheless, this insight provides a glimpse into the mind of these part-time MBA students which presents a better understanding on how their needs might be met in such teaching and learning interactions where both student and teacher are industry practitioners. Essentially, the analysis in Chapter Seven suggests that teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' is a function of congruence, or incongruence, between students' expectations, shaped by past experiences, and their actual experiences in these interactions.

Chapter Eight brings together the key aspects of this thesis by first recapitulating the motivations behind the research, and the key findings including areas of congruence and incongruence of data with theory, the key contribution to knowledge, and potential areas for future research. The Chapter highlights a potential gap in literature pertaining to the role students, who are industry practitioners, assume when engaged in teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors who are practitioner-tutors. *Habitus* has a dominant influence on these students' orientation to safely navigating teaching and learning interactions, and actions by the Local Counsellor, who is also viewed as a role model, help in the reconstruction of *habitus* to enable students' new ways of actively engaging in teaching and learning interactions.

2 Chapter Two Graduate Management Education in an Evolving Higher Education Landscape

2.1 Overview

Chapter Two is the first of three chapters that will cumulatively explore conceptions of teaching and learning interactions within the context of graduate management education where part-time students who are industry practitioners are taught by part-time practitioner-tutors drawn from industry, as well as make a case for the use of phenomenography, complemented with Bourdieu's Field Theory, as methodological and theoretical approaches in this thesis. Chapter Two, specifically, will explore the changes to the higher education landscape that has mooted a proliferation of internationalised Western undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Asia, and more specifically Singapore, and the associated slant towards student-centredness. This Chapter will also explore what these changes mean for graduate management education in general, and more specifically for MBA programmes.

2.2 The Changing Face of Higher Education

The higher education landscape has been evolving to keep up with the changing demands of its stakeholders, and conceptions of teaching effectiveness have not been immune to these changes. Three factors, in particular, have played a role in re-shaping perceptions of effectiveness in teaching and learning interactions, namely, the greater accessibility to higher education with an associated influx of mature students and part-

time faculty drawn from industry, the manner in which graduate management education is being defined, and the increased emphasis on student learning and experience.

2.2.1 Greater Accessibility to Higher Education

Universities, which were once the domain of the elite, are now accessible to the larger masses, even those from lower socio-economic groups who previously had the greatest challenge in terms of access to higher education, including postgraduate education (Ashwin, 2006a; Reay, 1998). This phenomenon is partly attributable to two broad trends in the evolving higher education landscape: the internationalisation of university programmes due to changes in higher education student funding; and, a greater demand for industry-ready graduates.

Western universities have been internationalising their programmes to seek a slice of the global higher education market, offering quality university education to parts of the developing world that previously had limited access to such education (McLean, 2015). This shift is largely due to the changes to student funding policies and strategies that have transformed higher education from a public good to a private good. Therefore, as subsidisation of higher education becomes increasingly unsustainable, universities have been forced to seek alternative sources of funding, setting higher education on a trajectory towards marketization. At the same time, the availability of reliable information technology and communications platforms have made higher

education increasingly 'borderless' and therefore potentially more accessible globally (Altbach et al., 2009).

Expansion of the service economy and the emergence of the knowledge economy have also created a demand for better-educated employees to meet the challenges of these sectors. Therefore, marketization of such degree programmes on a global scale implies an associated value that attracts the intended students. Contemporary higher education curricula, particularly graduate management courses like the MBA, must accordingly adopt pedagogical practices that attend to the cognitive and affective needs of mature students who are likely to possess substantive industry experience, and also be more discerning in their choice of higher education qualifications that can contribute directly to their educational experience, career progression, and development. In a similar vein, practitioner-tutors drawn from industry now take on an important role in fulfilling students' expectations, and their ability to engage students who are also industry subject matter experts will determine students' conceptions of effectiveness in teaching and learning interactions. As Ramsden (2008) aptly puts it, higher education must evolve in order to provide students qualifications and experiences that allow them to transit seamlessly into the workplace and be industry-ready.

2.2.2 Defining Graduate Management Education

Literature on graduate education, also referred to as post-graduate education, is varied, with higher education research focusing largely on professional education,

specifically undergraduate professional education, such as those in disciplines like medicine, nursing, and law, while business education research seems to focus largely on graduate management education, also sometimes referred to in business literature as business management education, such as the MBA. Raelin (1990) puts forth the argument that management is not a profession in its purest sense and hence should not be deemed so, which further distinguishes it from professional education, although the disciplines associated with management education have clearly defined professional associations. Graduate management education is a generalist programme, where the goal of programmes such as the MBA is to provide students with broad-based business understanding, and develop their skills as managers, so as to improve their career prospects in the longer term. Hence, business schools teaching graduate management programmes tend to focus primarily on ensuring that their students meet the needs of the industry as managers (Aistrich, Saghafi, & Sciglimpaglia, 2006; Garvin, 2007). Professional education, on the other hand, suggests a more focused 'vocational' approach determined by the specific discipline that is being taught (Clinebell & Clinebell, 2008). Having said that however, professional education, like graduate management education, specifically part-time programmes, share some commonalities such as the nature and needs of students, and the employment of practitioners as faculty to enable students' industry or vocation readiness. Therefore, the remainder of the discussion in this section will be using literature from professional and graduate management education research, sometimes interchangeably, to bring across specific arguments.

Graduate management education generally attracts students who are considered non-traditional students, particularly practitioners from various industries (Garris, Madden, & Rodgers, 2008). This distinction is made in relation to professional education, where students are drawn from specific undergraduate disciplines, who are also likely to be practitioners in their discipline (Aistrich et al., 2006). Students pursuing graduate management education, therefore, are usually mature industry practitioners, coming from varying undergraduate disciplines, possessing vast industry and workplace experience, seeking postgraduate management education on a part-time basis, with varying expectations of teaching and learning interactions (Bridge, 2006; Ramsden, 2008). At the same time, graduate management students are also characterised by their need to overcome several constraints like concurrently juggling studies, family, work and their other responsibilities while embarking on such a journey. Hence, their associated tensions and emotions managing their multiple spaces, which will inevitably impact their teaching and learning interaction experience (Fragoso et al., 2013). Essentially, their decision to embark on graduate management education is a major investment of time, money, and personal sacrifice, requiring significant trade-offs. Therefore, as Merriam (2001a) and Salomon and Perkins (1998) aptly point out, these adult students embark on programmes like the MBA with a clear idea of what they want to gain from the experience, and this is usually related to their life needs, expectations of workplace application of the knowledge that has been gained, or both. A basic assumption here is that adults can and will make sense of the world, and through continuous interaction with their environment create cumulative knowledge that they can apply in their lives. This debunks the notion of learning as an activity organised by the teacher for students to remember what is taught. Hence, as

Hodgson (2005) suggests, adult learners generally tend to determine their own learning agenda, and depending on their orientation to the education that they are receiving they will adopt appropriate learning strategies, which may sometimes be independent of the teacher. I would emphasise that independence, in this respect, does not suggest the absence of the teacher but rather a redefinition of traditional teacher roles. The agendas students adopt may not always be aligned to what is prescribed in the curriculum and this will create a natural tension between what they desire to learn versus what they need to learn in order to fulfil the requirements of the graduate management programme. This tension inevitably influences adult students' perceptions of effectiveness during teaching and learning interactions. However, despite their vast experience in the working world, which endow them with industry domain expertise, adult students pursuing graduate management education generally lack the requisite theoretical knowledge to successfully complete their education, which further exacerbates anxieties associated with learning and performance since many of these adults re-enter the educational environment after a lapse of several years of their undergraduate education (Fragoso et al., 2013; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Ross-Gordon, 2003).

A key strategy adopted by higher education institutions to engage these non-traditional students more effectively is through the employment of industry practitioners, also sometimes referred to as practitioner-tutors, practitioner academics or lecturer practitioners, as either part-time or fulltime faculty. This logic of practitioner-tutors enabling students' industry readiness is prevalent in both professional as well as graduate management education literature. Universities are

increasingly recruiting practitioners from business and professions, harnessing on their experience to offer alternative and contemporary perspectives, instead of just those from the traditional academic route (Currie & Knights, 2003; Oyewo, 2016; Prince, Burns, Lu, & Winsor, 2015; Shreeve, 2009). There also appears to be a trend of moving away from fulltime to part-time teaching, including the rise of “gypsy scholars” who teach part-time as a career (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 16). Practitioner-tutors, who possess industry experience and currency, bring talent not easily found amongst fulltime faculty, but at the same time are viewed as less skilled or schooled in teaching (Regan, 2006; Shreeve, 2009; Wagoner, 2007). This might inevitably lead to pedagogical inconsistencies that may inadvertently derail any value proposition that may be derived from the tacit experience and knowledge presented by the practitioner-tutor. Furthermore, their part-time status precludes them from being inducted into the norms and practices of academia, which may cause tensions when it comes to traditional notions of appropriateness of practices in teaching and learning interactions.

However, the engagement of industry practitioners as faculty is not always about providing the best experience in graduate management education. Altbach et al. (2009) argues that there is also a survivalist logic that prevails in contemporary higher education. This has to do with filling the gaps due to the increased demand for academics to meet the rising higher education student enrolment numbers. Sometimes, when such a logic prevails because of the need to meet funding needs, or profits in the case of private higher education, quality suffers in terms of the type of industry practitioners that can best attend to the needs of these students. However,

Abbas and McLean (2001) and Shreeve (2009) make compelling arguments that these practitioner-tutors, nevertheless, serve as a vital link between education and the real world, and my own experience suggests the same. Practitioner-tutors' "adaptive expertise", derived in a social context that is distinct from theoretical knowledge, and their ability to contextualise business problems and situations using their own lived experiences, lend credibility to the link between theory and practice, which is the value proposition students are looking for (Tenenberg, 2010, p. 75).

This confluence of students and faculty who are both industry practitioners have brought about a phenomenon where professionals are being taught by professionals, or more accurately in graduate management education, part-time students being taught by part-time faculty, both of whom are industry practitioners. While this is not a new concept and has its seeds in professional education, it is increasingly being used as a pedagogical method in graduate management education. Literature on professional and graduate management education in general, position this concept as the future for professional and graduate management education (Clinebell & Clinebell, 2008; Garris et al., 2008; White & Heslop, 2012). Having said that, however, I would argue that professional education seems to be more clearly defined. An example is where student nurses or doctors are taught by senior medical practitioners who have significantly greater proven medical experience, which carries specific tacit medical knowledge not found amongst non-medical professionals. Management, however, is a general skill that many profess to be experts in. Nevertheless, practitioner-tutors who have vast industry experience will bring tacit industry and management knowledge that will be invaluable to graduate management students.

Holt, Mackay, and Smith (2004) argue that as a result of this phenomenon universities are no longer able to monopolise knowledge creation, particularly in graduate management education where students' ability to deploy classroom knowledge in the workplace, many times quite immediately or concurrently, shape conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being effective. Students are looking for alternate ways of looking at their practice, which is the perspective practitioner-tutors offer, while at the same time reflecting on their own practice to add to teaching and learning interactions. I would argue, therefore, that students in graduate management education are now collaborators in the improvement and enhancement of teaching and learning interactions, rather than just passive recipients of information and knowledge (Ramsden, 2008). A large part of how they conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their practitioner-tutors as being effective, noting their transition between workplace and classroom, will be determined by the manner in which they are engaged. Correspondingly, as Medland (2016) suggests, teaching and learning interactions need to transform into collaborative co-construction of knowledge, leveraging on peer experiences, guided by practitioners who are subject matter experts skilled in teaching adult students. The greatest evidence of learning in graduate management education is when students and practitioner-tutors collaborate to get the best out of teaching and learning interactions, such that students are able to contextualise theory in their own domain and relate these theories to their own experiences (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004).

2.2.3 Emphasis on Student Learning and Experience

The previous discussion on graduate management education denotes a significant slant towards student learning and experience. This pedagogical shift to a student or learner-centred approach, focused primarily on student learning experience and quality of teaching, was mooted in the late 1960s by expressions of dissatisfaction of student higher education experience in most parts of the western world. Boud (2006) argues that a core belief behind student-centredness is the centrality of the learner, premised on providing opportunities for students to determine what they learn and how they interpret the associated experiences, which is a view supported by O'Neill and McMahon (2005) and Biggs (1996). The notion of student-centredness is anchored on transferring meaningful, rather than absolute, control to the student, a concept that can easily be misinterpreted by both student and practitioner-tutor in a graduate management environment, which sometimes results in dissatisfaction even when applied 'correctly'. The caveat here is that although students are, in principle, able to exercise choice in determining what and how they want to learn, which is particularly pertinent in graduate management education, this 'freedom of choice' needs to be enacted within the boundaries of the learning objectives of the module, facilitated by the practitioner-tutor. In this respect, McConnell (2006) stresses the importance of establishing relationships within teaching and learning interactions to promote learning. Therefore, a collaborative and supportive environment that engenders mutual respect and openness, supported by a facilitative and non-judgmental approach eases the potential anxieties experienced by adult students, and builds their confidence (Fazel, 2013). Such a safe environment provides the conditions necessary

to trigger interest and learning, while the conversations with the practitioner-tutor help to connect knowledge from everyday life to what is taught in the graduate management programme.

Literature on student-centred teaching and learning takes a number of different pedagogical orientations, although these are generic in nature, rather than being specific to graduate management education. Nevertheless, these perspectives are useful for understanding the concept. Boud (2006) and O'Neill and McMahon (2005) emphasise the autonomy of the learner, while Hase and Kenyon (2000) and Talbot and Lilley (2014) focus on the practical application of knowledge beyond the classroom. Both views resonate with the motivations of adult students pursuing graduate management education. However, Merriam (2001b) critiques this manner of adult learning as being seemingly individualised in its focus when in reality adults, particularly in graduate management education, actually learn best within a socially-constructed context leveraging on both peers and the practitioner-tutor during teaching and learning interactions. Taken to the extreme, such a focus on the individual learner may erode the importance of learning from peers, where every student, particularly adults who are practitioners themselves, offers unique and rich perspectives that add value to the learning experience of the class as a whole. Lester and Costley (2010) and Gureckis and Markant (2012) reinforce this position by emphasising the inseparable role of the teacher, or teaching support, as part of teaching and learning interactions. This reinforces the role of the practitioner-tutor collaborating with the practitioner student in teaching and learning interactions, as argued by Ramsden (2008) and Medland (2016) in the previous section on non-

traditional students. The value of collective learning cannot be understated in adult learning, or more specifically graduate management education, as it is synonymous to the way in which these students learn and grow in the workplace.

There are also some very practical issues that need to be contended with in relation to student-centred teaching and learning. Ashwin, Abbas, and McLean (2015) argue that at the macro level, marketization will drive larger higher education intakes to offset the effects of the cuts in university funding. The associated increase in student numbers, and therefore potentially larger classes, is likely to cause a lean towards more lectures and exams, rather than small group work and work-based assignments. The resulting pressure on churning out numbers and bell curves that discourage more qualitative approaches to teaching and learning interactions may likely create additional tension between academic and administrative requirements, as managerialism determines how higher education institutions are run. Hence, implementation will inevitably be challenged by resource availability, prioritisation and allocation, as well as the prevailing mental models of students, faculty, and administrators.

My own view, informed by literature, is that the term student-centredness already has so many perspectives in literature, it can be safe to assume that practitioner students too will have various understandings of the ways in which they conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their practitioner-tutors. Furthermore, Ashwin (2012) and Ramsden (2008) caution that the proceeding changes to curriculum and pedagogy design to address such student expectations have blurred interpretations of student-

centredness, thereby impacting how these approaches could be implemented in a sustainable and realistic manner. That said, neither the practitioner-tutor nor the student holds the monopoly in teaching and learning interactions, particularly in graduate management education. Rather, as O'Neill and McMahon (2005) aptly argue, it is an interdependence borne out of mutual respect and responsibility that adds value to teaching and learning interactions. Nevertheless, mismatched expectations of teaching and learning interactions, between practitioner-tutor and students, will inevitably impact how such part-time students pursuing graduate management education conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with the practitioner-tutor as being 'effective'.

3 Chapter Three Phenomenography – Ways of Understanding Teaching and Learning Interactions

3.1 Overview

To understand how graduate management students, who are practitioners, conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their practitioner-tutor as being 'effective', we first need to understand the qualitatively different variations of understanding teaching and learning, hence the employment of phenomenography in this research. The context of these teaching and learning interactions are ones that occur in graduate management education where students who are industry practitioners are being taught by faculty who are also industry practitioners. This Chapter will discuss the employment of phenomenography as an approach for investigating teaching and learning interactions, informed largely by the work of Marton (1981, 1986, 1988, 1994), and supported by the works of Entwistle (1997) and Åkerlind (2008, 2012, 2018), amongst others. This Chapter will also examine the various ways in which phenomenography has been deployed to examine such conceptions, comparing the related insights with non-phenomenographic approaches, and then briefly discuss the rationale of the use of phenomenography in this research.

3.2 Phenomenography – Discovering Variations in Meaning

Marton (1986, p. 31) described phenomenography as an empirically based "research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience,

conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and the phenomena in, the world around them". Its basis is premised on empirical rather than theoretical or philosophical perspectives. Phenomenography is an interpretative research orientation that focuses on the human-world or actor-phenomenon relation, and not the phenomenon itself, in order to make sense of those experiences as the actors perceive them. The aim is not to capture every aspect of the experience in its entirety but rather to understand the second order meaning of that experience, as conceptualised by the those who are experiencing the phenomenon, or what we refer to as conceptions, within a specific context. Conceptions, or categories of description, are the basic unit of description in phenomenographic research (Marton, 1986; Marton & Pong, 2005). Conceptions represent variations of a phenomenon, or more accurately, variations of awareness of a phenomenon (or lack thereof). So, only variations that are noticed contribute to the qualitatively different ways in which individuals experience and conceptualise a phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2018). Therefore, in deriving these categories of description, only data that are significant enough to explain conceptions are retained, while others are left out, hence the decontextualized nature of the categories even though the original data have a contextualised understanding. The categories provide order to the data in relation to the phenomenon that is being researched. Phenomenography as such focuses on describing the range of understanding of experiences within a group rather than that of each individual. These conceptions of reality need not always be correct as it is just a way in which reality is conceptualised, as in the case of graduate management education, by the individual students interacting with their practitioner-tutor in teaching and learning interactions (Dahlin, 1994).

Phenomenography's ontological assumptions are subjectivist and non-dualistic (Marton & Booth, 1997). This implies that there is no dividing line between the individual, or 'inside world', and the phenomenon, or the 'outside' world. Phenomenography does not make a separation between the subject and object as distinct entities but rather two parts of a whole where experience of a phenomenon is constituted as a result of the relationship between the individual and the phenomenon; hence, conceptions of reality arise from this interaction. Following this line of thought, an industry practitioner student's experience of teaching and learning interactions with practitioner-tutors in graduate management education are conceptualised through those very exact interactions that result in various conceptualisations of those teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'. In other words, the phenomenon being experienced is "not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed", but the phenomenon is "constituted as an internal relationship between them" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13). Conceptions are constituted, which means that for the individuals experiencing the phenomenon "the-world-as-experienced is all there is" (Dahlin, 1994, p. 93) and phenomenon are "what they are experienced as" (McDermott, 1981, p. 241). Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse (1999) argue that the non-dualistic perspective also suggests that all perceptions of teaching and learning that have been, and is being, experienced are present at the same time, although not in the same proportions all the time. Although such conceptions are generally cognitive experiences, not all experiences are cognitive in nature, which somewhat supports phenomenography's non-dualistic ontological position (Dahlin, 1994). At the same time, the research object of phenomenography has the character of knowledge, where the emphasis is on description, and knowledge is a matter of

meanings of understanding the phenomenon. In this instance, the central form of knowledge in phenomenography are these conceptions (Svensson, 1997). Therefore, phenomenography's ontological assumptions are also its epistemological assumptions.

Marton (1981, p. 187) also suggests that "different conceptions are not necessarily related to differences between individuals but may equally be well related to differences within individuals". In other words, other than how variations of a phenomenon are experienced between different individuals, the contextual nature in which a phenomenon is experienced by an individual may change as the context changes. Hence, a following argument is that a student, who is an industry practitioner, interacting with another industry practitioner, who is practitioner-tutor in teaching and learning interactions may well hold different conceptions of that interaction if it occurs within a workplace or professional setting. This arises from the probably different expectations this student might hold of that practitioner-tutor in these different contexts. While it might be near impossible to describe the individual's conception of his or her interactions with such a practitioner-tutor in a reliable manner, due to these 'internal shifts' in conception, it is possible to describe conceptions of teaching and learning interactions with a practitioner-tutor in a reliable manner. Such conceptions, or categories of description, are more generalisable in varying contexts. In this sense, phenomenography attempts to capture qualitative variations in perceptions of the world rather than perceptions of individuals.

To provide order to the categories so that they meaningfully represent the

qualitatively different ways in which students experience teaching and learning interactions, the results are organised logically in an outcome space that represent a structural and referential relationship. The structural aspect or dimension represents how the phenomenon is experienced by the actor, in this case students, while the referential aspect or dimension represent the students' focus. The outcome space allows the researcher to articulate the "span of generative possibilities" for relating to the phenomenon (Ekeblad & Bond, 1994, p. 155). The categories of description that constitute the outcome space each represent a distinctly different way of experiencing the phenomenon being researched but are also related to each other in an inclusively hierarchical manner, where less complex conceptions are subordinated to the more complex conceptions. The contextual nature of the conception in the representation of the outcome space remains implicit. However, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) and Bowden (1996) highlight the danger of the researcher imposing the structure of his or her outcome space on the data rather than allowing the data to emerge in a manner that constitutes the outcome space. The outcome space reflects both the data as well as the researcher's judgment, and in this respect it must be acknowledged that the "outcome space is inevitably partial" (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 121). The responsibility of the researcher, therefore, is not to attempt to develop the 'correct' outcome space but to ensure that the outcome space is as complete as possible so that it represents the structural and referential aspects of conceptualisations of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' in a meaningful manner.

Säljö (1996) critiques phenomenography in that it removes context from the individual in its final output as conceptions. Webb (1997, p. 198) presents a similar critique but

more specifically directed at deep and surface approaches to learning using phenomenography; he puts forth the proposition that phenomenography “appears to have no particular view of humanity and the social consequences of education”. His argument claims phenomenography’s relatively sterile focus where the emphasis is only on second order understanding in the meanings behind conceptions of a phenomenon. Phenomenography, according to this understanding, investigates conceptions of phenomena using a Husserlian perspective, where the conceptions are devoid of historical or cultural influence, and researchers are expected to ‘bracket’ their bias. This is not quite possible since the researcher’s attempt at bracketing will inevitably be shaped by his or her own historical and cultural experiences. These are difficult arguments to challenge, particularly in graduate management education, where mature students with industry and life experience will inevitably impose their cultural and historical experiences when describing conceptions as a result of their teaching and learning interactions (Popper, 2012). Perhaps what is more pertinent here, as Åkerlind (2018) argues, is understanding the importance of complementary approaches to research rather than one approach being suggested better than another. This presents the opportunity of complementing phenomenographic research with social practice theories, for example, to capture nuances or complexities that might have been possible to capture through phenomenography.

Another critique is phenomenography’s validity and reliability. Validity and reliability have positivist origins that are near impossible to impose on an interpretive process that “can never be objective and, in phenomenographic terms, represents the data as experienced by the researcher” (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 123). Nevertheless, validity can be

enhanced in a number of ways ranging from participant validation of transcripts to adopting the practice of getting participants to review the categories of description to see if they are recognisable in relation their conceptions of the phenomenon. While the former is useful to ensure that the actual words and meanings of the individual participants have been accurately captured, the analysed output in the form of categories is usually intended for a larger audience and may not always resonate with the individual participants. Reliability may be addressed through dialogic reliability checks with fellow researchers, whereas for individual researchers of phenomenography, the practical approach would be to exercise reflexivity during the research in order to provide the transparency required to mitigate any reliability concerns, especially in terms of process. Hence the focus of the researcher must be to ensure that any interpretation was defensible in terms of the phenomenographic approach to collecting and analysing the data. As an extension of this line of thought, Marton's (1986) reflection on the replicability of research results is instructive. He uses the analogy of the probability two people finding the same flowers on an island versus them finding the flowers once they know what the flowers look like. This is the very challenge in phenomenography as the research is a process of discovery, or one of exploration as Svensson (1997) suggests, which is difficult to replicate, but once the categories have been discovered other researchers will be able to use the research output. Therefore, the true test is not phenomenography's "theoretical purity, but its value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning", which should be the endeavour of any phenomenographic research (Entwistle, 1997, p. 129).

Marton (1986) refers to phenomenography as a research specialisation, which is essentially a combination of an approach and an orientation. As an approach, phenomenography is exploratory and interpretive in its derivation of categories, and as an orientation it is focused on human-world relations. Despite the various critique of phenomenography, however, it has proven to be an effective approach for seeking variation and its use in research has seen a dramatic increase in areas beyond higher education (Tight, 2016). In my opinion, therefore, phenomenography remains an appropriate choice for this research since it has already been widely used, and continues to be used, as an established methodology in higher educational research (Prosser et al., 2000; Tight, 2012; Yates et al., 2012). I will now discuss how conceptions of teaching and learning interactions have been expressed in phenomenographic as well as general research on teaching and learning, with a focus on graduate management education.

3.3 Students Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions – Phenomenographic and Others

3.3.1 Overview of the Literature

Phenomenographic research on variations of experience in teaching and learning interactions seem to be focused primarily on undergraduate higher education, and these studies may be categorised either as students' perspectives (Ashwin, 2005; Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Mbabazi Bamwesiga, Fejes, & Dahlgren, 2013; Paakkari, Tynjälä, & Kannas, 2010) or academics' perspectives (Åkerlind, 2008; Ashwin,

2006b; Martin & Balla, 1991; Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser, Trigwell, & Taylor, 1994), as separate studies, with some studies investigating both students' and academics' conceptions within the same piece of research (Trigwell & Reid, 1998). Phenomenographic studies of postgraduate student experience, particularly graduate management experience, is limited, although existing literature adopts strands in terms of academics' conceptions (Ginns, Kitay, & Prosser, 2008; Gonzalez, 2009; Watkins, 2004), students' conceptions (Blummer, Watulak, & Kenton, 2012; Cliff, 1998; Diehm & Lupton, 2012; Hallett, 2010; Pimpa, 2009; Watland, 2007), and professional education (Alves de Lima et al., 2005; Shreeve, 2009, 2010; Stenfors-Hayes, Hult, & Dahlgren, 2011).

General research on postgraduate student experience is also limited, as most studies are focused on undergraduate experience. Most of this general research employed surveys, questionnaires and structured interviews, deriving their results through varying approaches such as literature reviews (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven, & Dochy, 2010; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004; Richardson, 2005), phenomenology (Canning, 2010; Reid & Johnston, 1999), grounded theory (Ashong & Commander, 2017), thematic analysis (Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999), and constant comparative method (Kember, Jenkins, & Ng, 2003; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001), amongst others. The remainder of this section will focus on postgraduate students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions, combining phenomenographic studies complemented with research from other general studies, both postgraduate and undergraduate. The Chapter will then reflect on the impact of culture on students' conceptions, and review the importance of peer learning and support in graduate management education, and

conclude with a discussion on what phenomenography as a research approach is able to tell us, and what it cannot.

3.3.2 Students' Conceptions of Teaching

Phenomenographic studies on postgraduate students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions are limited, with most studies focused on postgraduate education in general, with a more limited focus on graduate management education. However, these studies, though limited, do shed some interesting light on how these postgraduate students might conceptualise teaching and learning interactions. Watland's (2007) phenomenographic study of on-line tutor support for MBA students in a Canadian University suggested that students' perceptions of the quality and experience of participation in teaching and learning interactions was fundamental. Students felt that the establishment of mutual connections, thereby building a relationship, between the tutor and themselves was an important factor, not just from an academic perspective, but also from one that was affective in nature. This expression of relationships and emotions is made explicit here, while it seems silent in undergraduate literature. This is not surprising given the challenges graduate management students face juggling the various aspects of their life, work, and studies, as was discussed previously (Fragoso et al., 2013). Hallett (2010) in her phenomenographic study of part-time Masters students' conceptions of tutors' study support indicated that at a very basic level, the conceptions were skills-acquisition related. These conceptions ranged from tutors enabling accessibility to literature and information, to providing 'technical' support such as academic writing, which were

about catering to the learning needs of students to help them achieve the required grades. These conceptions are not surprising as postgraduate students, although generally goal-oriented in their behaviour, also lack the necessary theoretical and academic knowledge, due to the lapse of time from their undergraduate education, even though they might be industry or domain experts.

These ideas resonate with the earlier discussion on graduate management students in Chapter Two (Fragoso et al., 2013; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Merriam, 2001a; Ross - Gordon, 2003; Salomon & Perkins, 1998). Hallett's (2010) study also discovered two learner-centred conceptions, which was the development of students, and fulfilling students' potential, which suggest a developmental orientation to teaching. It is also important to note that Hallett's study does emphasise the need for tutors to complement academics in teaching and learning interactions, especially when tutoring and teaching are separated as roles, by geographic location, or both. This suggests a necessary 'partnership' between the University academic and the practitioner-tutor in enabling such a developmental outcome. Such a conception holds an enduring orientation, which could be stated as the ultimate goal of postgraduate students embarking on graduate management studies (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004). The preceding discussion on postgraduate students' conceptions of teaching draws distinct parallels between undergraduate and postgraduate students' conceptions of teaching, specifically in terms of teacher versus student-centred perspectives, and enduring conceptions such as personal development and growth (Ashwin, 2005; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). The key variance in phenomenographic research on postgraduate education is the importance of the softer and relational aspects of teaching and

learning interactions as an enabler for effective learning, which is not explicitly featured in similar undergraduate research.

Phenomenographic studies of undergraduate students' experience take on a number of strands. Trigwell and Reid (1998) in their phenomenographic study of higher education work-based learning programmes discovered that students conceived their experience in four ways, namely, the acquisition of knowledge tools that could be used at the workplace, knowledge that gave them a better understanding of their workplace hence their ability to perform better in their jobs, knowledge that culminated in a qualification, and developing understanding to enable them to contribute to their organisation. These conceptions varied from personal gain, which is the ability to use knowledge and qualifications for effective workplace functioning, to personal growth and development in service of organisational growth. Students' conceptualisation of teaching as personal gain or being teacher-centred are also reflected in the phenomenographic study of student teachers by Paakkari et al. (2010) as 'ways of experiencing teaching', such as the transferring of knowledge and skills, supporting the active processing of knowledge, and supporting the transformation of conceptions. In the same study, the 'ways of experiencing teaching' were also described as supporting holistic personal growth, and, building a learning community with the students. Similarly, Ashwin's (2005) phenomenographic study described student's conceptions of Oxford tutorials as transfer of relevant content knowledge, verification of tutor's perspective of the 'correctness' of knowledge, knowledge as a contested space for the tutor to develop students' thinking, and knowledge as a collaborative creation of tutor and student. The first two conceptions are what might be considered

teacher-centred perspectives, while the last two conceptions represented a student-centred perspective.

A common strand running through these various studies is that the ways in which students experience teaching and learning interactions may be represented as a hierarchical relationship where at the 'lower' end, it is rudimentary and utilitarian in nature, subordinated to the 'higher' end, which is about holistic development. In very broad terms, the 'lower' conceptions suggest a teacher-centred approach, whereas the student is the focus of teaching when teaching results in students having the space to co-create and internalise knowledge that is useful at the workplace and beyond. Interestingly, these conceptions generally express an outcome-based representation of conceptions, even at the 'higher' end where the focus is on application in practice and personal development. Issues related to the tensions experienced by part-time adult students, and the importance of attending to their emotional needs do not seem to feature prominently in these phenomenographic studies.

Non-phenomenographic research on students' conceptions of teaching are useful in complementing our understanding of postgraduate students' needs in teaching and learning interactions. Students' conceptions of teaching have been described in terms of teacher characteristics. Feldman's (1976) research highlighted student-desired teacher characteristics such as enthusiasm, passion, and friendliness, which represented an emotional aspect of student-teacher relationship. These views are echoed in similar studies by Delaney, Johnson, Johnson, and Treslan (2010). In a study of MBA students, Tootoonchi, Lyons, and Hagen (2002) describe desired teaching and

learning interactions in terms of teacher competence and teacher attitude. Additionally, it was important to these students that the teacher be personable, approachable and supportive in order to be able to create a conducive learning environment, which also implied willingness to provide consultation on course work outside of curriculum time. Hativa (2015) adds to these characteristics with the notion of empathy, which was particularly important in graduate management education where students' work-family-study tensions play an important factor in shaping conceptions of teaching and learning interactions. These ideas resonate with much of the research findings by Trigwell and Prosser (1991).

It is interesting to note that although approachability is not factored as a consideration in the teaching-learning process, it is nevertheless a factor in influencing students' conceptions of effective teaching and learning interactions (Reid & Johnston, 1999). Feldman (1976) also discovered that students considered teachers to be 'superior' when they demonstrated the ability to stimulate interest, provide clarity, and were domain experts who were open to ideas. MBA students, in particular, express practitioner-tutor subject matter expertise as possessing the credibility to use real world examples, including the practitioner-tutor's own work experience, to contextualise content in order to facilitate students' learning and understanding (Tootoonchi et al., 2002). These views co-relate to literature on professional education, citing the engagement of practitioner-tutors, who possess a wealth of industry experience and track record, to establish the link between theory and practice in a contextualised and meaningful manner. Nevertheless, it is also important to be cognisant of the potential deficiencies in pedagogical abilities and skills amongst these

practitioner-tutors as industry and domain competence does not necessarily equate to pedagogical competence (Regan, 2006; Shreeve, 2009; Tenenbergs, 2010).

Another series of studies describe these conceptions in terms of actions carried out by the tutor or teacher. The conception of teaching as actions by the teacher has been described by Pratt (1997a) as techniques adopted, or specific duties adopted by the teacher in teaching and learning interactions. Trigwell and Prosser (1991), in an early study of first year nursing students indicated that teaching and learning interactions that promote or encourage deep learning is likely to improve learning outcomes and experience. Specifically, the students sampled described teaching as behaviours that tutors exhibited during teaching and learning interactions, such as creating opportunities for the interaction of ideas, creating time for consultation on project work, perhaps even beyond the curricular time, providing students with adequate feedback, and demonstrating empathy for the challenges students faced while pursuing a higher education degree. Feldman's (1976) study also highlighted the importance of teachers stimulating interest and providing quality feedback as a necessary teaching and learning interaction construct. The notion of stimulating interest was elaborated in Goldstein and Benassi's (2006) study of students' and instructors' beliefs about excellent lecturers in higher education. Students in this study highlighted the importance of the lecturer creating a safe teaching and learning environment that encouraged students to think and explore alternative perspectives independently.

Although the studies by Pratt (1997b), Trigwell and Prosser (1991), Feldman (1976),

and Goldstein and Benassi (2006) represent undergraduate students' conceptions, these actions during teaching and learning interactions are also representative of the expectations of graduate management and professional students. The practitioner-tutor's ability to connect with students, both at the personal and well as professional levels, tapping on their mutual industry experience, is an important determinant of teaching and learning effectiveness (Barker & Stowers, 2005). In this sense, practitioner-tutors generally tend to adopt a participative approach to teaching and learning interactions with graduate management students, which also reflects these students' preferences for such engagement. Such an approach facilitates immediate transfer of knowledge from classroom to workplace, and in many instances from workplace back to the classroom as an iterative process of reciprocal transfer of knowledge (Currie & Knights, 2003; Prince et al., 2015). The key emphasis here is the attention to emotional needs during teaching and learning interactions, which is equally relevant in graduate management education. Inevitably, these perceptions will translate into expected norms in teaching and learning interactions, hence, conceptualisations of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'.

3.3.3 Students' Conceptions of Learning

Students' views on effective teaching is also often coloured by their own preferred ways of learning. Their perceptions of effectiveness, have a greater impact on their learning than the actual teaching and learning interaction itself (Nijhuis, Segers, & Gijsselaers, 2008; Stes, Coertjens, & Van Petegem, 2013; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). Hence, the studies related to student conceptions of teaching and learning

interactions seem to focus largely on learning rather than their conceptions of good or effective teaching, and these have been expressed in literature in a number of ways. Booth (1997), in her phenomenographic study of changes to pedagogy in undergraduate computer science education, defined learning as the shift from 'knowing' to 'doing'. This could only be facilitated if content was taught in a manner that is understood and useful to the students, as opposed to communicating content for the purpose of teaching, which is a value proposition that teaching and learning interactions, between students and faculty who are both industry practitioners, offer. The importance of real-world application of theory at the workplace and beyond, cannot be understated. These ideas are manifested in the phenomenographic study of the conceptions of the quality of learning of higher education students in Rwanda (Mbabazi Bamwesiga et al., 2013). Although this study focused on conceptions of quality of learning, which were derived from student satisfaction, the insights are a useful perspective for understanding how students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as 'effective'. One perspective from the Rwanda study was the possession and demonstration of knowledge, both in the classroom, and in the case of part-time undergraduate students, in the workplace, particularly when students are viewed at their workplace more positively than someone who did not possess the same level or understanding of knowledge. Another perspective was students' ability to effectively apply classroom theory at the workplace, which was manifested through the implementation of practical and viable solutions to workplace problems, using the knowledge that students gained from their teaching and learning interactions. A third conception of learning from the Rwanda study is anchored on the notion of 'durability', which pertains to students' ability to practically apply classroom knowledge beyond

the immediate time and space of teaching and learning interactions. This conception of the enduring impact of learning affirms a previous longitudinal phenomenographic study by Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty (1993) that not only replicated the findings in Saljo's (1979) non-phenomenographic study but added a sixth conception where learning was considered 'effective' when it resulted in students' personal growth and change. However, a major critique of this study's conception of personal change is that it actually represented only a philosophical rather than a practical academic conception of learning (Cliff, 1998). Nevertheless, the ability to deploy classroom theory in the workplace, as well as the personal growth and change that occurs in the process, present credible motivation for any student embarking on graduate management education.

Students conceptions of learning have also been positioned as deep, surface, and strategic approaches (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). In this phenomenographic study of learning and knowledge in higher education, a deep approach is one where students seek meaning in what they are learning and try to relate it to their personal and workplace experiences, which establish the basis for workplace application of knowledge and personal growth and change. Following the previous discussions on graduate management education, one would imagine this as the most probable approach adopted by graduate management students given their focus on workplace application and personal and professional development. However, I would also argue that the emotional stress or anxiety resulting from juggling work, studies and personal commitment, commonly prevalent amongst graduate management students, would steer them towards a reproducing orientation, or surface approach, where the focus

of the student is to achieve the minimal requirements of the programme or module. It is also important to note that students' approaches to learning are also influenced by their conceptions of learning. These approaches have been described in various ways in literature (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Mbabazi Bamwesiga et al., 2013) and reflect an alignment with literature on students' conceptions of teaching (Ashwin, 2005; Paakkari et al., 2010; Trigwell & Reid, 1998).

Similar to students' conceptions of teaching, it is useful to examine student conceptions of learning from non-phenomenographic research as a complementary perspective. In an early study of adult students Saljo (1979) identified five qualitatively different conceptions of learning. These conceptions range between a reproducing orientation to one that seeks meaning. Learning described as increasing knowledge, memorizing and reproducing, and applying facts or procedures are essentially reproducing orientations, similar to surface approaches to learning. Learning, described as understanding meaning, and, making sense of meaning to understand reality, suggest meaning-oriented perspectives, as a result of the greater awareness of the purpose of learning, similar to deep approaches to learning. Saljo (1979) also discovered that students may not stay in one orientation all the time and may shift from surface to deep or 'regress' from deep to surface depending on the contextual nature of teaching and learning interactions. Similar findings are echoed in follow-on studies conducted by van Rossum and Schenk (1984), Hase and Kenyon (2000), Talbot and Lilley (2014) and Ashong and Commander (2017). I would argue that this flux between deep and surface approaches would also apply to graduate management students as their motivations for pursuing the MBA vary, and these motivations will

also be challenged by contextual and emotional demands placed on these students.

3.3.4 Importance of Peer Learning

Stes et al. (2013) and Gopee and Deane (2013), in their respective studies of undergraduate students, argue that learning occurs not only between students and faculty, but also between students themselves. Peer learning adopts a relational approach, leveraging on social and human capital, as well as the wealth of experience and knowledge that exists within the peer group. Peer learning is also non-threatening when compared with traditional teacher-student interaction, even for mature students, and creates conditions for students to take control of their own learning, and develop skills that enable them to learn and re-learn independently, beyond the classroom, as “autonomous learners” (Ashwin et al., 2015, p. 617). The teacher’s role in peer learning, though less specific, will be to shape the collaboration and learning process to ensure that the needs of the curriculum are met. This is an important insight, as peer learning does not suggest learning in the complete absence of teacher support. The teacher may still be required, albeit periodically, to shape dialogue as well as fill in knowledge gaps. However, Stigmar (2016a) cautions that there is also no clear evidence that suggests that peer learning translates to better academic results. Nevertheless, peer learning is an important part of graduate management education as it is synonymous to the manner in which these students learn at the workplace.

3.3.5 The Influence of Culture on Conceptions

The role of culture or cultural influence, though discussed, is frequently neglected in discussions of teaching and learning processes. Culture or cultural influence may arise from a number of sources ranging from ethnicity, geography, industry, or even undergraduate educational discipline, especially in the case of graduate management students. Teaching and learning constitute human interaction within a social space that is more complex than teaching or learning by itself (McLean & Blackwell, 1997; McLean & Bullard, 2000). Therefore, the pitfalls associated with adopting an ethnocentric approach to teaching and learning interactions, especially in internationalised graduate management programmes cannot be understated. Clarke and Flaherty (2002) in their comparative international study of adult post-graduate marketing students in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK) indicated varying preferences in the use of tools in teaching and learning interactions. PRC students preferred a structured approach involving lectures and homework, which allowed them space to 'digest' the knowledge in their own time instead of discussions. Unlike their UK and US counterparts, PRC students also held their University Professors in higher regard than guest lecturers, hence a preference for academics rather than practitioners. PRC students also believed that building relationships with their Professors also enabled a better learning environment.

Reflecting on these findings, it appears that conceptions of teaching and learning are grounded on cultural foundations, and, therefore, notions of effective teaching and

learning interactions originating from one cultural perspective cannot be universally applied. These arguments support the importance of contextualisation of theory in graduate management education that is directly related to the cultural nuances of the host country that the programme is being taught, assuming that the student cohort is homogenous (Pimpa, 2009). However, Charlesworth (2007) emphasises that while such studies draw a link between culture and learning, it is not clear how cultural nuances impact learning styles. From a practical perspective, contextualisation to culture is not as simple as it seems as many graduate management programmes try to draw a demographic mix of students that represent multiple cultures and workplace perspectives to improve overall learning experience. Since it is unlikely that conceptions of a 'good' teacher or practitioner-tutor, or teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', will be the same across cultures, such mixed student demographics will inevitably lead to trade-offs made in teaching and learning interactions, and the associated conceptions of effectiveness (Pratt et al., 1999).

3.4 What Phenomenography Tells Us and What It Does Not

The limited phenomenographic literature on postgraduate student experience on teaching may be thematised as skills and knowledge acquisition, growth and development of students, and building relationships with the tutor to enhance participation and interaction. Literature in this area also highlight the importance of dealing with emotional needs as part of teaching and learning interactions (Hallett, 2010; Watland, 2007). Emotions are about the learning mind-set, or what can be described as " the way I am as a learner" (Brown, 2000, p. 277). Emotions are

particularly important because they reinforce memory, and allow recall of contextualised experience in a meaningful manner that forms individual conceptions of teaching and learning effectiveness. Graduate management students, in particular, have to manage a number of emotions ranging from managing time to juggling work, studies and family life, and also the emotions associated with understanding what they have learned in class within the context of their workplace. The manner in which these adults cope with these emotions influence their learning mind-set, and their approach and orientation towards teaching and learning interactions.

There is a broad area of postgraduate student experience that is not captured in postgraduate phenomenographic studies but are adequately surfaced in similar studies of undergraduate experience. Phenomenographic studies of undergraduate students' teaching experience flesh out themes like teacher and student-centred approaches, skills and knowledge acquisition for qualifications and workplace deployment, as well as development and growth of students (Paakkari et al., 2010; Trigwell & Reid, 1998), while similar non-phenomenographic studies raise themes like teacher characteristics (Delaney et al., 2010; Feldman, 1976), and actions carried out by the teacher, which are related to teacher behaviours and techniques adopted by the teacher during teaching and learning interactions (Feldman, 1976; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Pratt, 1997b; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). Similarly, phenomenographic studies of undergraduate conceptions of learning suggest a range of themes like possession and demonstration of knowledge to attain qualifications as well as real world workplace application, long-term personal development, as well as surface, deep and strategic approaches to learning (Booth, 1997; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004;

Marion, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Mbabazi Bamwesiga et al., 2013). These conceptions of learning do not appear as sufficiently explicit in postgraduate research but demonstrate overlaps with conceptions of teaching. I would argue that in a context where industry professionals are taught by practitioner-tutors, factors like domain credibility, experience and track record, practitioner-tutors' behaviours and techniques, workplace deployment of classroom knowledge, as well as development of students as industry practitioners, would bolster positive experiences in teaching and learning interactions. Hence, the relevance of these insights for graduate management education.

Non-phenomenographic studies of postgraduate student experience express teacher attitude and competence in terms of domain expertise, approachability, being personable and supportive, and demonstrating empathy (Hativa, 2015; Tootoonchi et al., 2002), which also reflect the importance of attending to the emotions of students. I would argue that the findings, from both phenomenographic and general studies, are relevant for any student teaching and learning experience. However, none of these studies are specific to graduate management education, particularly within the context of student industry practitioners who are taught by part-time practitioner tutors drawn from industry, hence the area for investigation in this thesis, specifically in terms of practitioner-tutor qualities, actions during teaching and learning interactions, and conceptions of learning.

The decontextualised nature of phenomenography limits what can be discovered in this study. Teaching and learning interactions are socially-situated practices involving

industry practitioners playing the roles of student and practitioner-tutor, each bringing to the interaction their history and experiences. Therefore, conceptions of teaching and learning are complex at best, and phenomenography presents a set of heuristics to lend order to the 'messiness' in the data. One specific aspect is the influence of culture and how it impacts understanding of conceptions. Many studies have placed the conception of meaning making as being hierarchically more inclusive than memorising. In this instance it would be erroneous to assume universal understanding of this hierarchy as many of these studies are Western in origin. Specifically, memorising is a means for meaning making amongst many Asian cultures, hence the possibility of misconstruing their approach as surface learning when indeed they are taking a deep approach to learning (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Lai, 1993; Marton, Watkins, & Tang, 1997). Unravelling this complexity requires a complementary research approach. This is where Bourdieu's metaphorical concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *capital* and *doxa*, provide a useful framework to make sense of these complexities that might otherwise be lost. The next Chapter will discuss Bourdieu's Field Theory in a little more detail, its application in understanding teaching and learning interactions, critique of Bourdieu's concepts, and finally explaining how Bourdieu's theory illuminates conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' in a context where industry practitioners in a graduate management programme are taught by practitioner-tutors drawn from industry.

4 Chapter Four Situating Bourdieu in this Research

4.1 Overview

Chapter Four explores the complexities that might be masked by the decontextualised nature of phenomenography, using Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa*, to understand teaching and learning interactions as socially-situated practices. This Chapter will also examine the prevailing critique of Bourdieu's concepts, and establish a rationale of why Bourdieu is a suitable complementary research approach to phenomenography.

4.2 Teaching and Learning Interactions as Socially Situated Practices

Reckwitz (2002, p. 250) argues that the teaching and learning interaction is a socially situated practice, or 'Praktik', where both the teacher and the students, as agents within this practice, are not only each a "carrier of patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how, and desiring". These routinised practices, in turn, shape the way the teacher and students understand and constitute meanings of their world and the practices they share when participating in teaching and learning interactions. There are various dimensions of these practices, ranging from actual classroom teaching, feedback given in assignments, assessments, academic support and even peer-to-peer learning. These structural-agentic practices, which Ashwin (2012) identifies broadly as the teaching and learning environment, identities of the student and the teacher, disciplinary knowledge practices that shape

the teaching and learning interaction, and institutional cultures, influence the nature of interaction as well as their experiences of reality. These societal or institutionally-shaped artefacts and norms are also understood by both the teacher and the student, as agents within the social space or practice they operate, in a state of what they view as “visible orderliness”. (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 251).

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) posit from a social practice perspective, all phenomenon related to teaching and learning are not independent of each other and actually exist in relation to each other. As such learning is a social activity that is embedded in specific social and cultural contexts, and is very much participative and collaborative, where shared understanding is achieved through peer interaction. Salomon and Perkins (1998, p. 21) refer to this phenomenon as “learning to learn from others” and “learning to learn with others”, which aptly summarises teaching and learning as a social practice. Bourdieu (1989) adds lucidity to this line of thought by explaining how teaching and learning interactions are also determined by community-based expectations, which comprise artefacts and norms, such as etiquette and behaviour, and implicit rules that are mutually recognised by both teacher and student, and other stakeholders in teaching and learning interactions, in terms of what is considered as acceptable or what is expected. These structures translate to the social relationship that teacher and student share as part of teaching and learning interactions, where the behaviour of both parties are guided by some form of tacit understanding of what constitutes that relationship. Following these arguments, the conception of what is appropriate in teaching and learning interactions depends on the experience-based viewpoints of both teacher and student, hence their

expectations in that space. Therefore, reality is relational, dependent on the relations between teacher and student, and the associated social structures and rules is determined by both of them, as agents that are responsible for producing them (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). These notions of appropriateness, hence perceptions of what constitutes being 'effective', becomes a little more complex in graduate management education, where both student and faculty are industry practitioners, with experience and expertise, unlike a traditional undergraduate environment where the knowledge-experience power distance is mostly in favour of the teacher. This implies that congruence in meaning contributes to conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', while a divergence in world views may result in one that is not.

Therefore, social practice theories help us understand our place in the world, as well as make sense of our experiences in relation to the world. It is shaped by our past experiences, and the rules and norms of the social context or society we operate in. Social practice theories highlight how and why there are differences in the motives and intentions of different human actors or agents, and how they adjust to each other to seek 'balance' in these interactions. Through practice, these agents affect social structure, and in turn they are influenced by the social structure, hence a circular association between agents and society. Some will pursue self-interest, while others may choose to follow the norm. Whichever path the individual chooses, his or her actions manifest as a result of this sense-making, and is therefore not random (Reckwitz, 2002).

These ideas of an operating social context, where actors or agents operate optimising the value they possess to improve or preserve their status in the midst of implicit rules of that social context, are perhaps appropriately expressed through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory, or his theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1984, 1989, 1990b, 2011; Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). However, attempting to understand Bourdieu by first reading his writings was an ambitious endeavour. Bourdieu's original works are largely inaccessible to the average reader due to the difficult language in use, the original being in French, where some nuances may have inevitably been lost when translated into the English language. Hence, in approaching Bourdieu, I initially approached the works of Grenfell (2014) and Wacquant (1998) as primary references to establish a baseline understanding, supplemented by other works that elucidated Bourdieu's concepts, before re-visiting Bourdieu to better understand his works. Hence, Bourdieu's theory has been unpacked in the following discussion by using the works of Grenfell (2014) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), as the principal conduits to review and understand Bourdieu's original works, supplemented by the works of Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone (1993), Crossley (1999), Coleman (1988); Pratt (1992), Vaara and Faÿ (2011a), and Pouliot and Mérand (2013), amongst others.

4.3 Teaching and Learning Interactions – A Bourdieuan Perspective

Bourdieu's theory is a 'macro-theory' of sorts, not without its flaws, but provides a framework, or more accurately a set of thinking tools, to understand the social world, especially where key concepts of his theory are encapsulated in the metaphors of *field*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa*. It is important to note that Bourdieu's conceptual

metaphors should not be interpreted literally, and neither are they mutually exclusive. Rather, it is the manner in which these metaphors inter-operate in the real world that illuminates the motivations behind the manner in which teaching and learning interactions are conceptualised.

Bourdieu (1985) uses the metaphor of a *field* to describe social space or context in which we operate and occupy positions in. Derived from his original French term 'le champ', his notion of a *field* was envisioned as a competitive space, very much like a game field or even a battlefield, where individual agents dominate, or get dominated, while attempting to achieve their goals within the 'rules of the game'. He also envisaged society as being comprised of numerous multi-dimensional social spaces or *fields*, each with its own characteristics, expectations, and actors, a view that is echoed by Vaara and Faÿ (2011b) in their study of MBA education using Bourdieuan concepts. The social world, therefore, is made up of multiple *fields*, each seen as having its own boundary, and these *fields* are very often divided into *sub-fields*, a view that is similarly argued by Thomson (2008). Within the context of graduate management education, teaching and learning interaction is one of many *sub-fields* that constitute the *field* of higher education, which exist in tandem with the workplace. These unlevelled *fields* are bounded by implicit as well as explicit rules that determine how the agents, which may be individuals or institutions, could or should operate, by choice or determination. Agents' respective positions in the field, relative to other agents, not only determine what they are expected to do or can do in that *field*, but also set conditions on their ability to preserve or improve their positions (Bourdieu, 1985; Maton, 2005; Thomson, 2008). The manner in which the 'game' is played in the *field*

is determined by consensus, most of which is implicit, and that constitutes predictable behaviour amongst agents operating in that *field* (Martin, 2003). This predictability in graduate management education, is predicated on a presumed implicit understanding of teaching and learning interactions between the student and faculty, both of whom are industry practitioners. Crossley (2004) does, however, clarify that Bourdieu's conception of social space is different from the traditional use of the term to describe a context or background that is used to understand and research a social phenomenon.

The practices that exist in a *field* are ordered by *habitus*, which Bourdieu (1977, p. 378) defined as a "matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions". This notion of *habitus*, which is central to Bourdieu's theory of practice, was grounded on the assumption that individuals are a complex representation of their past experiences and conceptions of reality, interacting with current conceptions of reality. The likelihood of how we act in a certain way is dependent on how we expect others to respond in a *field*. This is an iterative process where reality, as they constitute it, is being continuously constructed and re-constructed to shape orientations to the world around them. Hence, *habitus* may be explained as an agent's disposition, shaped by past experiences acquired through socialisation or social conditioning, which then shapes how those dispositions manifest in the *field*. It is acquired through practice; a sort of pre-conditioning that shapes the way an agent thinks, feels, behaves, and makes choices, and as a result becomes part of the agent's psyche and operates at the unconscious level as a form of practical logic that determines subsequent practice. Farnell (2000, p. 399) refers to this as "unconscious practical logic", which shapes

interpretations of practice through alignment of agents' collective experiences, thereby enabling a range of subjective options within the objective space of the *field*. Unless the individual reflects on his or her experiences, it is likely to remain unconscious. *Habitus* shapes future behaviour, in a continuous process of adjustment that seeks a form of equilibrium in the field. This is because agents seek to be comfortable in the *field* they are operating in, and as a result take the world around them for granted (Breiger, 2000). A lack of congruence, however, renders agents feeling like "fish out of water", which then causes seeking of that equilibrium challenging, and perhaps even impossible (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 108).

Vaara and Faÿ (2011b) argue that adult students with significant work and industry experience and expertise, particularly those in graduate management education like the MBA programme, generally hold mental models of an ideal 'MBA *habitus*'. This has the potential of clashing with the *habitus* of faculty who are also practitioners when it comes to how the teaching and learning *field* ought to be managed in terms of content, delivery methods, and styles, and such a clash could constitute a significant barrier for learning. Such expectations may vary from notions of proper attire, as well as social behaviour and etiquette, to presumption of roles, and may set conditions for barriers to learning. *Habitus* of part-time adult students is shaped by cultural experiences resulting from their own personal development and cultural nuances related to their undergraduate discipline or industry, and they will use these experiences to make sense of theory and practice in teaching and learning interactions. Students' educational backgrounds, and particularly their past educational experience, will also influence their perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning interactions in

graduate management education (Alhija, 2017; Morgan, 2006). Exposure to innovative teaching styles may render the student unimpressed by lesser quality teaching styles, even if the latter do fall within the category of what is considered as effective teaching from a pedagogical perspective. In this instance, it is the lack of congruence of expectations that deems teaching and learning interactions as ineffective rather than the actual quality of the interaction itself. Hence practice, or conception of what practice ought to be in a specific social context or *field* results from the relation of *habitus* with the agent's social position within that social context or *field*. As an extension, conceptions of what teaching and learning ought to be in teaching and learning interactions in graduate management education between practitioner students and practitioner-tutors, are shaped similarly. As Burnell (2015) emphasises, however, *habitus* is continuously being modified in these interactions to achieve some form of 'equilibrium', but sometimes incongruence of *habitus* may leave the perception of ineffective teaching.

In this respect, Pratt's (1992) research on the influence of culture on students' conceptualisations of teaching and learning interactions is instructive. The study was conducted on local students and expatriate Western lecturers in a Hong Kong university. The results of the research indicated that students expected their teachers to be experts in their respective disciplines and be able to contextualise content to attend to the nuances unique to the local teaching and learning environment. Teachers' demonstration of care and empathy for the students in order to guide these students in their learning and personal development, was also important. Western expatriate faculty in this same study, however, had very divergent views of teaching

and learning interactions. They viewed the teacher as a facilitator of student learning, and the student was expected to challenge the teacher as part of teaching and learning interactions. This divergence led to students viewing Western expatriate faculty as being very focused and sub-par, limiting their responsibilities solely to examinations and assessments. The study does, however, caution that the findings of the research are not determinant of Chinese society's conceptions of effective teaching and learning interactions. In this light, it is also important to note that this study was carried out well over two decades ago when internationalisation of Western universities was at its infancy. Nevertheless, Pratt's (1992) research also suggests that *habitus* and *field* are not mutually exclusive and changes in that relationship can bring about disruptive change, which Bourdieu described as *hysteresis* (Hardy, 2008; Pouliot & Mérand, 2013). This mix of practitioners in graduate management education, one as a student and the other as faculty, in the teaching and learning interaction *field*, changes the nature of traditional teacher-student relationship. Traditional notions of the constitution and possession of *capital* (which will be explained further) as well as the 'rules of the game' are constantly being challenged as students and teachers discover their places (Grenfell* & James, 2004; Hardy, 2008).

According to Bourdieu (1984), the key medium of influence, or 'currency', in a *field* is *capital*, which he defined as resources that an agent could employ to exert power and influence in a *field*. *Capital* determines the position the agent is able to assume or is forced to assume in that *field*. *Capital* exists in a number of forms, namely, *economic*, *social* and *cultural capital*. Lin (2014, p. 370) argues that most individuals, in reality, actually possess "*capital portfolios*", which is a suite of *capital* accrued from their

actions and interactions in the various *fields* they have operated in rather than just a single form of *capital*. It is therefore the volume and variety of *capital* that lends weight to its symbolic value. In teaching and learning interactions, such *capital* may be in the form of authority, resources, skills and expertise, workplace experience and knowledge, networks, goodwill, reputation, and so on. Specific to graduate management education, as Vaara and Faÿ (2011a) argue, students' *capital* accrue from their industry knowledge as well as their experience and expertise as practitioners. Practitioner-tutors also possess similar *capital* accrued from their own industry experience and expertise, but in addition also possess pedagogical authority that symbolically legitimises the right to shape teaching and learning interactions as they see fit. The nature of *capital* determines how students and practitioner-tutors in this instance each navigate the *field* of teaching and learning interactions.

Capital has value only insofar that it is recognised. Adult students operate in a number of *fields* at the same time, such as work, family, and higher education, and their dispositions are valued differently in each of these *fields* (Hardy, 2008). Therefore, as Vvaccuant (1989) argues, the *capital* that the student is endowed with only has value in relation to the *field* that student is operating in, assuming that the value is greater relative to other students, or even the teacher, and this value changes as the agent enters another *field*. Lin (2014) shares this similar argument. The knowledge that a student or teacher possesses in teaching and learning interactions is only useful if it accords the holder the ability to exert influence or power within that social context. Therefore, each agent strives to increase their *capital* by adopting various strategies that enable them to either preserve or improve their position in the *field* that they

operate in, to dominate or be dominated (Thomson, 2008). Hardy (2008) also adds that the *capital* that an agent possesses, however, is always in a state of flux. Agents interacting in a *field* are exposed to the ideas, experiences and knowledge of other agents, which will in turn re-shape or reinforce their own ideas, experiences and knowledge. The renewed symbolism will allow some of these agents to assume new positions in the *field*. To place this argument in context, graduate management students, particularly, may be experts in a particular domain in which the practitioner-tutor may not have expertise, which results in knowledge asymmetry in favour of the student in teaching and learning interactions. I would argue, in this instance, a temporal role reversal where practitioner-tutor learns from practitioner students. Students' own knowledge and experiences are also shaped through peer-sharing, which then reinforces or reconstructs existing notions of teaching and learning as being effective.

Desan (2013) argues that Bourdieu's conception of *capital* differed from the traditional Marxist view. Marx viewed *capital* not as wealth, or a thing or a resource, but rather a process where labour could be exploited to create surplus value. Bourdieu, on the other hand, viewed *capital* as any real resource that yields power, and something that could be used to exert an agent's goal-driven influence in a *field*. In this instance, the symbolism accorded by the *capital* was more important for Bourdieu than the actual worth of *capital* because the power and influence that an agent yields depends on the social recognition of the value of that *capital*. Bourdieu termed this as *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1985; Crossley, 2014). The power arising from this symbolism could be a source of social inequality since it accords advantages

and disadvantages relative to other agents in the *field*, just as knowledge and experience would in teaching and learning interactions in graduate management education (Moore, Armstrong, & Pearson, 2008; Siisiainen, 2003).

Behaviour in the *field* is also regulated by a set of implicit social norms and expectations shared by all agents in that *field*. Bourdieu termed this as *doxa*, which are rules for action and behaviour that are not prescribed but rather understood through socialisation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). *Doxa* sets limits on what can or cannot be done, or what is considered acceptable or unacceptable in that *field*. Since these beliefs are considered legitimate and unquestionable, *doxa* takes on a form of symbolic power that can be enhanced by the *capital portfolios* that agents possess. *Doxa* also underpins the implicit logic of any practices that occur or are carried out in that *field*. In the context of graduate management education, *doxa* induces students and teachers, despite both being industry practitioners, to accept practices arising within teaching and learning interactions without understanding the rationale or questioning the logic behind the taken-for-granted ways of doing things (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). Therefore, *doxa* shapes acceptance of what teaching and learning should be in teaching and learning interactions, and even if there was disagreement on the nature of this relationship, it may not be overtly expressed. When agents operate for extended periods in a *field* with specific *doxa*, the ensuing impact shapes their *habitus*, which in turn shapes their tacit beliefs and the practices they adopt. Deer (2008) referred to this unconscious submission to the status quo as “learned ignorance”. Therefore, in teaching and learning interactions, there may be many

practices that students and teachers disagree on but choose to remain silent about because of the 'way things are done here' assumption that one or both parties make.

4.4 Power and Dominance

The use of power in a social context, whether deliberately or unconsciously, is fundamental to Bourdieu's work. In higher education teaching and learning interactions a natural dominance occurs when a teacher, who is viewed as authority and subject matter expert, interacts with a student. This is likely to be so even in graduate management education where both students and practitioner-tutors have extensive industry experience and domain expertise. One significant area would be assessment where the practitioner-tutor continues to retain power, despite any attempt to adopt a learner-centred approach (Hodgson, 2005). Even when the teacher reaches down to the student in an attempt to seemingly abdicate that authority, in order to engage the student more effectively, that dominance is still latent (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Vvacquant, 1989). This is not unexpected since the graduate management education *field* is usually a microcosm of the society in which it is functioning. Hence, the societal educational culture, and the associated attitudes and beliefs of the stakeholders, such as academics and students, will manifest itself in teaching and learning interactions (Ashwin, 2012). One perspective is that since the teacher usually holds an asymmetrically superior position in teaching and learning interactions, he or she can leverage on the opportunity as an agent of change by building relationships with students to enhance the teaching and learning experience, as a collaborative approach to shaping social reality (Bourdieu, 1989).

4.5 Bourdieu as a Theoretical Lens

The discussions on Bourdieu's Field Theory provide a useful framework to understand teaching and learning interactions within a social practice setting, which eases making sense of the link between theory and practice (Grenfell, 2014). However, Bourdieu's ideas may not always be applicable as he conceived them, particularly in a graduate management education setting.

Bourdieu's concept of *field* is contentious and can be easily subject to academic abuse. This is particularly so when making sense of *field* boundaries. Bourdieu describes a *field* as having three dimensions, namely, the power relations, the struggle for positions, and the implicit rules and norms, and these dimensions determine what is inside and outside these boundaries (Bourdieu, 1993; Grenfell* & James, 2004; Pouliot & Mérand, 2013). He adds to this confusion by sometimes likening social space to geographic space and even drawing reference from field theory in physics. While his use of spatial metaphors to explain his theory are useful to a point, they also tend to be abstract and can be confused with their "equivalents in ordinary language" (Silber, 1995, pp. 326-336). The use of spatial metaphors may also be misconstrued as an attempt at "genre stretching" (Brown, 1990, p. 57). Bourdieu also posits that the number of theoretically possible *fields* is infinite, and *fields* overlap and have influence over each other; these ideas further blur the notion of boundaries and the relationships between *fields* (Pouliot & Mérand, 2013). It can therefore be difficult to decide on the actual constitution of a *field*. For instance, are graduate management education and the workplace two different *fields* that meld into a *sub-field* referred to

as teaching and learning interactions? Does that *sub-field* actually exist or is more likely just a temporary marketplace where knowledge is traded and exchanged? Hence, it is not clear whether a *field* is a bounded reality or something that merely exists in the minds of the agents.

Bourdieu also seems to paint the *field* as a seemingly antagonistic space where “every *field* is a site of overt struggle” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 734). However, competition in a *field* may not always necessarily be the norm. In teaching and learning interactions, practitioner-tutors and students cannot be considered as homogenous agents, as would be the case where two players meet in a competition field. Although practitioner-tutors and students are distinctly different in their teaching and learning interaction roles, and do share commonalities as industry practitioners, they are also both necessary components in that interaction *field*. This is a scenario where it is more likely that collaboration, rather than competition, as Bourdieu suggests, will allow their respective goals in the ‘game’ to be achieved (Martin, 2003; Thomson, 2008). As an extension of this thought, it could also be argued that students’ and practitioner-tutors’ conceptions of teaching and learning interactions are not different but actually different dimensions of the same teaching and learning interaction *field* (Morgan, 2006). This idea of co-construction supports the belief that neither the practitioner-tutor nor the practitioner student retains monopoly of knowledge in graduate management education (Ashwin, 2012; Fernández-Río, 2016).

It is also not uncommon for peers within graduate management education to leverage on one another to access information and experience (Coleman, 1988; Gopee &

Deane, 2013; Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008; Portes, 2000). A great deal of peer interaction occurs within and outside the teaching and learning interaction *field*, such as discussion of group assignments that taps on each other's experience and understanding of theory and practice, and how that might be applied in context (Martin, 2003; Stigmar, 2016a). This phenomenon leverages on what both Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (2011) term as *social capital*. However, the commonality of terms is where the similarity stops. While Bourdieu views *social capital* as a lever for agents to strengthen their position or influence in a *field*, Coleman views *social capital* as more enabling through norms, obligations and expectations that are exercised for the good of all agents operating within a *field* (Dika & Singh, 2002). This supports the notion of collaboration rather than competition as Bourdieu suggests. *Social capital* is based on mutual cognition and recognition, and this is how it acquires a symbolic character and is transformed into *symbolic capital* (Siisiainen, 2003). However, I would argue that collaboration within the higher education *field* could actually be a means to accumulating *capital* in order to compete in the *field* of the workplace.

Bourdieu (2011) also seems to suggest that the power relationship between the teacher and student is absolute. Teachers possess pedagogical authority, which is the *capital* that gives them the power to shape outcomes and even behaviour in the teaching and learning interaction *field* (Vaara & Faÿ, 2011b). The symbolism of this *capital* is also exercised through the power they wield in assessment. However, when practitioner students possessing domain knowledge from various *fields* enter teaching and learning interactions they may actually possess greater *symbolic capital* than the teacher. Students bring to teaching and learning interactions specific expertise and

knowledge that adds value to collective learning and in some instances may be the subject matter expert. Therefore, the practitioner-tutor quite effectively, though temporarily, ends up being the student. This brings us back to the argument of co-construction of knowledge, which then debunks the absolute nature of the teacher's power. To put things in perspective, it must also be acknowledged that Bourdieu's ideas were based on a different time and place where social reproduction favoured the privileged, hence his conclusions regarding the absolute nature of power. Nevertheless, this is an area of interest which does not seem to have been discussed in literature on graduate management education.

Finally, Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic capital* is difficult to quantify. In reality, the value of the symbolism varies between agents within a certain social context or *field*, and may not hold the same degree of symbolism or power in another social context (Desan, 2013). Recent changes to academic funding and the associated influx of non-traditional students, and faculty, has also changed the nature of the higher education *field*, and the relationship of its agents, namely the students and the teachers. Traditional notions of the constitution and possession of *capital*, as well as the 'rules of the game' are constantly being challenged as students and teachers discover their place in this new teaching and learning interaction *field* (Grenfell* & James, 2004; Hardy, 2008). Hence, another area for investigation in this thesis.

Bourdieu's theory provides a useful framework to guide thinking on students' conceptions of effective teaching and learning interactions within the context of graduate management education. However, this research is also cognisant of the

variations and limitations of the theory, such as the clarity of *field* boundaries, and notions of absolute teacher power, and the ‘fuzziness’ of *capital*, and how they might influence such conceptions in the real world. Nevertheless, applying Bourdieu’s theory of practice allows the research to unlock complexities that might be obscured by the decontextualised nature of knowledge arising from phenomenographic research. Here, it is useful to recognise that the role of *habitus* and how it determines response to teaching and learning interactions, as an added layer of understanding, and this is where Bourdieu’s conceptual thinking tools are useful for investigating the conceptions that arise in this research. The specific contexts of student and Local Counsellor as practitioners, and the flexible interpretations of graduate management education, provide rich data to explore Bourdieu’s concepts in practice. The next Chapter will discuss how research design and conduct has been shaped by literature, particularly that on phenomenography and Bourdieu’s theory of practice.

5 Chapter Five Designing and Conducting the Research

5.1 Context of the Research

The previous three Chapters discussed the relevant strands of literature related to industry practitioners playing the roles of student and practitioner-tutors in teaching and learning interactions within the context of graduate management education, the various conceptions of teaching and learning interactions derived from phenomenographic and general studies, and a discussion of Bourdieu's practice theory as a theoretical lens. This chapter will discuss the phenomenographic approach to the research design and conduct, including my ontological and epistemological assumptions, the manner in which data was analysed, and some of the issues that affected the conduct of the research.

5.2 The Phenomenography Approach

5.2.1 My Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

When we experience a phenomenon, we experience it in a way that is unique to us because each of us are different in terms of our personalities overlaid with our experiences. As a result, we relate to that phenomenon in different ways. That experience of the phenomenon is understood through the way in which we describe it, or assign meaning to it, which would include the understanding of practices associated with that phenomenon. Following this argument, therefore, we cannot

understand what people do or how they feel about a phenomenon if we do not understand how they interpret or make meaning of that phenomenon. There may also be multiple conceptions of the same phenomenon, as every person experiencing that same phenomenon will make meaning of it in different ways, depending on past experiences and current perceptions, hence resulting in variations in meaning for the same phenomenon. Meaning is constituted through interaction with the phenomenon and the external world that contextualises that phenomenon, and as such we cannot separate the description of the phenomenon from the person describing it (Marton & Booth, 1997). Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) refer to this as the inseparable nature of the knower and the known. Through this description, we share what is considered an internal relationship with the phenomenon we are describing, and it is this relationship that defines who we are in relation to that phenomenon. This lack of distinction, or separation, between the individual and the 'world', or the 'inside' world and the 'outside' world or phenomenon, suggests a non-dualistic assumption of reality where object and subject are intertwined rather than separate (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Phenomenography's non-dualistic orientation to reality, therefore, presents an approach to better understand how part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with the Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as being 'effective'. Prosser and Trigwell (1999) argue that this non-dualistic perspective also suggests that all perceptions and experiences of teaching and learning that have been experienced, are being experienced are at the same time, although not in the same proportions all the time. This is distinctly different from a constructionist perspective where the real

world is seen as separate from the world that is constructed in the minds of those experiencing the phenomenon. Dahlin (1994) weighs in by adding that although conceptions are cognitive experiences, not all experiences are cognitive in nature, which somewhat supports phenomenography's non-dualistic ontological position. This is to say that ontologically, phenomenography suggests that there is only one world, which is understood in different ways by different people. Phenomenography adopts an empirical approach that focuses on the human-world or phenomenon relation, and not the phenomenon itself, in order to make sense of those experiences as the part-time MBA students conceptualise them, with the intention of identifying the qualitatively different ways in which different people "experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena" (Marton, 1988, p. 53). These descriptions, of the various meanings of the manner in which students understand teaching and learning interactions, which are articulated as conceptions, represent the central form of knowledge in phenomenography. In this respect, phenomenography's ontological assumptions are also its epistemological assumptions.

5.2.2 Relating Phenomenography to Bourdieu

In approaching Bourdieu's practice theory as a theoretical lens, I feel it will be useful to discuss where these approaches are similar, how they differ, and the value Bourdieu adds to phenomenography. Both adopt an empirical approach to investigating the social world rather than purely theorising the social world. Like phenomenography, Bourdieu's approach to investigating a phenomenon begins with a practical context, where data is collected and analysed before a theory to understand practice is

developed, although Bourdieu has often been criticised for the positivist streaks in his research, specifically his use of statistical data to accurately represent human behaviour, and also his belief in the efficacy of reflexivity (Griller, 1996). Phenomenography and Bourdieu's practice theory also share the common notion of the relational nature of reality.

Phenomenography is clearly non-dualistic, where there is a simultaneity between object and subject constituting reality. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is his attempt at dissolving what he believed to be the false dichotomy between social structure and human agency, purporting their interdependence as a sort of dialectic relationship between actor and social structure that is not primarily situated in structure nor agency, hence mediating the mutual relationship in either enabling or restricting practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Griller, 1996). However, I would argue that his attempt at avoiding dualism seems to be in conflict with his ideas of agency being enabled by structure, hence creating further structures. This process of creation and recreation, as agents interact with their social world, alludes to a form of duality, which differs from phenomenography. Furthermore, his concept of *field* suggests a "duality of structured space of positions and a space of positions-takings" (Ferrare & Apple, 2015, p. 46).

This is where I would describe the two approaches as being similar and yet not the same, which is inherently the value using them as complementary approaches. Phenomenography provides a heuristic to lend order to the messiness of the data from the research, providing knowledge in the form of conceptions. Bourdieu's theory of

practice provides an additional lens to tease apart the complexities, arising from culture and context, that might have been lost in phenomenography's decontextualised knowledge, in order to have a more in depth understanding of practice.

5.2.3 My Methodological Approach

My intention was to understand how part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are themselves industry practitioners, experienced and interpreted "various aspects of reality" (Marton, 1981, p. 178) during teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners. Hence, I embraced an interpretivist paradigm for this research. My aim was not to capture every single aspect of students experiences, but rather to understand meaning of those experiences, as conceived by the students participating in this research, or what we refer to as conceptions, or levels of awareness, within a specific context (Marton, 1994).

The research was designed as an idiographic examination (Bem, 1983; Falk, 1956) of students' lived experiences of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor. An idiographic approach suggests a focus on the individual rather than generalising individual accounts to the entire sample population researched. In this research, my position as a researcher is quite distinctly one of an insider, as I am, and continue to be, a practitioner-tutor who is a part-time faculty with the University of Strathclyde, tutoring part-time industry practitioner MBA students as a Local

Counsellor. Being an insider, I adopted an emic orientation to my research in order to understand the research participants' point of view (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999; Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). I was conscious that my own meaning making of my experiences of teaching and learning interactions, both as a former part-time MBA student, as well as a current part-time faculty, would inevitably shape my interpretations of my research participants' experiences (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013).

Accordingly, the selected research method had to address various qualitative conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', from the perspective of part-time adult students who were industry practitioners being taught by Local Counsellors who were also industry practitioners. The research also had to take into consideration the various student dispositions and experiences that shaped those perceptions. To address this need, this research entailed an empirical qualitative study that adopted a phenomenographic approach, complemented with the use of Bourdieu's theory of practice to understand their conceptions and motivations.

Using the assumptions above as a background, I framed the following research questions to discover the data I needed to find:

- a. How does a phenomenographic approach illuminate how part-time industry practitioner MBA students in Singapore conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as 'effective'?

b. How do the conceptions of these teaching and learning interactions compare with (i) phenomenographic studies on conceptions of effective teaching, and (ii) literature on professional learning?

c. How do the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu illuminate the social and cultural complexities of industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners, which phenomenography cannot?

The first two questions are framed within the context of phenomenography, where the intention is to discover the qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as 'effective'. These conceptions will eventually materialize as categories of description and an outcome space. The third question sits within the context of social practice where Bourdieu's concepts will be used to analyse the conceptions of teaching and learning interactions from the perspective of a socially-situated practice. Hence, the first two questions are aimed at organizing the data while the third is focused on examining the complexities in the conceptions.

5.2.3.1 Selecting the Sample for Data Collection

It was important to ensure the student sample being researched mirrored the demographics of the normal cohort of part-time University of Strathclyde MBA students in Singapore in terms of gender, and local and international student representation. Such a demographic range bolstered the chances of maximising the

possible variations in conceptions of teaching and learning interactions, within the sample (Akerlind, 2005b; Trigwell et al., 1999). To support this requirement, a purposive sample of twenty-four part-time MBA students, comprising a mix of male and female, local as well as expatriate working adults, were selected (Maxwell, 2008; Neuman, 2005). All students are industry practitioners with an average working experience of eight to ten years. The distribution of the sample is illustrated in the table below.

	Local Students	Foreign Students		Total
		Asian	Western	
Male	16	1	2	19
Female	4	0	1	5
Total	20	4		24

Table 1. 1 Demographic Distribution of Sample Participants

The students selected were from cohorts that had already graduated. This was intentionally done in order to mitigate the possibility of power imbalance had they still been my students under my tuition and care (Akerlind, 2005b). Since it was not possible to get the list of students from the University of Strathclyde or YMCA due to data protection regulations, I used the email addresses from the email exchanges I had with these students when they consulted me on their work. I also managed to access additional students through introductions from the students I had interviewed. Each request for an interview was preceded by an email invitation followed by an official invitation, which included the student consent form (please refer to Appendix Two) as

well as participation information (please refer to Appendix Three). A total of fifty-six email requests were sent out, out of which thirty-one emails were rejected as the email addresses were no more current, one student rejected the request, and another twenty-four agreed to be interviewed.

5.2.3.2 Designing and Conducting the Interviews

The various options considered for data collection using a phenomenographic approach included participant observation, written discourse, and interviews. Both observation and written discourse were deemed less suitable for my research as the participants, who had already graduated, were difficult to access due to their work and family commitments. Furthermore, the use of observation raises ethical issues related to reporting what was observed, while written discourse takes time, and generally students find it easier to verbally express and share their experiences rather than write them. Interviews, on the other hand, especially in-depth semi-structured interviews that were more interactive, placed less pressure on the participants, which then created space for understanding through dialogue. Interviews were also relevant given that teaching and learning interactions are socially-situated practices where nuances have to be abstracted from the manner in which these different students articulated their conceptions, much of which are likely to be from tacit knowledge that has been taken-for-granted (Bruce, 1994; Marton, 1988) .

In support of the phenomenographic research design, I employed semi-structured interviews to gather data that allowed me to gain a detailed understanding of

students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions through their own lens. This approach allowed the participants to reflect on their own experiences of teaching and learning interactions and how those interactions influenced their learning or ability to learn (Akerlind, 2005b; Entwistle, 1997). The main aim of the interviews was to get participants to reveal to me the various ways in which they conceptualised teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as being 'effective', and also what these conceptions meant to them from the perspective of professional learning or learning in general. Accordingly, an interview guide (please refer to Appendix Four) was developed as a basic frame for the interview rather than as a rigid set of questions to be followed, as should be the case in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, although Skype was used in three instances as the participants were working in another country at the time of data collection.

Qu and Dumay (2011) and Alvesson (2003) offer three relevant theoretical perspectives of the research interview as a method: neopositivism that focuses on facts; romanticism that attempts to study meaning; and, localism that seeks situated meaning. I decided to adopt a 'localist' position as my intention was to understand participants' views within a socially-situated context, which in this case was teaching and learning interactions. My assumption here was that "social phenomena do not exist independently of people's understanding of them", and my purpose in the interview was to understand why participants conceived experiences as they did (Hammersley, 2007, p. 297). A 'localist' position also helped to mitigate any possible power asymmetry during the interview. In this instance, interviewees were positioned

as active participants in the interview process so the interviews were conducted as conversations or dialogues between peers, rather than as formal sessions between researcher and participant. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes and was digitally audio-recorded with full written consent, following the usual assurances regarding anonymity, confidentiality and secure data storage.

The actual interview process commenced with easing in the participants through 'small talk', to build up an atmosphere of trust, before focusing on their conceptions of effective teaching and learning interactions. Using open-ended questions, participants were asked to describe their varying conceptions of teaching and learning interactions, supported by situated concrete examples. Follow-up open-ended questions allowed further probing to elicit underlying meanings, and also provide participants the opportunity to add perspectives that were previously not covered or omitted. This manner of engaging in the interview as a dialogue allowed me to build on what the participants brought to the conversation, either by delving deeper to understand meaning, or paraphrasing to seek alignment, as the dialogue progressed. The decision on what to probe further was based on the occurrence of specific words or phrases relating to teaching and learning interactions, where I needed more clarity, and I did so by asking students to expand on their understanding of these words and phrases. In a similar manner, the decision to stop probing was made when repetitions in participants' answers were apparent, or when their body language suggested that they really had nothing more to say. As the researcher, I was also cognisant that in phenomenographic research it was inevitable that some form of analysis would be occurring concurrently with the data collection and that some of the analysis would in

some way shape how future data collection unfolded. This implied that there was a constant possibility of my own assumptions of teaching and learning interactions being imposed on my data collection. Therefore, maintaining objectivity was an important requirement where I set aside, or bracketed, my own preconceived notions of effective teaching and learning, while at the same time empathising with the perspective of the student, focusing on the meaning behind the thoughts they were articulating (Akerlind, 2005b). The interviews allowed me to understand the world of these part-time MBA students through their lived experiences of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors as a phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The Skype interviews in particular provided me with a new perspective on face-to-face interviews, as I was initially cautious about using on-line synchronous interviews. Digital technology allowed me to access participants whom I would otherwise have been unable to interview due to geographic separation. Interviews were also conducted at the time of their convenience, and with digital audio recording using in-built recording software. The video feedback allowed me to discern visual cues, therefore reducing any possible qualitative degradation of outcomes when compared to a face-to-face interview, which provided me the assurance I needed as a researcher (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, I also experienced a 'downside' when the video link during one of my Skype interviews failed, which is a real issue with digital technology (Hay-Gibson, 2010). I was basically down to just voice conversation and I could get a sensing at times that the interviewee was distracted, even though I could not be sure, and this affected my own sense of confidence during the interview. Hence, another insight on the importance of paralinguistic cues in managing the interview

space and how this influences the confidence of the interviewer, and perhaps even interviewee, on the validity of the interview process (Chen & Hinton, 1999). In this specific instance, where visual cues were absent, my sensing of the student's continued commitment to the interview was based on the responses to my questions, particularly the tone of the response. I also had an informal chat after the interview to gauge the student's satisfaction with the interview experience.

Interview records were securely stored digitally in an external hard drive as well as in my personal computer, with password protection in accordance to data protection and ethical approval regulations.

5.2.3.3 Transcribing and Organising the Data

Transcription of data was a key start point for effective analysis, and a key decision I had to make was the manner and detail to which the interviews were to be transcribed. At one extreme, a naturalistic mode would have captured every utterance, while at the other end, a denaturalistic mode would have focused on capturing the essence of meaning in which "idiosyncratic elements of speech" were removed from the transcript (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, p. 1273). A phenomenographic approach necessitated the capture of what was said and also some of the linguistic as well as emotional aspects of the conversation that would lend clarity to the interpretation of meaning (Akerlind, 2005b; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Hence, I adopted a denaturalistic approach to lend focus on the substance or meaning

of the content of what was being said by the interviewee. This obviously generated some issues.

One of the key challenges in the interview transcriptions was the interviewees' construction of meaning through the use of slangs, colloquial terms, metaphors, and narratives, peppered with Geo-ethnic accents and poor diction, as many were not native English speakers (Oliver et al., 2005). This was particularly so for local Singaporean students who used Singlish, a hybrid of English and local dialects, which was seamlessly integrated into otherwise normal English dialogue (Gupta, 1998; Woo, 2008). This was further complicated by the common and frequent codeswitching between English, Singlish, and dialects in normal Singaporean communication, which is considered acceptable amongst the general public, and even teachers, despite the official government stand that its use is considered unacceptable in the official domain (Rubdy, 2007). Hence, the way in which meaning was constructed by some of the participants may not be easily understood by native English speakers reading excerpts of the transcript represented in the thesis. It was important therefore that the written research was expressed in a manner that accurately interpreted the "meaning as it was expressed in the findings originating from the data in the source language" (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010, p. 314). I did this by further probing during the interviews to ask questions to clarify parts of the interview that were not clear to me, or might be clear to me but not to the reader.

I transcribed the first eight interviews personally to get a flavour of the key themes and ideas that were prevalent. However, the voluminous nature of each transcript,

which varied on average twenty-five pages each, and trying to run my business while doing my PhD part-time, meant that I had to take a practical approach and so I outsourced the transcription of the remaining interviews. Guidance was given to the transcriber, using the experience I gained from transcribing the interviews myself, to document the interviews verbatim, although I did not require every minor linguistic or emotional aspects to be transcribed. Subsequently, I reviewed the transcripts while listening to the recorded interviews to ensure that the essential elements of each interview had been transcribed (Akerlind, 2005b; Davidson, 2009). It was important that the perspectives documented were grounded in the raw data to ensure that they were based on empirical evidence from the interview transcripts. To further mitigate misinterpretation of the research and to add to the validity of the perspectives captured, participants were allowed to read their respective transcripts to provide respondent validation (Bryman, 1988). Member checking, prior to analysis, also ensured that the data represented in the transcripts was “congruent with participants’ experiences and description of meaning” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). It was also important to ensure that the interviewees were aware of how their interviews would be transcribed, and give them choices for reading and editing their transcripts. All transcripts and extracts used in the actual thesis write up were anonymised to ensure privacy and confidentiality (Creswell, 2002, 2013). The various interviews, which form the major source of data, were supplemented by my research notes, which were taken during and after the interviews. The research notes helped me to focus, as a researcher, and these notes were refined after listening to the audio recordings again (Akerlind, 2005a). These actions allowed me to proceed to the next stage, which was the analysis of the data.

5.2.3.4 Phenomenographic Analysis

There are a number of variations in approaching phenomenographic analysis. Possible approaches that I considered were a Martonian approach of constructing 'pool of meanings' from excerpts taken from the various interview transcripts (Åkerlind, 2012), or dividing transcripts into 'related parts' as Prosser (2000) suggests. A third approach that I considered was one proposed by Bowden (2000), by dealing with the whole transcripts all of the time. I decided on a Martonian approach in order to allow my research to seek meaning units that described the human-world relation to be surfaced. A key critique of this approach is the possibility of a single interview contributing to a category of meaning. To mitigate this possibility, the research was analysed in terms of the "collective conceptions of the participants" of which the individual was just another contributor (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2014, p. 6).

In adopting phenomenography as a methodology, a major challenge was the voluminous amount of data that I needed to interpret and sense make. I completed a total of twenty-four interviews and each generated twelve to fifteen pages of transcribed data, with each script comprising numerous themes. To manage this challenge, I conducted a preliminary analysis of eight transcripts, before looking at the rest, as a basis to analyse the larger sample (Åkerlind, 2005a, 2005b; Åkerlind et al., 2005). There are, however, opposing views of when data analysis should commence. One view is to commence analysis only after all the interview transcripts are completed as this will prevent the researcher from seeking the 'right' answer from subsequent interviews based on the analysis done earlier. An alternate view is to

analyse a sample first before analysing the whole. A third option is to complete transcription of all the interviews, analyse a sample, and then the whole (Åkerlind et al., 2005). I employed the second approach, which was to analyse a sample of transcripts, to establish a preliminary sample set, before analysing the whole set of transcripts, in order to efficiently manage the voluminous data. This was, for me, the most practical approach given the complexity of the data that was collated, and it also gave me confidence to proceed as I saw themes emerging with the initial set of transcripts.

The actual analysis was conducted in two stages, with the first stage involving phenomenographic analysis of the transcripts to discover conceptions of teaching and learning interactions as described by the sample students. In the second stage I used Bourdieu's concepts to unearth complexities in the conceptions that might have been lost due to the decontextualised nature of phenomenography.

My approach to phenomenographic analysis was guided largely by the works of Akerlind (2005b; 2012) and Marton (1986; 1997). I focused on individual transcripts to identify themes related to students' conceptions of ways of experiencing teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors as being 'effective'. Transcripts were viewed as a whole as it comprises a set of inter-related meanings that are contextualised within the transcript. Specifically, I was looking for words or phrases that were relevant to teaching and learning interactions, based on the context when those words and phrases were made. These were marked and extracted as I went through each transcript. Specific quotes that reflected the flavour of the meaning

behind these selected words and phrases were also sieved out. Eventually, the sum of the selected quotes from all the transcripts formed the data base for analysis. Quotes were examined as a data pool, shifting away from the individual transcripts to identify 'pool of meanings' embedded in the quotes. Hence, relevant quotes represent not just the 'pool of meanings' that were present in the quotes but also the context of the interviews. In a sense, the 'pool of meanings' represent data that relates to the individual as well as the collective. The 'pool of meanings' were then grouped into similar sets to identify second order descriptions that would represent the qualitatively different conceptions of teaching and learning interactions. As evidence of conceptions started emerging, I referred these back to the transcripts to ensure alignment with the content within the transcripts. These conceptions were organised as categories of description, which represented commonality among transcripts within a conception. Where there was a conflict between the categories and what was represented in the transcripts, the categories were adjusted so that they were an accurate representation of the data in the transcripts. This entire sequence of events was an iterative process where the data was revisited and the categories of description refined. On average, each transcript was read between six to eight times. Eventually, I narrowed the results down to four qualitatively different conceptions. The finalised categories were adjusted to ensure that they were logically related structurally and referentially (Åkerlind, 2012).

Summary notes were used for each of the transcripts to consolidate insights on possible themes, which then allowed me to re-visit transcripts to refine these themes, and to identify categories of description (please refer to Appendix Seven) and their

relationships. As I went through the various transcripts to flesh out themes and supporting quotations, it felt like I was seeing more of the same themes recurring, especially after about eighteen transcripts. This was an indication that I was approaching theoretical saturation, where the amount of data that could be found to develop meaningful categories of description were diminishing and the limited number of variations had been identified (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1968). To mitigate concerns regarding analytical rigour, I decided to conduct the analysis in chunks, not attempting to analyse more than two transcripts at a time initially, to prevent analysis 'fatigue' and possible bias as a result. The aim was to ensure that every analysis session was a fresh start (Åkerlind et al., 2005). I had to ensure that I bracketed out any preconceived notions I had of teaching and learning interactions, by stepping in and out of the process and crossing the boundaries between being an insider and an outsider, to reflect on my own influence on the research (Jönsson & Lukka, 2005). In particular, I was wary not to marginalise or consider erroneous any views shared by the interviewees just because they did not conform to my world view as a previous part-time MBA student. I disengaged from the data every couple of transcripts to ensure that I looked at every transcript from a fresh perspective, as far as I could to stay objective, and avoid complacency and just try to complete the coding of the themes. I also sought alternative opinions on the preliminary category of descriptions and outcome spaces from my Supervisors and some of my fellow PhD cohort members to mitigate my possible bias as a researcher. Finally, it was important that I clearly articulated the detailed process, as I am attempting to do in this chapter, to let the reader have a sense of confidence that I have exercised due diligence as a researcher to ensure that my findings were as a result of my discoveries from the data

rather than data moulded as a consequence of my pre-conceptions (Akerlind, 2005b; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

The categories of description and their relationships formed outcome spaces, which surfaced directly from the data. The accrued insights were overlaid with my own judgment during the analysis as a researcher (Akerlind, 2005a; Dortins, 2002). The outcome space allowed the articulation of the “span of generative possibilities”, or the qualitatively different ways of relating to the phenomenon of teaching and learning within teaching and learning interactions (Ekeblad & Bond, 1994, p. 155). I also had to ensure that the associated categories of description demonstrated hierarchical inclusiveness to be valid, which meant that the categories of description shared a hierarchical relationship where ‘lower’ categories were sub-sets of ‘higher’ ones. I concluded my analysis when I felt that there were no new insights from the iterations, which meant that data saturation or redundancy had been achieved (Åkerlind et al., 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997).

While phenomenography provides a certain degree of order to the messiness in the data, it does not fully bring out the aspect of teaching and learning interactions as socially-situated practices. In particular, the decontextualised nature of phenomenography does not adequately surface the complexities behind students’ conceptions, such as those shaped by cultural or experiential nuances. Hence, in the second phase of the analysis, the qualitatively different ways in which these part-time MBA students conceptualised their teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors as being ‘effective’ were examined against Bourdieu’s concepts of *field*,

habitus, capital, and doxa. In particular, the intention was to understand the specific complexities of these conceptions, in this context of the nuances associated with industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners, that are not fully captured through phenomenography. This part of the analysis will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

5.2.3.5 Using Phenomenography as an Approach for this Research

Teaching and learning are relational, and in graduate management education this means the interaction between the practitioner students and practitioner faculty in teaching and learning interactions. If we can understand that relation, or the qualitatively different ways in which these practitioner students conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with their practitioner faculty being 'effective', then we can improve teaching and learning practice which is the main motivation for this research (Marton, 1986). Furthermore, phenomenography provides order to the data in the form of categories of description, and the outcome space provides a means of examining the experiences in a collective and holistic manner, that was empirically derived, rather than one that is hypothetical or philosophical. This mitigates the potential confusion that arises when looking at the data independently where different people perceive the phenomenon differently and also in different contexts, and it enables understanding the qualitatively, and limited, number of ways that a phenomenon can be experienced by the specific sample that was analysed (Åkerlind, 2012). It is also important to note that the phenomenographic approach has already been widely used as an established methodology in higher educational research, and

is gaining traction as a research approach in other disciplines, which further supports its use in my research (Prosser et al., 2000; Tight, 2012; Yates et al., 2012).

5.3 Research Challenges

There were four issues that had a direct impact on my research, specifically: power asymmetry between the respondents and myself as the researcher; memory and experience recall; my perception and objectivity as a researcher; and, the generalisability of my research findings. I will now discuss each in detail.

5.3.1 Power Asymmetry

A major issue that was not quite apparent to me initially was the potential power asymmetry between myself, as the researcher, and the respondents, who were my students. I had assumed that power would not be a major issue because these students had graduated and therefore did not have any formal association with me as their Local Counsellor. Power does exist, however, not only in the research relationship between the researcher and the researched, but also in the entire research process (Brinkmann, 2007; Thapar-Björkert & Henry, 2004). This power relationship was also influenced by the fact that I shared the common experience of being a student in a part-time MBA environment, which potentially induced a certain level of bias on my part (Berger, 2015). There were three specific facets of this power asymmetry that I have reflected upon and would now like to discuss.

Firstly, power asymmetry between the researcher and research participant is a natural state that is always present (Brinkmann, 2007; Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009; Kvale, 2006). This is particularly so in a Singaporean culture where deference to the teacher as an authority is quite normal, a conception that is derived from actual student experiences in their education that continue to subtly exist even after the teacher-student relationship has formally ended (Oyserman, 2011). Non-Singaporeans who were of Asian origin shared a similar orientation, while the few students who were from the West were cautious given the classroom atmosphere or their socialisation while working in Singapore.

Secondly, the interview conversation was not a “dominance-free dialogue between two equal partners”, even though I had made every attempt to conduct the interviews as conversations (Kvale, 2006, p. 484). Furthermore, the specific area of research, which I determined, set the boundaries for the conversation. As a researcher, I decided on the selection of participants, who did not have any direct influence on their selection. Furthermore, I also determined the scope of the research, without participants’ involvement. In many instances during the interviews I had to ‘steer’ the conversation back to what the design had intended when participants ‘strayed’, sometimes because they probably did not understand the question fully or clearly (Brinkmann, 2007; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

Finally, even though my research seeks to give voice to the participants, it is I, as the researcher who gains in real terms, in a rather skewed manner, because I would eventually decide how I interpreted and represented the participants’ views. It was

not my intention to represent every voice, nor distort these voices as that would not do justice to the research. My intention was to use my voice to represent the voices of the participants (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

However, the hierarchical power relationship between researcher and participant does not always exist as “fixed stereotypical roles” (Thapar-Björkert & Henry, 2004, p. 364). These roles may vary from the positivist view of the researcher being the neutral observer, where the researcher and researched maintain mutually exclusive roles, to the constructivist paradigm where the power between the researcher and the researched shifts based on context. During many instances in this research, power was in the hands of the participants, particularly in the early stages of the research, where I was dependent on participants’ consent to participate. This allowed the participants to seek more information, and many negotiated the research and research process, which resulted in my original schedule having to be adjusted. During the data collection phase of the research, the participants continued to wield power, though implicitly, by deciding what information was shared even though I had established the parameters of the questions. There was one instance where participants decided to terminate the interview altogether after agreeing to meet up on the email (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

An important aspect of mitigating this power imbalance was to first recognise the moral obligation and responsibility I carried, as the researcher, and to anticipate potential harm to the participants that may arise as a result of my research. The obvious starting point, therefore, was to ensure that the participants had the choice

first to decide to participate in the research, and then have an avenue of withdrawal through mutual agreement (Elwood & Martin, 2000; Forbat & Henderson, 2005). This strategy worked as all twenty-four students who agreed to participate in my research completed their interview obligations. In an attempt to further reduce this possible dominance I allowed the participants to have a look at and provide inputs on the completed transcripts of their interviews (Brinkmann, 2007; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Kvale, 2006). This allowed the participants to clarify views that I may not have understood and recorded correctly, which then allowed power to be handed over to the participant. Although only six of the twenty-four participants provided inputs on their transcripts, it was a deliberate choice that they exercised having been given the opportunity to do so.

5.3.2 Memory and Experience Recall

One of my original concerns when designing the research was memory and experience recall, particularly where memory of past experiences is subject to lapses or changes over time, since students' experiences are a "retrospective recall of an event rather than a measure recorded at the time of the reported event" (Koenig-Lewis, Asaad, Palmer, & Petersone, 2016, p. 63). Participants' memory of events and experiences depended on how they encoded, stored and retrieved the information associated with their experience. The accuracy of such memory was also dependent on the dissonance between how new experiences were encoded in relation to the manner in which they captured past experiences through mental structures known as schemata (Roediger, Gallo, & Eisen, 2002). The narrower the dissonance, the greater the chance of

experience retention and accurate memory recall. Therefore, an important aspect of the validity of this research was the ability of the participants, who had graduated a year or more prior to the interviews, to be able to recall accurately their experiences and feelings about their teaching and learning interactions when they were part-time MBA students. However, it was also important to understand that these “memory events” were subject to various factors that either enhanced or reduced their ability to recall these experiences accurately (Roediger et al., 2002, p. 4).

A key factor is the part-time student status of my research participants. In full-time higher education, the university can be viewed as a “social milieu” where many interactions occur between students, their peers, faculty as well as administrative support staff (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2016, p. 61). In such an environment, the students’ mood or affective state, both during actual experiences as well as in subsequent recall, has an enhancing or impeding impact on the accuracy of that memory recall depending on the state in which those experiences were coded and stored (Bower, 1981; Lewis & Critchley, 2003). However, the participants in this study were part-time postgraduate students holding full-time employment as industry practitioners. They did not experience the same level or intensity of full-time university social experiences, even as alumnus. These adults operated in two worlds; the classroom or the world of theory, and the workplace, or the world of practice. While straddling these worlds they contended with the dynamics of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, and the associated congruence or dissonance of those experiences with the workplace. Therefore, their experiences of effective teaching and learning were shaped not just by teaching and learning interactions, but also their experiences

interacting with their peers in the classroom and in social settings. The latter, arguably, has a more enduring impact on students' positive orientations towards conceptions of teaching and learning in a part-time MBA programme (Berger & Milem, 1999). An added dimension to this insight is the positive co-relation between the maturity of these students and their orientation towards their academic experiences because of the potential post-degree opportunities in career and personal development (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2016). Research seems to suggest that such a positive affective state raises the accuracy of memory recall, which then mitigates validity concerns of those recalled experiences stated in this study (Ahn, Liu, & Soman, 2009; Bower, 1981; Lewis & Critchley, 2003).

Research also suggests that sometimes, false memories occur. This means that the experience recalled either never occurred, or the experience occurred differently from the manner in which it was recalled. Such false memories occur quite readily because individuals also attempt to try to fill in gaps, by constructing meaning, as they proceed to recall experiences, or what is also known as "reconstructive memory" (Lewis & Critchley, 2003, pp. 803-812). Mood, at the time of the experience, may also result in "imaginative constructions" due to the associated bias with which that experience may have been coded and stored (Bower, 1981, p. 139). Hence, the need for these participants to contextualise their experiences through descriptive examples as part of the research interview.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors being 'effective', was defined as the

process of teaching and learning that resulted in teaching and learning interactions being perceived as 'effective' or not, rather than the resultant qualification itself. The research focused on the experiences and feelings as a result of teaching and learning interactions. Therefore, when these students were asked to reflect on their experiences during teaching and learning interactions, it was important for me to understand that their conceptions of why they embarked on a specific action was likely to act as a filter for their recall of experiences, because retrospective recall of strategically selected moments affected how experiences were recalled from memory (Cowley, 2008). Since accuracy of memory recall was a universal occurrence with all the sample students interviewed, this research also accepted that the accuracy of memory recall would be a limitation that had to be understood within the context of the findings arising from the research.

5.3.3 Perception and Objectivity as a Researcher

My perception and objectivity as a researcher was another design issue I had to contend with. This is because humans are "inference machines" that construct the world and our experiences related to that world through what is implied through those experiences (Roediger et al., 2002, p. 12). Following this reasoning, my perceptions of the world of the part-time MBA student have been somewhat shaped by my own experiences as a part-time MBA student. These experiences have also shaped the way I teach, focusing on what I considered as effective teaching and leaving out what I thought not. I also acknowledge that my experiences and perceptions might inevitably influence the findings based on my views of what is considered good or bad teaching.

Hence, objectivity as a researcher continued to be a key area of concern, as I needed to be aware of my own biases, as a researcher, and conscious of not imposing those biases on the research (Brinkmann, 2007; Eisner, 1992).

My status in the research as an 'insider' was also potential source of bias. Although I am only a part-time faculty of the University of Strathclyde, I have been an actor in teaching and learning interactions that I have been researching, and therefore have experiences related to that context. Such a position both disadvantaged as well as advantaged the research. On one hand, I had concerns, and legitimately so, on the level of impartiality that I have exercised in the research interviews as well as the analysis process (Darra, 2008). On the other hand, my understanding of organisational culture, as well as the disposition of the students in the study, allowed me to interpret the findings from a very unique perspective, which meant that my findings are grounded on "messy and difficult to access multiple realities of organisational life" (Smyth & Holian, 2008, pp. 36-37).

In theory, objectivity required me to make a succinct distinction between being objective versus striving to do so but in reality it was not that simple (Eisner, 1992). Concepts of objectivity and impartiality are learned as we mature morally as individuals, way before we actually become researchers, hence objectivity is in itself an ethical concept (Brinkmann, 2007; MacIntyre, 1978). It is not an 'if' but a 'must'. Objectivity also meant that as a researcher I had to step outside the data, viewing the data as a third party would, and yet my own experiences challenged my ability "to skip between the worlds of interest and disinterest" (Linsteadl, 1994, p. 1322). I

realised that these worlds were somewhat inseparable, which added to the challenge of maintaining objectivity.

Madill, Jordan, and Shirley (2000) argue that objectivity in educational research has frequently been challenged as being unable to produce knowledge that is objective or reliable. This is because the subjectivity of knowledge will likely to be seen as being influenced by the participants' understanding of the questions raised during the research interview, my own interpretation of the data, and the cultural context and nuances that were prevalent in that research relationship. The influence of cultural artefacts such as the roles, rules and expectations in an interview between the participants and myself cannot be understated where "contextual cues automatically and non-consciously activate the relevant cultural mind-set" which shaped perception, reasoning, and response (Oyserman, 2011, p. 165). Hence, I acknowledge that any form of knowledge produced, such as my cognition of the categories of description and the outcome space, was inherently subjective, although I have made every attempt to ensure that these knowledge products were grounded in data from the participants' interviews.

To stretch the argument further, objectivity, as Eisner (1992, p. 14) suggests, could also be described as an "unrealisable ideal", as there is no such things as pure objectivity because even an outsider conducting research carries some type of bias. The reality is that there is no single way of looking at and making sense of a phenomenon. The knowledge created as a result of my interaction with the participants through the interviews could never be absolutely objective. Bearing this

assumption in mind, I felt that it was probably more pragmatic to embrace the fact that the multiple voices in the interviews provided multiple perspectives, and my voice and perception as a researcher, which was translated during the analysis, just added richness to the eventual outcome (Berger, 2015; Dowling, 2006).

I acknowledge, therefore, that central to good qualitative research is the practice of reflexivity, which was about exercising awareness of how my own position influenced the knowledge created from the research. Reflexivity allowed me to remain in an objective space through an iterative and continual process of reflection on the research, the research process, and outcomes. This rigorous process provided me the framework to manage the tensions that arose from my positional transitions between insider and outsider. To facilitate this I kept a research diary that articulated my research journey and recorded my decisions, and the rationale for those decisions (Berger, 2015; Dowling, 2006; Newton, Rothlingova, Gutteridge, LeMarchand, & Raphael, 2011).

I had considered respondent validation of analysis as a possible way of maintaining objectivity, as that would mitigate possible errors in my interpretation of participants' views. My challenge, however, was that the analysis was targeted at a larger audience rather than the specific concerns or area of interest of the specific respondents. Therefore, I adopted a middle ground of sorts by allowing the respondents to view and edit their transcripts to ensure that their world view has been captured accurately (Mays & Pope, 2000; Rodriguez, 1999).

5.3.4 Generalisability of My Research Findings

The final issue I grappled with in this research is the generalisability of the research findings. Maxwell (1992, p. 293) argues that the notion of generalisability suggests that the qualitatively different ways in which students in this study perceive teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' may be applied to other part-time MBA situations; therefore, the nature of my research was focused primarily on understanding the "particulars rather than generalising to universals". Hence, I adopted a realist approach to validity and generalisability, acknowledging that it was not possible to eliminate errors in a scientific manner as one would in a quantitative study, as the qualitative research process is inductive in nature. As this research was a focused study of students in Singapore undertaking the University of Strathclyde part-time MBA programme, it was anticipated, therefore, that the findings would be specifically relevant to the University and its stakeholders, with possible implications for similarly run internationalised part-time MBA programmes in Singapore.

The robustness of internal generalisability was assured by exercising reflexivity. I was always cognisant that the relationship between the respondent and myself, as the researcher, had an impact on what was actually said during the interview, versus what that respondent would have said in another situation responding to the same question. I was also cognisant that most of my interpretation of what was said in the interview was based largely on the recording of the interview and the transcription, as the actual interview was only a small part of my ability to understand the respondent's world. I was conscious of ensuring the flow from "logic-in-use" to "reconstructed logic"

from the initial coding of the transcripts, to the derived themes, to the final structural and referential outcomes in the analysis, so that they were not disconnected (Maxwell, 1992, p. 296). Hence, I used my 'voice' to selectively articulate the 'voice of the respondents', rather than trying to make all the respondents' voices heard. I used their voice to build my argument.

5.4 My Reflections on the Research Experience

In this Chapter, I have described my ontological and epistemological assumptions that shaped the design of my research, the design considerations in terms of the selection of my data sample, the methods employed during the interview process, and also how I went about transcribing and analysing the data. The discussion also briefly discussed the merits and challenges of a phenomenographic approach and how Bourdieu was used to elicit the complexities in the conceptions that might have been lost in phenomenography. I also discussed some of the challenges I faced both in the design phase as well as in the execution of the research and analysis, namely, power asymmetry, memory and experience recall, my objectivity as a researcher, and the generalisability of my research findings.

I had started out with a clear research schedule that was rather linear in form. What I came to learn was that the actual research process threw that plan out the window the moment it was approved. There were many 'uncontrollable' factors that I had not considered in my original design, the most important of which was the availability of the research participants for the actual interviews. These were busy adults with even

busier schedules, so responses were sometimes slow, and interview appointments had sometimes to be rescheduled. This was made more challenging as I too am a part-time PhD student running my own business, so these changes in schedules had to be considered in tandem with my own schedule and the research timeline I had set for myself. Eventually, the original timeline slipped and the only way to get back on track was to adopt a 'circular' schedule, where interviewing, transcribing, and the writing up of my initial chapters were overlapped and reorganised as changes occurred.

Grappling to find time to conduct the research amidst running my business also meant that there were significant gaps when I had to 'put down my pen' to focus on the business. Oddly, this was somehow serendipitous in its outcome as reconnecting with my research, after several weeks' break, also forced me to question work that was previously completed. The lapse in time made previous work seemingly foreign as I had to digest my written work and notes with my readings, and this is where the journal was helpful. These were the refreshing times when I was momentarily an outsider looking in, which enhanced my attempts to be as objective as possible in my research.

At the heart of the research, however, was a constant reminder to myself about the sanctity of being an ethical researcher. To me, being ethical in the research process, and outcome, goes beyond just consent, confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants and their data. It was also very much about respecting the fact that these ex-students have, of their own volition, given up time for my research. Hence, my burden of ensuring the exercise of professionalism in the research process for these

participants which included the 'little' things like the preciseness of my attachments in the emails, making sure that the interview location was conducive for the interview, and being punctual and ready for the interview (Darra, 2008).

In this Chapter I discussed the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind phenomenography as a research approach, the major critique associated with phenomenography, its actual implementation in the conduct of the research, and how the decontextualised nature of knowledge discovered in the form of conceptions could be further unravelled using Bourdieu's theoretical lens. I also briefly discussed some of the methodological challenges associated with designing and conducting the research. The next Chapter will delve into the four conceptions of teaching and learning interactions in detail to add further clarity on the nature of these conceptions and how they influence notions of effectiveness.

6 Chapter Six Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions Being 'Effective'

6.1 The Four Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions Being 'Effective'

Chapter Six sets out to scrutinise the data from the interviews in greater detail in order to seek answers for the first research question in this thesis. It is important to reiterate that these conceptions sit within a context where industry practitioners, who are part-time MBA students, are engaged in graduate management teaching and learning interactions with Local Counsellors who are practitioner-tutors. Both parties carry with them credible work experience and professional industry knowledge, which sets them as 'first amongst equals'. This is distinctly different from a context of traditional student-teacher interaction in similar teaching and learning interactions in higher education or professional education, where students are distinctly less knowledgeable than their teachers. Hence, four categories of description were derived in total, each of which describe the qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as 'effective'. The specific conceptions are as follow:

- a. Conception 1: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor is an experienced and competent industry professional and practitioner-tutor;

- b. Conception 2: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor provides adequate information and knowledge to address the concerns and knowledge gaps of students;

- c. Conception 3: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor engages and develops students during teaching and learning interactions to become self-directed learners through interactive dialogue and peer learning; and

- d. Conception 4: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor mobilises knowledge for workplace effectiveness and professional development.

The four conceptions of teaching and learning being 'effective' form a nested hierarchy (Ashwin, 2005). These conceptions represent an "increasing breadth of awareness", which would mean that the more complex ways of experiencing teaching and learning interactions as being effective would constitute a higher degree of awareness of that phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2008, p. 635). Hence, students who conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as workplace effectiveness and professional development (Conception 4) are also likely to share Conceptions 1, 2 and 3. This accounts for the recurrence of insights from Conception 1 in the other three conceptions. However, students who adopt Conception 1 are unlikely to conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as described in Conceptions 2 to 4.

The following table illustrates the outcome space where the structural and referential relationships between these conceptions are presented.

		Structural Aspects of Conceptions			
Referential Aspects of Conceptions		Effective Local Counsellor	Information and Knowledge to Complete Assessment	Developing Self-Directed Learners	Workplace Application and Personal Growth
	Qualities of Local Counsellor	1			
	Experiences During Teaching and Learning Interactions		2	3	
	Learning and Development				4

Table 1. 2 Outcome Space for Students' Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Interactions as Being 'Effective'

The qualitatively different ways of experiencing teaching and learning interactions as being 'effective' were derived from the pool of meanings related to students' understanding of the qualities of the Local Counsellor, the students' experiences during teaching and learning interactions, and students' conceptualisation of learning. These understandings were based on a combination of students' actual experiences, both positive and negative, as well as their desired expectations, shaped by past experiences as students as well as industry practitioners.

Conception 1 is distinct from the remaining categories of description in that it represents, from the students' understanding, the most rudimentary aspect of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', which is the competence and qualities of the Local Counsellor. As industry practitioners in their own right, students

expect to be taught by Local Counsellors who are also competent industry practitioners. In addition to being current in their industry knowledge and experience, Local Counsellors are also expected to be as competent in their pedagogical skills and knowledge, which are necessary traits to be able to bridge theory and practice in a manner that makes sense to these students.

Conceptions 2 and 3 represent experiences during the actual process of industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners, where the desired qualities of the Local Counsellor, as described in Conception 1, are manifested in teaching and learning interactions. Conception 2 suggests that students conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with the Local Counsellors being 'effective' when they are provided relevant and adequate information and knowledge that contribute to the completion of MBA assessment requirements. Despite their status as industry practitioners who possess domain experience and knowledge, these students view their role in the interaction as passive participants, just extracting information and knowledge from the industry knowledge and experience of the Local Counsellor. In Conception 3, students conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as being 'effective' when they are able to actively participate and contribute to these interactions in a meaningful manner, through interactive dialogues and peer learning. This conception suggests that effectiveness is a collaborative outcome where both students and the Local Counsellor leverage on their mutual industry experience and knowledge for common gain.

Conception 4 describes a learning and development orientation, where students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors being 'effective' when the knowledge gained during these interactions leads to an enduring impact on students' workplace effectiveness and professional development. This conception emphasises the value students place on the importance of growing their professional knowledge and experience, as worthy industry practitioners, in a manner that opens up opportunities at the workplace and beyond.

The findings suggest that the greatest influence on students understanding teaching and learning as being 'effective' occurs during the actual process of teaching and learning interactions. This is not surprising because the most intimate contact time between students and the Local Counsellor occurs during these interactions. Also, unlike the lecturers from the University of Strathclyde, who focus on content delivery, the Local Counsellors focus on teaching and learning with an assessment and developmental focus, which perhaps have a greater impact on students. Nevertheless, the Local Counsellor who determines the teaching and learning interaction experience, and the enduring impact of that engagement on workplace and application and professional development cannot be ignored in shaping students' experiences.

The remainder of this Chapter will delve into each of these conceptions in detail to provide a better understanding of students' expectations. The various conceptions are each supported by quotations from students interviewed. These quotations provide context to their feelings, emotions and expectations that contribute to their specific

understanding of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', hence the conception that is being described. As the conceptions were constituted through phenomenographic analysis of all the interviews within this research, it is unlikely that a single quotation would accurately describe each specific conception. The quotations are therefore not supposed to describe the conceptions perfectly but to provide sufficient context to understand the students' conceptions of 'effective' teaching and learning.

6.2 The Meaning Behind These Conceptions

Conception 1: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor is an experienced and competent industry professional and practitioner-tutor.

Students adopting Conception 1 viewed the Local Counsellor as the fundamental component, or a nexus of sorts, in teaching and learning interactions that assured the effectiveness of these interactions. This conception is premised primarily on the qualities of the Local Counsellor as a professional industry practitioner, which comprises his or her competence, as well as characteristics or traits that are critical for effective teaching and learning interactions.

The key expectation is that the Local Counsellor is a competent and skilled practitioner-tutor, who possesses industry and subject matter expertise. This is reflected in the expectation that the Local Counsellor has a deep understanding of the

subject matter and content.

“I think I expected the tutor to be really the subject expert for one.” (p. T16-4)

“I expected the tutor to be much more experienced, have a much wider grasp and a much larger understanding of the topic that they are teaching.” (p. T7-5)

This subject matter expertise was necessarily coupled with the need for the Local Counsellor to possess industry experience and currency, which meant he or she possessed the credibility to provide contemporary industry examples to support theory rather than just being an academic who regurgitated dated examples and case studies.

“Of course preferably he is in that industry so that examples can be cited and with enough industrial experience coupled with teaching experience I thought that the tutor would be able to synergise the experience with examples that most of the students would be able to relate to.” (p. T1-3)

This desired industry currency of the Local Counsellor was motivated by students' need to be plugged into the latest thinking and trends in the industry, as they were also current industry practitioners themselves.

“So I am not sure it's a fair comment at the same time but what I really expected of the tutor back then was this. You have cutting edge, you are right there

where things are happening, and you are providing good insights on how...well, at the very least, they are locals right...how Singapore is being shifted by all these economic movements.” (p. T7-5)

These expectations of the Local Counsellor’s professional competence are not surprising since these working adults have committed a significant amount of time and money attending the part-time MBA programme after work. Therefore, as industry practitioners, they would expect to be engaged by Local Counsellors who really know what they are talking about because of their experience, deep expertise and tacit knowledge, and industry track record.

However, industry experience and subject matter expertise by itself would not be sufficient if the Local Counsellor was not able to convey that knowledge effectively. As a baseline, the Local Counsellor is expected to be as academically competent as his University of Strathclyde counterpart (referred to as “formal lecturers”), if not more.

“But I feel that the tutor role should not be limited. They should have a knowledge as good as the formal lecturers ...” (p. T2-7)

This notion of academic competence also presumes the possession of the necessary pedagogical skills and experience to teach their subject content, particularly when engaging mature students with significant work experience.

“Why am I saying that is because, ya, some tutors might be really experienced in their field but if they do not have enough experience in teaching they might not be able to give examples that some students who are not of that particular discipline to really appreciate. So I think it is like experience in both the teaching aspect as well the industry.” (p. T1-3)

There is also a subtle hint that academic and teaching competence should be the Local Counsellor’s personal endeavour, or responsibility even, to continuously acquire and hone such skills, rather than be expected to be trained formally.

“I also reckon that teaching is not something that comes with you when you are born. How shall I say...you have to somehow or rather train yourself to be able to teach and you have to know that you are not teaching a bunch of kids or teenagers who are just wanting to get knowledge. These people wanting to get experiences so that they don’t have to go through themselves to suffer the pain.” (p. T21-3)

Hence, as a practising industry practitioner, the Local Counsellor is expected to be someone who seeks to continuously hone his or her own skills to keep abreast of the latest industry trends, understanding that the audience are adult students who are also practising industry practitioners themselves. Such an expectation reinforces the notion of a skilled and competent practitioner-tutor. This perspective seems to indicate a distinction between tutoring younger students (hence the phrase “bunch of

kids”) and the more mature adult students (“These people...”) who are working industry practitioners.

The presumption of competence seems to be, nevertheless, accorded by students to the Local Counsellor due to his or her experience and seniority.

“The fact that guy is there as a tutor he has probably done his time so he deserves some respect”. (p. T9-6)

There seems to be a presumption that ‘time served’ as a Local Counsellor, and as an industry practitioner, equates to some degree of associated competence, which students respect, and is perhaps a judgment drawn from students’ past experiences in education, or perhaps even the workplace.

Possession and acquisition of academic and teaching skills and experience are nested within an expectation of conversance with curriculum as well as the assessment standards and criteria, as eventually teaching and learning, no matter how effective, come to nought if students do not understand what they are taught, and therefore are unable to fulfil the assessment requirements for the MBA programme.

“So local tutor, in my opinion, needs to know what is essential... ‘Essential’ means to me, for me in this particular example what is the essential to pass the MBA. So what is the bar here, what is essential, what do I need to know and what is nice to know.” (p. T20-2)

There are also a number of desired characteristics or traits, the possession of which alludes to the ability of the Local Counsellor to effectively connect with students and hence build the required relationships necessary for teaching and learning interactions to be 'effective'. Empathy is one such quality that students consider as a necessary trait that enables the Local Counsellor to connect with students and understand their status as industry practitioners in their own right. Students feel that their part-time adult student status earns them the right to be treated in a manner that recognises their multiple roles as student, employee, and parent, and in that same vein some latitude when it comes to issues like assignment deadlines.

"He also has to be empathetic, of course." (p. T9-8)

"Sometimes due to obvious reasons we may not be as fully committed to the course or following up in our assignments. I think tutors have to understand that, and also give that kind of understanding and respect for all the students, because no adult student wants to be treated like kids." (p. T11-6)

Empathy as a trait establishes the basis by which the Local Counsellor sets out to understand students' learning needs, which would then also set the tone for content delivery.

"Understanding the learning needs of the students. That would be the first step for me. So the question should be asked "what you guys want to learn?"
(p. T20-4)

Another desired quality is the approachability of the Local Counsellor who, for the students, is the only real point of contact in Singapore, and perhaps the only real bridge to the University.

“I think in a nutshell, he should have an approachable personality, and able to communicate effectively to the different adult learners...” (p. T1-10)

Approachability is very much about the personality that the Local Counsellor exudes, which could be a tall order given that it sometimes has to do with physical attributes.

“But I think if you are relaxed lecturer, the student may be more acceptable than a lecturer that is stoned faced.” (p. T4-6)

Nevertheless, simple gestures like smiling, being attentive to students’ needs, and generally being ‘safe’ to approach are manifestations of such a trait.

However, approachability is also necessarily coupled with accessibility since the tutorial delivery construct has limited face-to-face touch points. So, there is an expectation that the Local Counsellor is one who is open to students communicating with him or her, as and when required, through whatever means available.

“...be available to engage with the student... Which means to be contactable, for clarification purposes... Yes, email is fine, as long as contactable. So if there are clarifications or doubts.” (p. T18-3)

The Local Counsellor, therefore, represents the immediate conduit for students' queries and needs in relation to the assessments. Given that these students are juggling multiple roles, and that they have limited time to discuss and put together workplace assignments, characteristics such as responsiveness provide assurance that students will always have sufficient time to meet the assessment deadlines, as and when such situations occur.

"I expect the LC to be contactable via email and to respond within reasonable time to answer my queries on whatever I had with regards to the project."

(p. T13-9)

The Local Counsellor's openness was another quality that enabled him or her to seek innovative ways of challenging and growing students cognitively. The Local Counsellor is expected to be open-minded and not fixated on stereotypical notions of students' ideas and feedback. Open-mindedness provides students assurance that they would be treated as industry practitioners with experience and not inexperienced undergraduates.

"...I personally feel that the tutor has to got to be open minded. It's important not to always think that the tutor's point of view is the correct one then the only way." (p. T15-4)

Another quality that students expect of their Local Counsellors is a sense of passion, both as an industry professional as well as a practitioner-tutor. A passionate Local

Counsellor is viewed as one who is not just professional, but who possesses the resolve to ensure that teaching and learning interactions are enriching experiences for students.

“It’s when you can sense the passion coming through from the counsellor or tutor and they bring theory to life, in application, and they are able to cite perhaps working examples, and life example in the way they handle certain things, for example in OM, operations or marketing, in things they see in the open market, ya.” (p. T18-8)

Passion, then, is the necessary ‘fuel’ to engender learning given that students attend classes after a long day at work.

Humility is another quality that students expect of their Local Counsellors. They are particularly inspired by Local Counsellors who possess the humility to be subordinated to students’ latent expertise, accrued from their workplace experience and knowledge, so that students feel they are fellow industry practitioners.

“And it takes a lot of confidence, I think, for someone to put themselves in that role, and going from the perspective of, you know, ‘I don’t know everything, and therefore I’m going to be that platform that enables you all to learn from each other’.” (p. T22-6)

Although not an explicit expectation, altruism seemed to be a quality desired in Local Counsellors. Students conceived Local Counsellors who were prepared to go above and beyond their call of duty to serve the students' needs as exceptional individuals who taught because of their love for teaching.

“Because the teacher he is, I believe he is, paid to teach for these number of hours, right? Anything beyond that he, it's not, he's not really obliged to do. But if he puts in that extra effort, it shows that he is more dedicated in his work and more responsible.” (p. T24-15)

In Conception 1, the students conceptualise the Local Counsellor as the core element of the notion of effectiveness. He or she is viewed as the lynch pin that ensures that teaching and learning interactions are 'effective'. This conception is anchored on the traits and qualities that the Local Counsellor is expected to possess, from the 'hard' qualities such as industry currency and competence, and pedagogical competence, to the 'softer' qualities like empathy, approachability, humility, and open-mindedness. These expectations stem from students' personal orientations and expectations as industry practitioners who expect to be taught by Local Counsellors who exceed them as industry professionals. Hence, in Conception 1, students conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as 'effective' when he or she meets all these 'hard' and 'soft' expectations.

Conception 2: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor provides adequate information and knowledge to address the concerns and knowledge gaps of students.

Students adopting Conception 2 seem to adopt a utilitarian lens to gauge teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors as being 'effective'. Teaching and learning interactions are conceived as functional processes, driven by the Local Counsellor, where students are merely passive participants. This is despite students perceiving themselves as industry practitioners with requisite domain knowledge and experience to be able to participate more actively in these interactions; there is an absence of collaboration or co-construction. It is about the students being able to get what they 'need' to navigate the MBA programme successfully and this is manifested in a number of ways.

A major theme in Conception 2 is the importance of the provision of and access to information and knowledge related to the overall MBA programme. Students, especially in the early part of their MBA journey, are particularly anxious about the programme construct and completion, bearing in mind that many have returned to formal education after a long lapse, and seem to need to have a sensing of what they are in for during that journey.

Because there is [sic] no strict rules that says that you have to finish the course within two years but definitely it is the best to do it within two years but then of course do show us you have time, you have got to manage things properly. I

think they come in as a third party perspective to share a bit on how time can be managed?” (pp. T21-12 to T21-13)

The term “they” in the quotation refers primarily to the Local Counsellors, but also applies to the University of Strathclyde and YMCA administrative staff. Hence, there is an expectation that Local Counsellor will fill this information gap, and in some sense provide an advisory role, to allay students concerns and anxieties.

“I obviously didn’t have any set of expectation. I think because we were given some information before hand and as all these information [sic] like briefing on the project, the kind of goal, it was not in context given to us before the classes started. And I think part of the expectation was in the beginning to clear everything up, “what is the process, what is the goal, what is the time frame suggested time frame, what is the different methods?” (p. T5-2)

Although one might associate a strong sense of confidence with industry practitioners with working experience, these students did express numerous anxieties related to the conduct and successful completion of the MBA programme. These adult students view such information as essential to their emotional well-being. Perhaps this is a case where identity as a student has overtaken identity as an industry practitioner.

Once the stage is set in terms of understanding the requirements of their overall MBA journey, their next concern is regarding specifics on curriculum and content. A major part of this concern is the massive content that is downloaded through compressed

delivery by the lecturers from the University of Strathclyde during the intensive seminars. Students expect Local Counsellors to add to the content that was delivered, after the seminar, or even provide a lead-in to the seminars so that students are better prepared for the intensive sessions.

“So naturally I think as far as I am concerned that the tutor would had [sic] perhaps at that point in time would have had to build upon what the lecturer has done. Essentially at the weekend classes to try to, one, close any gaps that may occur in the minds of the students because the professor is going so fast so invariably there will be some areas that might not be too clear.” (p. T6-5)

There is also an expectation of the Local Counsellor (referred to here as the “tutor”) levelling up students, especially where students are unfamiliar with or weak in specific subject domains.

“Of course some of, those of us who are slower, perhaps in finance, some are slow in marketing, you know? And that’s where I’m not too sure whether it would be the onus on the tutor, to pick these fellas up, or see it and engage them a bit more?” (pp. T18-4 – T18-5)

Expectations of levelling up includes reinforcing students’ prior knowledge by linking technical terms to their experience as industry practitioners.

“So I think first and foremost I have the expectation to learn at least that, the right language to use in that business environment... So I may have been doing all these things all the while anyway but what I really needed was the right language so that I can talk to, the same language in those type of environment.” (p. T7-2)

Introduction of technical terms would necessarily also imply simplification of theory, especially when the language or concepts are very complex and difficult to understand (hence the colloquial term ‘chim, chim’, which roughly translates to ‘very complex’).

“I remember finance classes. So we were introduced complex formulas how to assess the value of the company and things like... So it’s breaking down of these ‘chim chim’ stuff, you know, very deep stuff, into something that we all can understand.” (p. T19-3)

In this instance, the expectation is not just for information and knowledge to be provided, but also given in a form that is ‘digestible’ for students.

Students also seem to hold some strong mental models of what it means to be a part-time MBA student who is holding a fulltime career as an industry practitioner, and expect their perspective to be understood.

“A lot of us are working adults. Among us, not all of us are very academic. Especially having worked for many years, we used to call certain things in certain ways”. (p. T19-3)

Hence, many workplace practices that students are used to, as a result of years of conditioning, may not always be in congruence with practices in teaching and learning interactions, which will obviously result in tensions. Though not explicit here, it suggests demonstration of empathy for their situation.

Therefore, they also feel that it is important that what they are taught makes sense to them, especially since there is a component of workplace utility attached to their motivation for embarking on the MBA. Hence, students also expect that the logic behind what they are learning is clearly communicated to them, which is a one-way process in their favour.

“Yes, because everything must have a logic at this age. When you can’t link process to logic you just can’t link the two together.” (p. T4-7)

Of course, being passive recipients in teaching and learning interactions, students not only expect additional resources but also that any queries during teaching and learning interactions are collated, with the requisite answers, and then disseminated to them.

“If possible, the tutor can also give us some reading materials.” (p. T3-12)

“...we expect kind of personal touch, to solve individual, not solve but help individual questions and from there discover that different classmates have different kind of concerns about the topic and may be at the end of the lecture, the tutor share [sic] it back with the class.” (p. T19-4)

Students’ utilitarian orientation also gravitates towards assessment, which is always the primary concern, since successful assessment outcomes are immediate and tangible indicators of a successful MBA journey. In particular, there is a need for Local Counsellors to make explicit expectations of successful assessment qualifiers.

“So, we want to have a very clear and structured idea of what to expect, what is the expectation, what shall we do and when we put in effort this is what we will get back in terms of the grades and we also need to pass this module as well and see if we can learn more about this subject itself. So when that is not forthcoming, it gets very frustrating.” (p. T10-10)

Students also expect guidance through their workplace assignments in terms of research focus, as well as tips to complete the assignment successfully.

“Well first of all, it’s the guidance. Guide you with your assignment; so, any questions you have. Coaching with the assignment and actually many times they were able to break it down. Sometimes the assignment seems daunting, and then they say “focus on this”, to help you along with that.” (p. T20-6)

“Like when we are doing our project or assignment, maybe they can guide us important things to take note of, what important things we have to do. Some of the techniques like which one should be used and how these techniques can be applied or how it cannot be applied.” (p. T3-6)

A key concern expressed by students in Conception 2 is the lack of alignment between the lecturer from the University of Strathclyde and the Local Counsellor, which leads to unnecessary confusion, frustration and anxiety. In particular, their expectation is congruence between lecturers and Local Counsellors on theory that is being taught, as well as instructions on assessments.

“The local tutor guide [sic] us to actually do this, but the UK tutor, right, would be like say there is no such need to do such a step. So there is a difference in opinion between the two. Then when we do our project we are a bit confused as to which one to follow.” (p. T3-4)

Related to this concern is also clarity of understanding and alignment of assessment requirements between the University and Local Counsellors. It seems that it is expected that Local Counsellors resolve such inconsistencies, as expressed in the “guide role”.

“...the guide role is to make actually sure whatever is taught in the class, the syllabus or the content is actually in line with what is going to be examinable.”
(p. T13-5)

However, Conception 2 also has a practical dimension to the information and knowledge that students expect. The first is related to contemporary industry trends and thinking, which is directly relevant to students as they return to their workplace.

“I want to engage the students in what is happening now, where the retail environment is shifting, who the consumers are. How are the consumers being shifted? These are things that I feel will really impact my learning experience in a business environment rather than learning about ok this the factory process...” (pp. T7-5 – T7-6)

The utilitarian expectation of any information and knowledge being relevant to students’ workplace application is somewhat implicit, but real nevertheless.

The second is information and knowledge related to leadership experiences. Many of the students are in junior leadership positions and do aspire to return to higher leadership positions after completing their MBA. So such experiences have direct utilitarian value.

“Because they speak more about leadership and not just being managers but about thinking like a leader. And the MBA programme to me is how do you transcend from being a manager to a leader and in those occasions when the tutors did very well it’s when they took a step back and say this is what I did in my organisation and it always followed a better good with a better purpose.”
(p. T8-8)

However, in both these instances, it is about receiving the information and knowledge from the Local Counsellor, with little or no contribution on their part as industry practitioners who might have different experiences or perspectives.

Conception 2 is a functional and utilitarian perspective. It is about gaining knowledge and information that leads to successful completion of assessments, which shapes conceptions of effectiveness. Past experiences, particularly those associated with the different disciplines in their industry, where each discipline has its own set of procedures and rules, impose varying frames of appropriateness (or the lack of it) during teaching and learning interactions with the Local Counsellor.

“I came from IT background, so IT is all about teaching programming and things like that, they are all the same. So I was thinking that tutor is maybe somebody who just helped in your assignment, just complete your assignment and as long as you complete your assignment, you can passed [sic] the exam, then the role of tutor is done”. (p. T19-5)

Effectiveness of teaching and learning, in this instance, is therefore measured by successful completion of assessments that lead to the award of an MBA.

In Conception 2, students have conceptualised teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors as ‘effective’ when students are ‘recipients’ of information and knowledge that lead to personal gain, with little or no contribution on their part. This is despite their expectation to be treated as industry practitioners who have requisite

practising knowledge to participate in teaching and learning interactions more actively. Their utilitarian orientation also drives the need for information and knowledge to be easily digestible, relevant, and useful in the workplace, and the Local Counsellor, as an experienced industry professional and practitioner-tutor, is expected to provide this. The key driver of effectiveness in this conception is the notion of utility, derived as a result of teaching and learning interactions.

Conception 3: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor engages and develops students during teaching and learning interactions to become self-directed learners through interactive dialogue and peer learning.

Students adopting Conception 3 view teaching and learning interactions as a space for collaboration and co-construction of knowledge between students and Local Counsellors, both of whom are industry practitioners, through interactive dialogues and peer learning. This perception is mostly driven by students' workplace experiences of what is considered normal practice.

"So, I speak of this because I was also like that and then after I came to P&G...P&G has a very strong culture in openness and speaking out, right...I realised that when everyone speaks their mind and there's a lot of engagement, right, you learn a lot, a lot more". (p. T11-5)

This expectation is also a function of cultural nuance, where prior cultural norms and practices shape how students conceptualise effectiveness of teaching and learning interactions.

“So, I expect a high level of interaction. I mean, I don’t want to be taught. I want someone to provoke my thoughts... That’s again maybe my ‘Frenchness’ that comes out...” (p. T22-5)

Conception 3 is based on an underlying assumption that students, as industry practitioners, are domain subject matter experts in their own right and therefore have the ability to contribute to the collective learning that occurs within teaching and learning interactions as active participants. This conception has three dimensions, namely, creating conditions for dialogue and learning, employing creative methods to enable learning, and enabling students to become self-directed learners.

Conditions that enable and promote interactive dialogue must first be established to create a learning environment. This starts with Local Counsellor understanding students’ demographics in terms of industry make-up and experience levels so that their learning needs can be identified.

“I think first of all, to understand the background of all my students I think the very same thing that we do in the work environment. Like I take over the department, the first thing I need to do is, I need to suss out all my staff, I need

to know who is what, and who might potentially hate each other. I need to look at the entire dynamics.” (p. T7-11)

Again, this notion is driven by previous experience at the workplace where a new manager attempts to understand the work environment (“*I need to suss out all my staff*”) before deciding how to go about enabling an effective workplace.

An appreciation of the student cohort necessarily takes into consideration any cultural nuances that might prevail, such as a cautious attitude towards speaking up, as it is quite normal for a class dominated by students of Asian origin to take on a passive role, seeking harmony, in teaching and learning interactions.

“But I think, being Asian students, we don’t ask a lot of questions”. (p, T12-7)

“Well, because generally Asians I think have a more reserved way of approaching others for help, especially others with authority, for example. There tend to be a bigger gap.” (p. T9-3)

Interestingly, most students of ‘Western’ origin within such a class demography also tend to be more cautious in speaking up since group behaviour seems to suggest an implicit rule in play. The ‘Asian’ mental model held by students, both local Singaporeans and expatriates, also sets certain implicit expectations on behaviour and norms in teaching and learning interactions.

“But I guess we have come through very different ways and according to the Asian’s education system whereby we will always be given the boundaries and you got to work within the boundaries”. (p. T21-5)

There seems to be an implicit acceptance of how things are done in Singapore (*“Asian’s education system”*), despite non-Asian students’ own previous experiences (*“we have come through very different ways”*), which then perpetuates itself in classroom practice.

Knowledge of student demographics allows Local Counsellors to customise delivery as well as the conduct of teaching and learning interactions so that optimal outcomes may be achieved in terms of dialogue and learning.

“So allowing us the freedom to explore or interpret the topics or subjects in different ways... Like basic inputting our own opinion into or even having someone voice out saying, “eh, maybe we should do this class a bit differently tonight” or “let’s just try something different” ... Basically the freedom to explore the pace of the classroom.” (p. T16-8)

Establishing a conducive mood and climate that promotes learning is also an important factor in Conception 3. Students generally attend classes immediately after a hard day of work, with many still having work on their minds. One expectation is the use of humour and stories to provide an engaging environment for dialogue and learning.

“Actually I like OM tutorial very much. I think the kind of speaking do help the students to pick up more information, is important. That is not to let the student feels that “oh this is another intensive lecture” and get bored of. So engagement and with a sense of humour and story-telling kind of things would be interesting.” (p. T19-4)

It is also interesting to note how students consider simple body language in teaching and learning interactions as being either constructive or an impediment to dialogue and learning. Simple gestures, such as demonstrating approachability and friendliness, which could potentially reduce the power asymmetry, between Local Counsellor and students, establish conditions for a conducive teaching and learning environment.

“Ya, maybe some are small gestures like moving closer to the participants or students to be like, as part of the classroom rather than I am standing right in front, and the students are at the back. So, I think small gestures like this could bring a little bit... you should ease the tension a little and start to break the ice, and allow the conversation to actually begin.” (p. T1-4)

Conducive conditions for dialogue and learning must be reinforced by structures that drive appropriate behaviour. One expectation is smaller class sizes where the more introverted students are provided a safe space for expressing their thoughts and ideas.

“I think ideally...let me see how to phrase this...it would be smaller classroom size up to about between 15 or 20 people would be ideal; makes it more interaction, a lot of different examples.” (p. T5-5)

Rather than allow students to form their own small groups for assignments, there is also an expectation that Local Counsellors take an active role in pre-designating these groups. This forces students who generally do not socialise out of class to interact and share ideas, which also provides an opportunity to learn skills like managing team dynamics. Having varying perspectives also promotes dialogue and learning, and this is particularly important given the diverse range of industry experience present amongst these students.

“It’s the lecturer will teach, then ask questions, then he will give you case study to do, and then he will split you all up in groups and you are not in your own groups he would actually chose the group for you. You are actually working with other people that you do not know.” (p. T3-8)

Having said that however, students also have the expectation that the dialogue space will be controlled by Local Counsellors so that learning actually occurs, and this desire was as a result of a negative experience.

“There is no structure in terms of helping us to learn collective. It was just one guy presenting his own version of what marketing means to Lego. one guy presenting in terms of what marketing means to Rolex. The problem is that it

felt like a market because nobody in the room was technically a marketing expert except the lecturer but he didn't control the discussion.” (p. T7-13)

A second dimension of Conception 3 is the expectation of the employment of varied and creative practices in teaching and learning interactions that enable and promote dialogue. This perception is sometimes shaped by workplace practice, which in this case is based on a local Singapore university workplace experience.

“Ok, here in NUS, we have different pedagogical styles”. (p. T12-3)

At times, expectations are shaped by past experiences in another discipline during undergraduate study, again in another local Singapore university.

“Like some of my classes last time when I was in university, maybe because I came from communication studies in NTU, we had to do debates”. (p. T16-5)

The focus of this expectation is triggering and sustaining students' interest so that learning occurs, which implies the use of non-traditional means of engaging students, such as impromptu presentations, to arouse curiosity and interest, and also keep them plugged into teaching and learning interactions.

“One of the key things about a good teacher is someone who creates an environment for questions, and stirs the curiosity. Like I remember that when I did the entrepreneurship module, one of the things that the tutor did was to

get us to go up front and share just off the cuff what we thought about entrepreneurship for two minutes.” (p. T9-7)

The element of fun and games provides a unique and engaging avenue to anchor concepts and theories covered in teaching and learning interactions, and a platform for dialogue and learning.

“There would be twenty minutes, half an hour of lecture, then we would have a break, and he would give us, say, a challenge. Then after the break the you guys are going to be given twenty minutes, thirty minutes to do this, within your team”. And very often it didn’t seem so related. So, we had a bunch of like balloons, and all these kind of like weird kit, you know? He was like, “OK, as a team, you need to use all of that stuff to describe what leadership is to you” ...There was a practical element, it was creative, it was hands-on, there was a bit of fun, approaching very serious topics.” (p. T22-9)

In addition to engagement through creative pedagogy, students felt that it was also always important to use real life situations that they were familiar with so that they could be eased into dialogue.

“But I think one of the important roles of the tutor would be to create. To create something out of the ordinary... Let’s say even something as boring as maybe financial management, the tutor could maybe have switched things up a bit and tell us “ok, never mind, lets’ monitor the stock market”, let’s, you know,

and “if you were about to make a decision now to buy up which stock, which stock would you buy for example or which bond would you buy?” (p. T16-8)

Real life examples, specifically those that related to local industry practice, enabled students to easily connect theory with their own practice since many of those scenarios would have been something they themselves might have experienced as part of their workplace exposure.

However, creative pedagogy by itself would not give the desired effect of learning from dialogues in teaching and learning interactions unless these dialogues were facilitated by Local Counsellors as two-way, interactive and collaborative processes.

“I guess those of us who went in were expecting a sort of a high level of interaction and relationship... So it has to be a two-way, interactive experience and I felt that the tutor engaged very well with the students.” (pp. T9-6 – T9-7)

Such collaborative engagements can only be achieved if students are empowered to challenge ideas, even those from Local Counsellors, so that learning can be effective.

“We can always challenge the tutor of course, which is also again a learning process...because you challenge someone always by throwing different ways of thinking, right. So I think it’s a learning always from both sides.” (p. T17-6)

This expectation relates to Local Counsellors' explicit demonstration of openness to students' ideas, by building on those ideas for collective learning. This expectation seems to have been shaped by exposure to previous forms of educational interaction in an adult learning environment.

"Before my MBA I did this Advanced Certificate in brain and assessment...in Singapore... learned how to teach adults. And all the teachers, the local teachers, they did that pretty well, you know. I mean they were open to different opinions, different perspectives, which is important. So, they didn't force us in any way. They challenged us sometimes, which was good".

(p. T17-4)

A flip side to such active participation and robust discussions is the possibility of the dialogue being inadvertently disengaged from the desired learning objectives. Hence, the expectation of mediation by Local Counsellors (referred to here as "*facilitator*") to steer the interactive conversations so that they culminate in learning.

"I mean in case of where there are differing views right, and then arguments come in, the facilitator can help to mediate. Facilitator will help with probing people to think even more, to think beyond what is said within the textbook, to keep probing, keep getting us to think of different things..." (p. T16-9)

The expectation of learning from dialogues is also anchored on students' belief that learning mostly occurs from leveraging on peer experience and knowledge, all of

whom are industry practitioners with a diverse range of domain experience that would provide different perspectives to theoretical problems.

“For me, what I expected, was a high level of interaction and I love when things are case study based because I feel that’s always a good way, then everyone can. You know, usually, or like a problem, or scenario, whatever, and then going around the class and just everyone just “you know, in my industry, this is how we do it”, or, “in my industry, this is how, in my function”, whatever.”

(p. T22-5)

As industry practitioners, students also acknowledged the importance of being able to freely express their ideas (as expressed in the phrase *“students must feel free”*) to add onto those shared by Local Counsellors, which would significantly enhance the quality of conversations in such dialogues.

“I think the best learning is when, apart from tutors sharing, right, students must feel free to ask any questions they have. And students must feel free to share their own experience... I realised that when everyone speaks their mind and there’s a lot of engagement, right, you learn a lot, a lot more.” (p. T11-5)

Students also felt that the learning engendered by collaborative dialogues was best achieved when embedded within a realistic or practical platform. Replication of workplace context and scenarios, especially those contextualised to local practice,

provide the adequate stimulus for students to learn effectively under near-real conditions.

“Yes, back to the very practical module on strategic consulting, where we were literally left on our own to interact with the clients and do our research and that’s very effective because we realised we have no one to turn to but your very limited resources. That is when you become very creative and you try to squeeze every drop of information that you have and then become very innovative in the way you try to look for information and intelligence.”

(p. T10-9)

A final dimension in Conception 3 is the link between teaching and learning effectiveness and students’ ability to develop the confidence to become self-directed learners. Students viewed this as being manifested by Local Counsellors (referred to here as the “lecturer”) seeking and giving feedback to gauge students’ level of understanding as well as to reinforce their learning. These acts of affirmation were perceived as being contributory to raising students’ confidence level.

“So, but, at the end of it, when we do the presentation, the feedback are given by the lecturers, and comments an feedback, will reinforce our understanding and adds on to what we have discussed earlier.” (p. T1-3)

Students felt that confidence building also entails Local Counsellors coaching students by raising differing perspectives to raise their level of awareness.

“He will listen and provide his views and said that, “OK, maybe you should look at it this perspective instead of this perspective” and share why you should be looking at this perspective... I think it’s sort of like an awareness among the group or more like a discovery, “Eh ya, we should look at it this perspective”.”
(p. T4-9)

This is particularly important for technical subjects like accounting where most students do not have the requisite exposure or knowledge to grapple with the content.

“For the more kind of technical topics like statistics, and all of these horrendous topics where for me it’s again once I get it, I get it, but it takes me a long time to get it, like I’m not a left-brained type of person. So there I really expected like a lot of cocooning, which I got.” (p. T22-5)

Once students start comprehending the basics of any module, then the expectation is to challenge their thinking and provide them space to explore relatively unassisted. It is about getting students to think and discover possibilities, other than the more obvious ones, so that they acquire the ability to shift their mind-set towards self-discovery, as would be the case in real life or at the workplace, rather than guided learning. The confidence that is developed to become self-directed learners lends itself aptly in the workplace.

“In a way, if he were to tell you just stick to this, you should be able to pass, I guess all of us will not learn anything; coming to think of it. But then of course

if you are in that situation you will be afraid of failing, you will be afraid of going out, wasting your time wasting your effort, but you are not doing what the tutor is asking for. But then of course, back in life, no one is teaching you where to go, and you will only see whether the ending is right or wrong when you reach the ending.” (p. T21-6)

Common to the dimensions of Conception 3 discussed in the previous pages is the role that students conceptualise Local Counsellors playing in enabling a positive set of teaching and learning outcomes. In this light students expect that Local Counsellors make an effort, or are seen to make an effort, to build relationships with students to nurture and develop them during their learning journey. Relationships are conceived as being enacted through a number of roles within teaching and learning interactions, anchored on mutual respect. A basic premise in this relationship is that Local Counsellors recognise students as domain subject matter experts, and as fellow industry practitioners, who have the potential for actively contributing to the collective learning in teaching and learning interactions.

“Ya, and I think another thing I was expecting from the tutor about this is like I said the tutor to be engaging and to treat us as people who are like subject experts in our own matters also, ya; treat us as contributors to the class.”

(p. T16-14)

Hence, this relationship is one that is expected to be collaborative, very much like the manner in which professional peers operate at the workplace, to learn as a team and achieve the required results, as a team.

“It was actually very interesting in the sense that I felt personally the working relationship was almost like we are in it together, we are trying to research in this particular field of study.... So that level of interaction more like not so much like supervisor and post-grad student, but rather like, let’s work together and try to understand more about the topic. So that level of collaboration almost like non-hierarchical actually kind of like inspires us to share more, learn more and together as a team...” (p. T15-6)

In effect, the expectation is one of a relationship between professional peers performing different roles, much like that at a workplace, except that the classroom context is teaching and learning interactions. Students view Local Counsellors and students as just performing different roles within a common domain with the shared intent of achieving collective gain.

“I think we are all equals but just that we are playing different roles. So, you are the teacher who is trying to impart some of your skill sets to the students and the students is [sic] here to learn. So everybody is on equal part, just that they are playing different roles. So there’s no like somebody’s superior, or somebody’s weaker.” (p. T24-6)

In this specific instance, the understanding of roles has been shaped by the student's own mentoring experience, which then set the context for the student's expected relationship with the Local Counsellor.

"I think it's the same because I believe that we, nobody is superior than anybody. It's just that we are playing different roles. If I can share with you my mentoring experience?" (p. T24-7)

Students also recognise that Local Counsellors, as current industry practitioners, come with vast experience, knowledge, and expertise and as such serve as industry role models for these students.

"Somebody whom we respect, we know has a lot of experience but yet somebody as we transition beyond the teacher-lecturer-student relationship. Somebody who we can always go back to for guidance, can share things."
(p. T15-12)

The notion of a role model also sits well in a sense that Local Counsellors, like students, are industry practitioners juggling teaching, their own work or business, as well as family commitments, which then becomes a useful point of reference for students to manage their own multiple spaces.

Conceptions of this role model relationship are also described in terms of mentoring and coaching, with these terms being used interchangeably, but having similar meaning from the students' point of view.

"I think for adult learning, rather than a teacher-student relationship, it should be more like mentoring-coaching kind, where they guide you rather than feed you, kind of environment." (p. T1-9)

This expectation is an example of how past positive experiences shape expectations of the future, in terms of what is considered the standard for an effective Local Counsellor.

"Positive experiences that I might have had previously let's say as a student in secondary school, people who is willing to guide, as well as in the Army, we have people leading by example, trying to guide and inspire us. These are the key things as I grow up I tend to relate to. And then as I start to see some of these being positively exemplified in let's say some of the lecturers, it's something I see as a key takeaway". (p. T15-9)

However, students' conceptions also include the implicit acceptance of the power asymmetry that exists between Local Counsellors and students.

“So basically I didn’t go in there with any expectation that there will be any other things other than a teacher student relationship. Mainly because the distribution of power is not equal.” (p. T7-9)

Power asymmetry, when explicitly communicated, does shape the basis of future relationships between student and teacher, and unfortunately may continue to latently exert its influence when the student enters graduate management education.

“I didn’t have any expectations back then and that’s the truth. It’s perhaps coloured by my undergraduate years where I had my supervisor, my thesis supervisor. I wanted to be pally with him... He said to me, basically, “I don’t think that we can be friends because friendship indicates an equal plain. So but I can affect you in ways that you can’t affect me”. So because of this the premise of friendship is broken”. (p. T7-9)

In this conception, the notion of authority is still considered important. Being treated as an adult and professional peer does not equate to a lack of structure in teaching and learning interactions. Therefore, their expectation is that Local Counsellors should still maintain authority and order during these interactions in order to achieve optimal outcomes.

“I feel that while the tutor or lecturer should be more open, it should not go beyond a point it becomes too cordial that he loses control of the whole class... So, I think a certain degree of authority is still required...” (p. T1-4)

Here the old adage of ‘with power comes responsibility’ resounds in an added expectation that Local Counsellors will always protect students’ interests in their learning journey.

“I mean some of the tutors stuck around during the, I mean like yourself, you were around for the lecture, parts of it, most of it, and that too built up a lot of camaraderie and it showed us that tutors got our back.” (p. T9-3)

Students’ previous educational experience involving interaction with Local Counsellors, in other higher education institutions, does tend to result in comparisons being made in a current context.

“Initially the expectations were quite high because based on our last, I mean the last time that we had for me personally I was in Australia and they called it the LCs were also hired by the university and they were university staff themselves”. (p. T13-2)

Sometimes this expectation is also benchmarked against students’ experience with the University of Strathclyde lecturers (referred to as “our professors”), which somewhat raises the bar at times.

“Basically my expectation of the tutor I guess it was very much shaped by our interaction with our professors”. (p. T6-5)

In some cases, expectations are latent or do not even come into play because there is congruence between past and present experiences in teaching and learning interactions.

“To be honest, I have not thought of any expectation of local counsellors. Why so is because maybe I used to study in university whereby we have both a mixture of overseas lecturers who conduct the whole course with them holding the tutorials and also a mixture of local counsellor teaching the tutorials while foreign lecturers conducting the main lectures. So in terms of expectations, I didn't really have any form of expectation because I thought that should be the way to go...” (p. T23-1)

Conception 3 is driven largely by students' experiences working as practitioners in their respective industries, as well as previous experiences in teaching and learning interactions that shape students' beliefs and notions of appropriateness and inappropriateness in their teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors. When these experiences match their expectations, teaching and learning interactions are seen as 'effective'. The reverse is true when those experiences are divergent from student expectations.

The autonomy and recognition that students desire in teaching and learning interactions is a recurring theme from Conception 1, while at the same time, expecting Local Counsellors to step in and take charge of learning. Another recurring theme is students' expectation to be recognised as domain experts in their own right, as

industry practitioners, hence the manner in which they perceive themselves as collaborators in teaching and learning interactions, rather than as mere students. However, there seem to be some practical tensions here. On one hand, students expect to be treated with respect as equals because of the value they feel they bring to teaching and learning interactions as a result of their domain expertise, but at the same time expect Local Counsellors to retain authority and keep order within that same space. This is pretty much a case of having the cake and eating it too. Recognition as industry practitioners suggests shared responsibility for navigating teaching and learning interactions, rather than just leveraging on the expertise of Local Counsellors. Conception 3 seems also to be rooted in the notion of the development of students to become self-directed learners through a conducive learning environment that is supposed to be established by Local Counsellors. This suggests collaboration and active participation in teaching and learning interactions where both the students and the Local Counsellor, both of whom are industry practitioners, contribute to the larger good of the shared space. These insights from Conception 3 provides a glimpse of the changing needs of the current generation of part-time MBA students, who are industry practitioners.

Conception 4: Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor mobilises knowledge for workplace effectiveness and professional development.

Students adopting Conception 4 take on a learning and development lens in describing teaching and learning interactions as being 'effective'. This is a shift from just

'knowing' to 'doing', which inevitably leads to some level of personal or professional development. This perception is shaped by the distinction students make between an undergraduate degree and the MBA, believing that the latter should lend a greater focus on application of theory at the workplace.

"I find that I don't really enjoy the Bachelor Degree because it's very theory-based; it's a lot of assignments but very theory, like very dry stuff. So, I was thinking that, when it came to MBA, I was thinking I want to learn more, because it's been a few years since I graduated. So I want to learn more, and I want to see how I can actually make my work more interesting". (p. T24-4)

This distinction of differing needs of mature industry practitioners versus younger students is a recurring theme from Conception 1.

Conception 4 has three main dimensions: perception of theory having workplace value, actual experience of the value of application of theory in practice, and the perceived or experienced lifetime value of the knowledge acquired.

Students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as 'effective' when theory covered during these interactions is perceived to have utility in practice, which is somewhat similar to the notion of utility expressed in Conception 2.

"Well, of course, as the learner, as the name suggests, I am still there to learn, but on top of that there should be something more than just content learning..."

Practical stuff and how I can actually contextualise it and apply to my own work..." (p. T1-8)

The subtle difference here, as compared to Conception 2, is the focus on workplace application of knowledge, rather than just mere acquisition. It is about very practical and time-tested knowledge (*'practical stuff'*), rather than just theoretical applications. It also implies that knowledge must have contextual relevance for it to be applicable, which is not surprising given their status as industry practitioners. The role of Local Counsellors is to be able to mobilise this knowledge in a manner that students are able to make that connection between theory and practice.

As industry practitioners, students' interest in theory is driven by the possibility of practical use at the workplace, and therefore, if that link seems to be apparent, their perceptions of teaching and learning interactions are positive. This notion of application of theory in practice is a key motivator, and an important determinant of teaching and learning effectiveness.

"Application is definitely very important... Because it's head knowledge and if you don't apply it in life, there's no transformation, no changes in terms of you, the way you handle things, and apply things." (p. T18-6)

Students also expect that theory is presented with a certain degree of local and cultural context, rather than the traditional textbook examples and case studies which are normally European or Western in context.

“I was expecting to maybe provide examples, local examples. Because some of the examples cited by the lecturers could be in European context. So, although we heard of it but I also wanted to understand from an Asian perspective, how is it seen here, and then we can compare and contrast from what the lecturer and tutor has given.” (p. T24-3)

The immediacy of application is an important consideration when relating theory and practice. Localised examples shorten the learning curve, which allows immediate use of that knowledge at the workplace. The associated experience from workplace application, in turn, provides further knowledge for students to contribute effectively during teaching and learning interactions, in a sort of ecosystem for reciprocal learning.

The perception of teaching and learning interactions being ‘effective’ is reinforced when students actually experience the value of theory applied in practice, such as when frameworks, tools and templates gleaned from the classroom are used to make decisions and judgment at the workplace, with positive outcomes.

“Effective teaching would be things that stick with us... So for example, operations management, voice of customers; I will start to think about some of those concepts. I mean, I am not a customer service personnel [sic] but I am able to look from a different perspective and say “eh, I actually yes I still remember this concept, so how do I apply it, how do I see things differently”.
(pp. T15-10 – T15-11)

This is particularly apparent for technical subjects like finance. Concepts that seemed like gibberish during teaching and learning interactions now form the sound basis for decision making at the workplace using the theory that was learned by the student.

“Certain subjects it’s really a lot more apparent, like, now if I pick up a financial sheet, it’s not just a bunch of numbers to me. At least I’ll be able to make some sense of it. Before that it’s just like a bunch of numbers.” (p. T1-9)

These experiences enable students to feel that they are able to make changes to workplace practices and improve the organisation with the knowledge they have acquired. The associated self-worth arising from these experiences further bolsters their perceptions of teaching and learning interactions being ‘effective’.

“For me personally is how I can contribute better to my employee. So how I can do a better job as a manager and how I can basically speak to my associates with better confidence, because with the knowledge of an MBA you can effectively have the confidence to actually speak to people about business matters or anything.” (p. T13-10)

Teaching and learning interactions are also perceived to be ‘effective’ when there is an enduring impact on students, both at the workplace and beyond. Effectiveness, in this instance, is understood in a number of ways. One perspective is having more knowledge than before, when they started their MBA journey.

“Learning is about being more knowledgeable than before.” (p. T11-6)

Another perspective is when the gain in knowledge results in students’ ability to recall and utilise prior or passive knowledge when required in practice.

“But certain activities that happen after that allow me to say, actually, “Oh, ya! I knew this, ya, I read this somewhere, I heard this somewhere.” So, I was able to appreciate, you know, beyond, what was just seen on the surface. Ya, I know why they did it this way, because I have studied this before. Both ways, so I would say it is both ways.” (p. T1-9)

This expanded knowledge is manifested as the derivation of new perspectives to problems that lend themselves to more creative and effective solutions, which then lead to better results and outcomes. This phenomenon is not a one-off experience, but rather knowledge and skills that endures and grows in the students’ professional journey.

“So, before embarking on this project you could have a one-sided view on certain things, but through this learning process, where you discuss, you throw ideas, challenge your own thinking and you challenge other people’s thinking, you come out with a new conclusion, which then provides you with a new perspective.” (p. T24-13)

The most significant aspect of Conception 4 is when students experience personal change and growth through the acquisition of skills and capabilities not directly related to the curriculum, especially management skills which are rudimentary to becoming better managers.

“Actually, this learning one [sic] have to clarify it’s more than just about the knowledge. It’s the whole growth as a person... Before the course I wasn’t comfortable in talking to masses. I always liked to avoid presentations and stuff, but during the course, of course we had to present, we had to express our ideas. So that part have [sic] grown pretty much, in that area.” (p. T11-12)

These skills and capabilities, mostly acquired vicariously from peers, the UK lecturers and, to a large extent, Local Counsellors, embed practices that lead to the cultivation of new habits to enable mind-set shift. As a result, the student becomes a better person.

“And I think learning to me means open your mind, or breaking away your mind-sets on how things should be. It should also give you a big heart to see the differences and perspectives of other people in the world, and to accept their differences. And to be a bit more patient when things are different. And to change you to be a better person.” (p. T18-10)

Conception 4 suggests that part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are also industry practitioners, conceptualise their teaching and learning interactions as

‘effective’ when the theory and the knowledge that they gain from these interactions results in their ability to demonstrably apply such theory and knowledge effectively at the workplace. As an extension of this conception, the notion of effectiveness is also viewed as one that contributes to their overall professional and personal growth as industry practitioners and individuals. Conception 4 also suggests that notions of effectiveness are drawn from the enduring effects accrued from teaching and learning interactions. This conception also recognises skills and knowledge that are not directly relevant to industry practice, or more specifically general management skills, but are nevertheless important for growth as professionals; these are learned vicariously from Local Counsellors during teaching and learning interactions. This aspect of the study sits well with graduate management education which adopts a generalist approach to enabling these students to become better managers in their industry and workplace.

In this Chapter we have discussed the four conceptions which represent the qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as ‘effective’. The discussions in this Chapter address the first research question in this thesis. The conceptions relate to the qualities of the Local Counsellor, the actual student experiences resulting from teaching and learning interactions, and students’ learning. In deriving these conceptions, it is important to be mindful of a context where these students, as industry practitioners, are taught by Local Counsellors who are also industry practitioners, hence students’ associated expectations of Local Counsellors as well as teaching and learning experiences. A consistent theme that runs through these

conceptions is the notion of the student as a subject matter expert, a belief arising from their status as industry practitioners, hence the need to be recognised as such. Another theme that runs through these conceptions is the role of the Local Counsellor in enabling teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'.

The next Chapter will examine these conceptions in relation to the theories on conceptions of effective teaching and professional learning, as well as derive a better understanding of the motivations behind these conceptions using the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu.

7 Chapter Seven An Interpretation of the Conceptions

7.1 Setting the Context

In the previous Chapter, I set out to explain in detail the four qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualised teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as being 'effective'. The conceptions varied from the distinct qualities and attributes of the Local Counsellor that set conditions for conceptions of effectiveness, to the actual experiences during teaching and learning interactions that shaped conceptions of effectiveness, and students' experiences in terms of learning and personal development and growth. These conceptions provide the answers for the first research question in this thesis.

In this Chapter, I will set out to establish the answers for the second and third research questions that were framed in this thesis. I will first examine how these conceptions align with, or defer from, understandings established in phenomenographic and professional literature, as well as those articulated in general research on teaching and learning interactions. These discussions will then be overlaid with Bourdieu's social practice theory to get a better sensing of the complexities behind these conceptions that might not have been apparent in the conceptions.

In approaching these discussions, I will be using the referential relationships between the conceptions, namely, the qualities of the Local Counsellor, students' experiences

during teaching and learning interactions, and learning and development, as the frame for this dialogue between data and literature.

7.2 Qualities of the Local Counsellor

7.2.1 Overview

The Local Counsellor straddles between students' experiences in teaching and learning interactions and the learning outcomes that students derive as a result. The Local Counsellor is also a practitioner-tutor and therefore shares common background with students as an industry practitioner, which inevitably establishes a set of expectations with students in relation to teaching and learning interactions. Phenomenographic research on teaching and learning interactions from students' perspectives focus primarily on approaches, ways of understanding, and outcomes, with such literature largely silent on teachers' qualities and characteristics. However, these gaps are reasonably addressed in literature on professional learning and general research on teaching and learning interactions.

7.2.2 Discussion

Students' expect Local Counsellors to be competent and skilled practitioner-tutors, and therefore place a significant weight on industry and subject matter expertise, academic competence, and character. As fellow industry practitioners, students expect Local Counsellors to be subject-matter experts who are well-versed with the

latest trends in industry, and therefore possesses rich experiences in real-world application of knowledge (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007; Oyewo, 2016; Pratt, 1992; Tootoonchi et al., 2002). Essentially, students expect Local Counsellors to possess proven industry track record, with both technical as well as application skills, which enables them to relate theory to the workplace. This is particularly important in graduate management education where application is more likely to be an amalgam of explicit and tacit knowledge, which skilled practitioner-tutors can offer. Hence, there seems to be an implicit assumption that subject matter expertise reinforces Local Counsellors' competence, and therefore provides some sense of assurance in the potential benefits that may be derived from teaching and learning interactions.

Professional competence does not necessarily translate to the ability of Local Counsellors to conduct teaching and learning interactions effectively. Not every practitioner-tutor has the natural skills, nor the necessary training, to be able to plan and deliver teaching and learning interactions effectively; hence, students' expectations of Local Counsellors' academic competence as complementary capability to professional competence (Oyewo, 2016). Academic competence includes the possession of effective pedagogical skills and knowledge related to adult learning, such as instructional planning, delivery, and evaluation, as well as familiarity with the curricular and assessment requirements of the MBA programme. This is an important consideration for PHEIs as these practitioner-tutors are drawn from industry, based on their academic qualifications and industry track record, but rarely possess any form of pedagogical training, which potentially render them ineffective in teaching and

learning interactions, even if they are the best in their industry (Poritz & Rees, 2016; Wagoner, 2007).

Students' also place a great deal of weight on the qualities of Local Counsellors, in addition to academic and professional competence. Qualities such as empathy, openness, humility, approachability, and passion are described as traits that would allow Local Counsellors to build relationships with students and engage them effectively during teaching and learning interactions (Delaney et al., 2010; Feldman, 1976; Hativa, 2015; Oyewo, 2016; Simendinger, Puia, Kraft, & Jaspersen, 2000; Tootoonchi et al., 2002; Watland, 2007). Approachability, in particular stood out as an important pre-requisite for students in this research. It seems to be a taken-for-granted, yet critical, Local Counsellor characteristic that sets conditions for students to engage them comfortably. Behaviours associated with approachability also include friendliness, by way of showing interest in students and their progress. Interestingly, though, approachability is not considered to be directly related to the teaching process, and is therefore not taken into consideration as a factor for teaching effectiveness (Reid & Johnston, 1999). Approachability, unfortunately, is also a relatively amorphous concept that would be near impossible to replicate since its meaning is likely to differ between students. Students expect Local Counsellors to be empathetic to their circumstances as part-time students juggling their work as industry practitioners, their studies and, their personal and family commitments (Hativa, 2015; Pratt, 1992). At the same time, Local Counsellors are expected to be humble, recognising that there is more than one person in these teaching and learning interactions who can contribute industry experience and knowledge. Humility coupled

with openness sets the stage for Local Counsellors to leverage on students' alternate perspectives and specific domain knowledge in service of a collaborative relationship (Delaney et al., 2010). Local Counsellors who exhibit all these qualities in a consistent manner exude passion for their role in teaching and learning engagements, which students equate to professionalism as industry practitioners. Altruism is perhaps the pinnacle of such qualities, where students articulate Local Counsellors' engagement and time spent with them beyond curricular time as appreciated and desired, but not expected (Trigwell & Prosser, 1991).

7.2.3 New Insights

Students' expectations of Local Counsellors also raised two related qualities that are not currently discussed in literature, at least not explicitly, and these are accessibility and responsiveness, and the Local Counsellor as a role model. I would argue that accessibility and responsiveness are seemingly related to the notion of approachability. While Local Counsellors may be approachable, face-to-face time is limited, hence their openness to being accessible through other means is an important factor for students. Such accessibility would involve time out of curriculum that the Local Counsellors are not obliged to fulfil. A related quality is responsiveness, so that students' queries are addressed in a timely manner. Accessibility and responsiveness are implicit qualities common in the business world where 'time is money', hence the expectation that Local Counsellors adopt similar attitudes and behaviours, as students would expect of fellow industry practitioners.

Another interesting insight not made explicit in literature is the notion of the Local Counsellor as a role model to students. Like students, Local Counsellors also juggle concurrent roles as industry practitioners, teaching the MBA on a part-time basis, while attending to their career or business, as well as personal and family responsibilities. Local Counsellors' continued industry currency and expertise place them as examples of what it means to be a consummate professional. These characteristics set the stage for Local Counsellors as a role models; someone that graduate management students aspire to become in their professional career. Hence, there is an implicit labelling of Local Counsellors as presumed to being competent. I say presumed because this is a student-desired quality that can only be affirmed in actual teaching and learning interactions. Students do accord a certain level of respect for Local Counsellors who are practitioner-tutors, nevertheless, and seem to use them as a yardstick for their own professional development. This would be synonymous to the manner in which these students would accord respect to an accomplished industry practitioner at the workplace.

The expectations of Local Counsellors highlighted in the preceding discussion begs the question whether it is realistically possible for any one individual to possess all the qualities and traits specified at any one time. Such a demand weighs against the pragmatism adopted by PHEIs in selecting Local Counsellors, the most important criteria being academic qualification and professional track record, as these are 'quantifiable' and could be used as a relatively objective basis of ensuring that the Local Counsellors meet the needs of these students.

7.3 Students' Experiences During Teaching and Learning Interactions

7.3.1 Overview

Students' conceptualisations of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' are mostly formed during the actual interactions, as many of the qualities explained in the previous section are actually manifested as tangible actions in this space. Hence, the characteristics and qualities of Local Counsellors, as discussed in the previous section, and teaching as a process, are not mutually exclusive.

7.3.2 Discussion

A cornerstone of effective teaching and learning interactions is the building of relationships between Local Counsellors and students, and this has been expressed in a number of ways in this research. This notion of building such relationships is also congruent with phenomenographic studies of student experiences in teaching and learning interactions, as well that in professional learning (Simendinger et al., 2000; Watland, 2007). The importance of relationships to these students who are industry practitioners is not surprising since much of the business world operates on relationships and networks, hence the natural mapping of what they are used to as industry practitioners onto the academic space (Simendinger et al., 2000). These relationships set the conditions to enabling a safe and conducive environment for learning to occur. This sense of 'safety' is important to these part-time students, given the anxieties many of them experience as a result of the gap since their previous

formal education. It is about attending to their emotions in a positive manner (Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Watland, 2007). Local Counsellors are expected to achieve this by understanding student demography and nuances and then acting on these to calibrate and contextualise teaching and learning interactions to improve the quality of learning (Barker & Stowers, 2005; Zerihun, Beishuizen, & Van Os, 2012). Contextualisation presupposes considerations for cultural nuances specific to a Singapore context, and also those related to the specific industries (Clarke & Flaherty, 2002).

While the conditions stated previously seem to be an expectation of most if not all the students in this sample, the actual manifestation of learning strategies vary, as some prefer to adopt surface learning approaches, while others adopt deep learning approaches. The surface learning approaches adopted by students are consistent with the phenomenographic studies that were reviewed (Hallett, 2010; Paakkari et al., 2010; Trigwell & Reid, 1998). One distinct aspect of this conception is the specific focus on acquiring skills and knowledge primarily for attaining the MBA and also better personal workplace performance, which presents a utilitarian approach to teaching and learning interactions. These students prefer to adopt the position of passive participants within these interactions, with little or no collaborative or constructive role in achieving learning outcomes (Carnell, 2007; Knowles, 1970). Local Counsellors are expected to provide additional knowledge and information resources to supplement that of University lecturers, simplify the theory taught, and level up weaker students. Students also expect Local Counsellors to ensure that there is alignment in content and assessment requirements with the University and the

lecturers who deliver theoretical content during the intensive seminars as this would have an impact on students' performance (Hallett, 2010). Students' satisfaction, and perceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' are derived when there is adequate and appropriate information and knowledge being imparted by Local Counsellors, which then allows students to succeed or even excel in assessments (Kember, 1997; Paakkari et al., 2010; Prosser et al., 1994; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). This perspective presumes that as adult students they are clear about what they want to achieve from teaching and learning interactions and will therefore pursue such an orientation based on the extrinsic motivation of completing the MBA degree (Merriam, 2001a; Salomon & Perkins, 1998). Although students in this research expressed the need for Local Counsellors to explain the logic behind the theories taught, as well as for these insights to be aligned with current industry trends, I would argue, particularly for Conception 2, that this need is driven by students' desire to perform better in their assessments with the better information and knowledge that they stand to gain, which is still a utilitarian conception of effectiveness (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Saljo, 1979).

Students adopting deep learning approaches conceptualise teaching and learning interactions as a space for collaboration and co-construction of knowledge, where students, as industry practitioners with domain expertise and knowledge, assume the role of active and necessary participants. In this relationship, Local Counsellors, despite their status as a practitioner-tutors, are expected sometimes to take on the role of co-learners, especially when expertise lies with students because of their specific domain expertise. This interdependence between Local Counsellors and

students, as industry practitioners, anchored on mutual trust and respect, enables effective teaching and learning, as both parties build on the collective knowledge available to achieve the desired learning outcomes (Stes et al., 2013; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). In order to achieve such collaborative interactions, students expect Local Counsellors to encourage students to participate in interactive dialogues and peer learning. Teaching and learning interactions may therefore be described as “ongoing sets of dialogues in a social context”, where the emotional aspects of those interactions significantly influence notions of effectiveness (Trowler, 2008, pp. 21-22). Local Counsellors leverage on the pre-existing wealth of industry experience and knowledge residing amongst the student cohort to allow them share those experiences, through interactive dialogues, to value add to collective learning (Barker & Stowers, 2005; Gopee & Deane, 2013; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005; Parker et al., 2008). Interactive dialogues and peer learning are grounded on the principle of the autonomy of the learner in determining his or her own learning goals, and in some sense replicates the manner in which these industry practitioners operate at the workplace through the exchange of thoughts and ideas derived from their own experiences. A similar construct in the classroom allows students to take control of their own learning, facilitated by Local Counsellors. The sense of control provides confidence in the teaching and learning process, and the arising positive emotions set the tone for students’ perceptions of effectiveness.

Students also expressed the importance of the employment of creative pedagogy, which is perceived as being critical to stimulating interest and encouraging dialogue (Feldman, 1976). Employment of non-traditional teaching methods such as the use of

games to better anchor theoretical concepts, impromptu presentations, and debates, eased the difficulties of engaging in teaching and learning interactions after a long day at work. The intention is to arouse curiosity, challenge students, and sustain interest, with Local Counsellors facilitating collaborative dialogue to enable collective learning (Gopee & Deane, 2013). In particular, the use of localised real-world examples and scenarios were important to these students, as industry practitioners, since the knowledge gained had direct relevance with their workplace. In this instance, Local Counsellors who are also industry practitioners tend to take a more participative approach to teaching and learning interactions, using concrete examples and illustrations from their own experience rather than just 'war stories' (Barker & Stowers, 2005; Tenenberg, 2010; Tootoonchi et al., 2002).

Students adopting deep approaches are eventually working towards gaining confidence to become self-directed learners, so that they are ready for the workplace (Tenenberg, 2010; White & Heslop, 2012). Although this is not an entirely new concept as industry practitioners, graduating from a management programme like the MBA also means that they are gearing for managerial positions as part of their career progression, where concepts are not used in silo but in a seamless and integrated manner to solve workplace problems. This is the value-add that these students feel that a practitioner-tutor can bring to their development during teaching and learning interactions. They view coaching and feedback by Local Counsellors as a means to encouraging them to think independently and explore alternative perspectives, so as to shape their emotional and learning experiences positively (Goldstein & Benassi, 2006).

7.3.3 New Insights

Two themes related to students' expectations were discovered in this research that are not currently discussed in phenomenographic literature on student experiences during teaching and learning interactions, as well as that on professional learning. These are the sharing of leadership experiences by the Local Counsellor, and the regulatory role of the Local Counsellor.

Students' expectations of Local Counsellors sharing their leadership experiences could be attributed to two things. Firstly, Local Counsellors are perceived as accomplished industry practitioners who would have the relevant breadth and depth of leadership experiences that could not be found in text book theory. The value these Local Counsellors bring is the thinking behind their leadership approaches, and vivid illustrations of leadership challenges, coupled with their solutions. Secondly, as graduate management students, their eventual aim is to lead organisations as industry practitioners, with the collective knowledge they have gained in the MBA programme. As explained earlier, management is not a precise science and there are many aspects of management where the 'art' of execution is where the greatest impact is achieved. Hence, it is this nexus between students' theoretical knowledge and workplace vicarious management experiences, coupled with the actual experiences of accomplished practitioner-tutors that shapes conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective'.

A second theme not explicitly found in phenomenographic or graduate management literature is the role of the Local Counsellor as the 'regulator' of teaching and learning interactions. Expectations like pre-designating peer learning groups so as to ensure a diversified learning environment, managing the balance between allowing students to take charge of the learning space while at the same time ensuring that interactive dialogues stay within curricular boundaries, and mediating when there are conflicts between students during discussions as well as in group work, appear as notions of this regulatory role. Students' combined expectations of autonomy in learning and respect as industry practitioners, while also expecting the Local Counsellor to assert control when the situation is not in their favour is a tall order. I would argue that this could be a case of the mind-set that some students adopt when they participate in teaching and learning interactions, where they assume the role of students who happen to be industry practitioners, as opposed to industry practitioners who want to maximise their learning in these interactions leveraging on the experience of Local Counsellors.

Although the range of descriptions of teaching effectiveness may seem like there is a hierarchical relationship between imparting information and knowledge, and getting students to change their mind-sets to become self-directed learners, in practice, as this research suggests, it seems more like two perspectives at each end of a continuum (McLean & Bullard, 2000). Students' needs during their MBA journey are likely to traverse along this continuum depending on a number of factors, such as their individual circumstances, learning needs, and the complexity of the content that these students are being engaged in. Local Counsellors play a crucial role in navigating this

continuum by sense making students' learning needs, and then exercising "conceptual flexibility" to provide effective teaching and learning experiences for students (Shagrir, 2015, pp. 791-792). Effectiveness is experienced when students' needs are matched by actions of Local Counsellors during teaching and learning interactions, and the more effectively Local Counsellors navigate this continuum, the greater the likelihood of the perception of teaching and learning being seen as effective.

7.4 Learning and Development

7.4.1 Overview

The aim of graduate management education is to develop industry ready managers. Hence, students embarking on such studies use various 'indicators' to ascertain if they are achieving their desired goals. When students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' as learning and development, their focus is on workplace application and their own professional development, adopting a long-term perspective of their investment in the MBA, rather than just seeking only immediate returns.

7.4.2 Discussion

Students adopting Conception 4 want to actively engage in teaching and learning interactions, to understand meaning and logic, and to provide and challenge perspectives, which suggests a generally deep approach to learning (Trigwell &

Prosser, 1991). As industry practitioners, students are driven by the need to deploy theory in their workplace, usually quite immediately, rather than from the perspective of just gaining qualifications. Hence, the importance of Local Counsellors illustrating the relevance of theory taught from very practical and deployable perspectives, and more specifically from a local Singapore context (Booth, 1997; Cliff, 1998; White & Heslop, 2012). Possession and demonstration of such knowledge at the workplace, while still studying, provides students immediate returns in terms of better workplace management. This was usually manifested through the implementation of practical and viable solutions to workplace problems, by recalling prior or passive knowledge gained from their teaching and learning interactions (Ashong & Commander, 2017; Mbabazi Bamwesiga et al., 2013; McLean & Bullard, 2000). This reciprocal learning that occurs by applying theory from classroom to the workplace, and then using experience from practice to make sense of theory in the classroom, is valued, and expected, by these students as industry practitioners.

The importance of professional and personal development is a consistent theme in this conception. These students view Conceptions 1 to 3 as a means to an end in relation to Conception 4. The term “durability”, coined by Mbabazi Bamwesiga et al. (2013, p. 343), aptly describes students’ desired notions of enduring skills, and professional and personal development as the ultimate gain from the MBA. Such capabilities enable students’ ability to practically apply classroom knowledge beyond the immediate time and space of the MBA. It is about enabling students to learn how to learn by challenging mental models and status quo, which is a valuable skill from both a professional as well as a personal dimension, and particularly important in their

roles as industry practitioners (Fernández-Río, 2016; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Harvey & Knight, 1996). These skills and capabilities are not 'one off', but become part of the students' psyche when dealing with complex workplace problems and issues. Students are able to reflect on the employment of theory in practice, and the resulting experiences in practice create new knowledge to approach workplace issues in a creative and sustainable manner. Learning for these students is a personal endeavour that contributes to personal growth or change, where Local Counsellors, as practitioner-tutors, mobilise students' ability to achieve their desired outcomes (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Paakkari et al., 2010)

7.4.3 New Insights

Students in Conception 4 use the term 'management skills' to broadly define a set of skills that are not explicitly taught in graduate management education, but are nevertheless necessary for effective managers. While such concepts are interspersed in general management literature, it seems absent in an explicit form in phenomenographic studies of graduate management student experiences as well as in professional education literature. These skills include soft skills such as communication and inter-personal abilities, and problem solving and decision making skills that require the assembling of various strands of knowledge, from the modules they have learned, in an integrated and coherent manner. These are rudimentary taken-for-granted management skills necessary for any manager, absolutely valued by employers, and yet does not feature as a formal component of graduate management education. As a norm, such skills are acquired vicariously through the Local

Counsellor's role modelling in teaching and learning interactions, as well as from peers in assignment discussions. Informational and knowledge content that has value beyond the curriculum, derived primarily from interactive dialogues, as well as from peer and Local Counsellors' sharing, equip students with the necessary tools to navigate both the workplace, and life in general. Learning, or more importantly, learning how to learn, is perhaps the ultimate skill any student can derive from teaching and learning interactions. Learning how to learn suggests an innate capability to develop oneself professionally as well as growth as a person. Conception 4 is representative of the approach expected of industry professionals engaged in teaching and learning interactions to be able to contribute to their organisations after completion of their MBA.

7.5 Phenomenographic Perspectives of Conceptions – Some Key Thoughts

These conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' manifest most visibly in the actual conduct of these interactions, which have been articulated in Conception 2 as provision of information and knowledge, as well as in Conception 3 as the learning that occurs through interactive dialogues and peer sharing. The hierarchical nature of Conceptions 1 to 4 also support the notion of the interdependence of teaching and learning (Alhija, 2017; Fernández-Río, 2016; Martha & Orlikowski, 2011; Newbie & Cannon, 2000). The higher order conceptions are not mutually exclusive to the ones that are subordinated, and this is apparent in the manner in which the qualities of the Local Counsellor influence the learning experience in teaching and learning interactions, which has a direct impact on the quality of

students' learning. The thesis findings also suggest that while students do desire to have control over teaching and learning interactions, specifically by being empowered to shape the learning agenda, there is also a natural tension with the Local Counsellor's regulatory role. Their ensuing conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' are largely determined by congruence or divergence with the Local Counsellor's personality, actions, and eventual outcomes of teaching and learning interactions.

The discussions thus far have described industry practitioner students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor practitioner-tutors being 'effective' in terms of the qualities of the Local Counsellor that enable effectiveness, the actions and processes during the actual teaching and learning interactions that enable effectiveness, and the accomplishment of learning and development in a similar manner. The discussions have also brought forth the importance of context and its influence in shaping such conceptions of effectiveness, but do not really explain the reasons driving these conceptions. In the next section, we will examine teaching and learning interactions in the context of socially-situated practices, and then overlay Bourdieu's social practice theory metaphors to deepen our understanding of these conceptions.

7.6 A Bourdieuan Perspective of Conceptions

7.6.1 Shaping Conceptions Through *Habitus*

The influence of past experiences structuring notions of effectiveness and ineffectiveness, which are then re-structured as part of these interactions, is a recurring theme, in all the conceptions. These experiences constitute a determinant driver in behaviour, accrued from both past academic as well as workplace interactions and outcomes, forming the basis of *habitus*, or dispositions that shape thinking and behaviour. Students' *habitus* help them make sense of their experiences, shaping their subsequent approach and orientation to teaching and learning, based on prior beliefs of 'effective' teaching and learning interactions. Three things, in particular, have played a dominant role in shaping the sample students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', namely, their cultural backgrounds, their past educational experiences, and workplace norms and practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Reay, 1998; Trowler, 2008). The lens that they adopt in making sense of their experiences has a latent but definitive influence on the manner in which they describe those experiences.

Habitus enables students to navigate the various *fields* they operate in, namely, the workplace, family, and studies, either sequentially, or more commonly, simultaneously (Bourdieu, 2005; Hardy, 2008). When students participate in teaching and learning interactions, they enter a *sub-field* that is an amalgam of the classroom and workplace, with each *field* being unique, yet sharing commonalities, particularly

so in a part-time MBA context where there is direct application of workplace knowledge in the classroom and vice versa (Levina & Vaast, 2008; Tønseth, 2015). Hence, students seem to adopt two lenses, both driven by *habitus*, somewhat concurrently during teaching and learning interactions, to determine effectiveness, which sometimes tends to present itself as competing expectations. This is manifested in Conception 1. As fellow industry practitioners, students' years of work experiences have shaped prior beliefs of an effective Local Counsellor as one who is a subject matter expert, with a credible track record and industry currency (Alhija, 2017; Morgan, 2006). Qualities such as accessibility and responsiveness represent the ethos adopted in the business world, as would be expected between busy industry practitioners, hence students' similar expectations in the classroom. At the same time, the Local Counsellor, being the 'teacher', is also expected to demonstrate a level of academic competence equal to or better than the academic staff from the University, a perspective probably shaped by past undergraduate experience. When students' experiences from industry practice are layered over space and time, *habitus* is constructed and re-constructed, resulting in unconscious pre-conditioning, and this seems evident in the sample interviewed in this thesis. Eventually, students develop a characteristic that Deer (2008, p. 117) aptly refers to as "learned ignorance", which is unconsciously ingrained in their disposition. So when students make conclusions about effectiveness and ineffectiveness of teaching and learning interactions, this pre-conditioning, though latent, exerts a powerful influence that manifests in their descriptions of the various conceptions articulated in this thesis.

Similarly, *habitus* formed by past educational experiences also shape students' expectations of the actual conduct of teaching and learning interactions, as expressed in Conceptions 2 and 3. In particular, specific academic disciplines during students' undergraduate education, have imbued students with a set of 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' behaviours and norms, which they then apply to teaching and learning interactions (Vaara & Faÿ, 2011a). Students from creative or communications disciplines, as described in Conception 3, expect the varied and creative use of pedagogical practices in teaching and learning interactions so that learning is enabled. However, some students, as described in Conception 2, prefer to play the role of passive recipients, and this is also shaped by prior experience in a Singapore education system where students are generally not vocal. What seems to be forgotten, as students enter the *field* of teaching and learning interactions, is that Local Counsellors are drawn from industry as practitioner-tutors primarily for their industry experience, rather than their teaching abilities. While, I can empathise with students' desire to be taught in a manner that allows them to understand and apply theoretical content through structured pedagogical processes, in reality there will always be a trade-off between industry experience and academic competence, just as there will always be trade-off decisions at the workplace. It appears, therefore that students' experiences with past structures associated with the 'classroom' *field*, and the associated *habitus*, takes on a dominant role in determining students' expectations.

Habitus shaped by culture is necessarily overlaid onto both industry and academic experiences. This is manifested in terms of socialised implicit rules, or *doxa*, such as their mental models of Asian students and what they normally do, expressions of

'Frenchness', and their acceptance of power asymmetry in teaching and learning interactions (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Deer, 2008; Pouliot & Mérand, 2013). *Doxa*, in many examples of expectations cited by students in this thesis, determine their conceptions of what is acceptable and unacceptable in teaching and learning interactions (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). This is evident as implicit rules of behaviour seem to have also influenced non-Asian students, including those of Western origin, as an attempt to assimilate in teaching and learning interactions by adopting a similar 'Asianness'. This reconstruction of their *habitus*, results in a set of learned behaviours that enable them to navigate the remainder of their MBA journey in Singapore.

Habitus also influences notions of immediate as well long-term expectations of learning and growth, as reflected in Conception 4. As current industry practitioners, students desire to be able to make immediate use of the knowledge gained in teaching and learning interactions at the workplace, through application or creation of new knowledge as a result of that application. This is not very different from the manner in which these industry practitioners navigate their workplace *field* in order to 'survive' on a daily basis (Cliff, 1998; Pimpa, 2009; White & Heslop, 2012). In a similar manner, students adopting Conception 4 take a long-term view of teaching and learning interactions, which is the learning that is derived from it. This is similar to the long-term approach these industry practitioners adopt in their careers, focusing on their professional growth and advancement, building and employing their accrued *capital* portfolios, which is a result of their industry or workplace *habitus* (Hallett, 2010; Paakkari et al., 2010). Workplace *habitus*, therefore, suggests that the road to

becoming better managers is paved by their ability to learn, and this influences their orientations in teaching and learning interactions (Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997).

7.6.2 Social Capital, Collaboration and Peer Learning

Bourdieu's description of the *field* as a competitive space, however, does not seem to reflect students' conceptions of teaching and learning interactions as a *field*, or *sub-field* (Bourdieu, 1985; Martin, 2003; Thomson, 2008). Conceptions 3 and 4, in particular, suggest a preference for cooperation, rather than competition by collaborating and co-constructing knowledge through interactive dialogues, and peer sharing (Coleman, 1988; Gopee & Deane, 2013; Martin, 2003; Medland, 2016; Parker et al., 2008; Portes, 2000; Stigmar, 2016b). This natural shift towards collaboration is likely to be attributed to workplace *habitus*, where it is normal for industry practitioners to work in teams, leveraging on the cumulative experience and expertise of members. In a similar manner, students focus on building *social capital* for long-term benefit as they are likely to encounter one another in the workplace in the future (Dika & Singh, 2002). The building of networks and relationships is common practice in industry, and is viewed as a means to navigate the challenges and nuances of the workplace. The benefits of such practices are ingrained in students, hence their adoption and expectations of similar practices in teaching and learning interactions. This could also account for students' need to build relationships with Local Counsellors as a necessary step for effective learning. These Local Counsellors, with their experience and knowledge, form a potential component of students' future networks

in industry. These forms of accrued *social capital* provide the basis by which these students navigate future *fields*.

7.6.3 Power Asymmetry

Although the notion of the teacher's absolute power over the student is a fundamental part of Bourdieu's work, insights from this thesis suggest that this is not always true (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Siisiainen, 2003; Vvacquant, 1989). Students, as industry practitioners, bring *capital* in the form of domain expertise that is employed for the collective advantage of their peers (Breiger, 2000; Lin, 2014; Vvacquant, 1989). To some extent this *capital* facilitates a temporal shift of power asymmetry in favour of the student, and is for all intents and purposes symbolic in nature (Calhoun et al., 1993; Desan, 2013). This is not surprising as it is similar to common industry practice where each member of a team comes with specific expertise that adds value to the project they are undertaking, and do take the lead when navigating specific aspects of the project where specific domain knowledge or experience is required, even when there is a designated team leader.

On the other hand, assessment continues to be an area where Local Counsellors still wield dominant power (Hodgson, 2005). Hence, the ball is in the Local Counsellor's court, so to speak, to reduce that asymmetry by building relationships with students, as students have expressed, to enhance the learning experience. Improved relationships, enabled through approachability and accessibility, translates to

partnership for co-construction of knowledge in teaching and learning interactions (Bourdieu, 1989; Mathieson, 2012).

7.7 Concluding Thoughts

Bourdieu's social practice concepts have added additional layers to the understanding of the Conceptions discovered through phenomenography. While the Conceptions describe the four qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor as 'effective', Bourdieu provides an understanding of dispositions and motivations that drive Conceptions being described in the manner in which they were presented. These understandings of dispositions and motivations are not easily discoverable through phenomenography as its face is decontextualised when presented. The discussion also suggests that workplace *habitus* seems to exert a dominant influence on notions of effectiveness. This is not surprisingly, since both students and Local Counsellors are themselves industry practitioners whose dispositions are more likely to be influenced by workplace and cultural experiences and nuances.

The next Chapter will bring together the key concepts and ideas that have been discussed in the preceding Chapters. The discussion will re-visit the key research questions and highlight how this thesis adds to the body of research on graduate management student experience.

8 Chapter Eight Conclusion

8.1 Overview

Chapter Eight summarises the key ideas discussed in this thesis and brings closure to the questions that prompted the research. I will first begin by recapitulating the motivations behind this body of work, and the approach that was taken to bring it to fruition, including the various challenges encountered in design, conduct, and analysis. This Chapter will then summarise the key discussions for each of the research questions in turn, culminating with my articulation of the contribution to knowledge arising from this thesis, specifically conceptions of teaching and learning interactions between students and faculty who are both industry practitioners.

8.2 What I Set Out to Do

This body of work was essentially an exploration of students' conceptions, combining phenomenography with Bourdieu's social practice theory concepts, the context being that both students and Local Counsellors were industry practitioners engaged in teaching and learning interactions. This thesis was motivated by my own curiosity in understanding how my students perceived teaching and learning as being 'effective' during their interactions with me as their Local Counsellor. I wanted to understand what was important to them, and what was not, but search for answers were somewhat hampered by the inadequacies of the current student feedback system in use. With these thoughts in mind, I set out to discover the following:

- a. How does a phenomenographic approach illuminate how part-time industry practitioner MBA students in Singapore conceptualise teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who are also industry practitioners, as 'effective'?

- b. How do the conceptions of these teaching and learning interactions compare with (i) phenomenographic studies on conceptions of effective teaching, and (ii) literature on professional learning?

- c. How do the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu illuminate the social and cultural complexities of industry practitioners being taught by industry practitioners, which phenomenography cannot?

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews of a purposive sample of twenty-four students who had already graduated from the programme. This sample was anecdotally representative of the demographics prevalent in such a part-time MBA cohort. A phenomenographic analysis was conducted to determine students' conceptions, or the qualitatively different ways in which these part-time MBA students, who were industry practitioners, understood teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellors, who were practitioner-tutors, as being 'effective'. These conceptions were translated into an outcome space, which was then informed by theory on conceptions of effective teaching and learning, and Bourdieu's social practice theory, to gain insights on congruence and divergence with literature.

I had a number of concerns in relation to the design and conduct of the research. The first concern was the potential power asymmetry between myself as the 'teacher' and researcher, and students who were participants. Students who had already graduated from the MBA programme were engaged as participants to minimise any possible power distance, residual or otherwise. From a research process perspective, interviews were carried out as conversations, allowing the pace to be dictated by participants. Participant verification of transcripts was also carried out to ensure that interview conversations were factually accurate. The second concern was related to memory and experience recall, as these students had graduated on an average of one to two years at the time of the interviews. This was managed by making effort to understand the possible filters that could influence retrospective recall of moments and experiences that might be strategically selected to respond to the interview questions, and subsequently seeking second and third order meanings as part of the analysis, as per a phenomenography approach. The final, and perhaps main concern was retaining my objectivity as a researcher since my own status as an industry practitioner, as well as my previous experience as a part-time MBA student, clearly positioned me as an insider. The main strategy to mitigate bias was the continuous exercise of reflexivity, and focusing on using my voice to represent the voice of the students rather than attempt to represent every voice that was interviewed.

8.3 What I Discovered

In approaching this section of the Chapter, I will summarise the key insights, using each of the research questions to frame my thinking.

8.3.1 Conceptions of 'Effective' Teaching and Learning Interactions

The research uncovered four qualitatively different ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, conceptualised teaching and learning interactions with their Local Counsellor, who was a practitioner-tutor, being 'effective'. Conception 1 focused on the qualities of the Local Counsellor as a determinant of effectiveness. As industry practitioners, students expected the Local Counsellor to be a current and experienced practitioner-tutor, who possessed professional and academic competence, coupled with qualities such as empathy, passion, open-mindedness, and approachability. Students holding this Conception deemed an 'effective' Local Counsellor as a necessary pre-requisite for 'effective' teaching and learning interactions. Desired expectations of industry expertise and currency are benchmarked based on their expectations of fellow industry practitioners at the workplace.

Conceptions 2 and 3 are focused on desired experiences during teaching and learning interactions as determinants of effectiveness. Conception 2 suggests that teaching and learning interactions are effective when relevant and adequate information and knowledge are imparted by the Local Counsellor to enable students to successfully

navigate and complete the MBA programme. Students position themselves as passive recipients in these interactions, which would be rather uncharacteristic when compared to the manner in which they would be expected to participate at the workplace as industry practitioners. Students seem to have either adopted a 'student' mode rather than wear the hat of an industry practitioner, or have regressed to surface learning due to pressures of juggling multiple spaces in terms of their studies, work, as well as personal commitments. Conception 3 presents itself as one characteristic of industry practitioners who are themselves to some extent subject matter experts in their own domain. Hence, their perceptions of effectiveness are shaped by their desire for interactive dialogues and peer learning so that they can learn how to learn as self-directed learners. Teaching and learning interactions, in this instance, are viewed as collaborative spaces where learning occurs through co-construction of knowledge between Local Counsellors and students, as fellow practitioners leveraging on their mutual cumulative experience. This mode of learning matches their normal workplace context as industry practitioners. Conception 3 does, however, recognise the importance of Local Counsellors shaping learning outcomes as active facilitators, or in simple terms their role as 'teachers'.

Students adopting Conception 4, determine effectiveness by their quality of learning, which is expressed in a number of ways. At its simplest form, learning is viewed as application of theory at the workplace, which represents the necessary utility students desire as industry practitioners. Local Counsellors, using their own expertise and industry knowledge, mobilise this outcome amongst students. Application at the workplace reinforces the relevance of theory taught in teaching and learning

interactions, which then further compacts their ability to stand out at the workplace because of their applied knowledge. The ability to recall prior knowledge from the classroom, and the ability to use business tools at the workplace reinforce their identities as competent industry practitioners. At its best, learning is measured by the enduring impact that knowledge gained, both formal, in terms of business theories, as well as the vicarious learning of management and leadership skills, leading to their own long-term professional, and even personal, development as individuals. Mapped against the workplace, these descriptions of Conception 4 reflect real-world learning that these industry practitioners are subject to, and need to excel in to progress as managers.

The four Conceptions are nested hierarchically, which means that students who adopt Conception 4 are also likely to adopt Conceptions 1 to 3, but students who adopt Conception 1 are unlikely to adopt the other three Conceptions (Ashwin, 2005). This thesis also suggests that experiences during teaching and learning interactions (Conceptions 2 and 3) have the greatest impact on students' understanding of these interactions being 'effective', although common to all Conceptions is the qualities of the Local Counsellor, who seems to be a key determinant of effectiveness (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Hanushek, 1992).

8.3.2 Relating Conceptions to Phenomenography and Professional Learning

To set the context when comparing the various conceptions with phenomenographic as well as professional learning literature, I would like to make explicit two

considerations that set boundaries for comparing practice and theory. Firstly, the literature on phenomenographic conceptions of students experiences of teaching and learning interactions, especially graduate management education, is rather limited, hence the references that I have made in this thesis to research with undergraduate students, as well as non-phenomenographic research. Secondly, professional learning in this thesis is placed as the learning that students as industry practitioners acquire as a result of teaching and learning interactions with Local Counsellors who are also industry practitioners. The focus is on management education, which is distinctly different from professional education that has a vocational skew.

The importance of practitioner-tutors as being instrumental in effective teaching and learning interactions, as described in Conception 1, is discussed in various forms. The need for Local Counsellors, in this instance, to be professionally competent as well as possess academic ability is largely recognised in graduate management education, although this perspective is missing from phenomenographic studies (Oyewo, 2016). This is in addition to the importance of personality traits as an enabler of effectiveness in teaching and learning interactions, which has been discussed in both phenomenographic and well as professional learning literature (Oyewo, 2016; Watland, 2007). However, both these areas of research are not sufficiently explicit in terms of the actual nature of these traits and qualities, whereas non-phenomenographic literature makes several references to these qualities such as empathy, approachability, and passion (Tootoonchi et al., 2002). These factors have a contributory effect on the emotions of part-time graduate management students, and thus form the basis by which Local Counsellors build relationships with students in

service of their learning. It is also apparent that students' orientation to Local Counsellors vary, from fellow industry practitioners to one where he or she is viewed as a 'teacher', depending on their practical and emotional needs. This is an interesting phenomenon as students' orientation to fellow practitioners at the workplace is unlikely to see this shift, which is probably attributable to the context of that relationship.

The insights from Conceptions 2 and 3 are also represented in various forms in literature. Descriptions that represent surface approaches to learning, as described in Conception 2, has been discussed in several phenomenographic studies. Specifically, studies by Hallett (2010), Trigwell and Reid (1998), and Paakkari et al. (2010) have found common themes pertaining to the provision of information and knowledge in order to meet assessment and qualification requirements, which are not generally discussed in professional learning literature. Research studies on professional learning tend to adopt a more practice-oriented approach, such as the practitioner-tutor defining the needs of students in terms of demography and cultural nuances, so that teaching and learning interactions could be better structured for positive student experience, and also emphasising the use of concrete illustrations to make theory come alive in teaching and learning interactions (Barker & Stowers, 2005; Clarke & Flaherty, 2002). Interestingly, the importance of addressing cultural nuances as part of the process of structuring teaching and learning interactions have also been discussed by Cliff (1998) and Pimpa (2009) in their respective phenomenographic studies. Students who reflect the need for teaching and learning interactions to be contextualised to local and cultural nuances tend to adopt an application focus. The

knowledge they gain reflect an orientation towards a deep approach to learning as described in Conception 3. In particular, empowering students to take charge of their learning, having Local Counsellors leverage on students ideas, anchored on their respective industry experience, and encouraging interactive peer discussions are supported by both phenomenographic as well as professional learning literature (Ashwin, 2005; Barker & Stowers, 2005).

Although not explicit in phenomenographic or professional learning literature, actions by Local Counsellors, such as providing feedback on students' assignments, as well as coaching them by challenging their thinking, all of which are necessary to enable empowerment and self-directedness, are discussed in non-phenomenographic literature (Feldman, 1976; Gopee & Deane, 2013; Stes et al., 2013). Conception 3 represents many of the realities of the workplace, such as leveraging on the cumulative experience and knowledge of peers, as well as coaching of subordinates and team members when in management positions. Conception 2, on the other hand, would be rather uncharacteristic of industry professionals, but nevertheless represent a perspective that even industry practitioners adopt in teaching and learning interactions.

The descriptions articulated in Conception 4 are adequately discussed in phenomenographic literature. The two broad strands of themes relate to workplace application and implementation of theory, and the long-term professional and personal development of the individual. The importance of contextualised workplace utility lends meaning to teaching and learning interactions, which is important to

students who, as industry practitioners, will want to see the immediate impact of workplace implementation of what they have learned (Cliff, 1998; Pimpa, 2009; White & Heslop, 2012). The ability to do so reinforces their confidence in Local Counsellors as well as teaching and learning interactions, as they are likely to be seen at the workplace as better managers as a result of their MBA experiences (Booth, 1997; Trigwell & Reid, 1998). The epitome of Conception 4, which is the notion of long-term professional and personal development and growth, is also discussed in phenomenographic literature (Hallett, 2010; Paakkari et al., 2010).

8.3.3 Bourdieuan Perspectives of Conceptions

While phenomenography opens up our understanding of the qualitatively different ways in which these sample students conceptualise teaching and learning interactions being 'effective', these conceptions are unable to explain the underlying complexities related to social and cultural influences that give rise to these conceptions. This is particularly so since teaching and learning interactions are socially-situated practices anchored on social and cultural nuances.

In this respect, Bourdieu's metaphors of *field*, *habitus*, *doxa*, and *capital* provide a useful framework to make sense of teaching and learning interactions as socially situated practices that come with the specific nuances of social interaction, and these insights are largely in congruence with literature. Students' past experiences, accrued from culture, undergraduate education, and workplace practices and norms form their unique *habitus*, which allow them to navigate the various *fields* they operate in as

industry practitioners and students, namely, the workplace, and teaching and learning interactions, respectively. *Habitus* is the key determinant of their conceptions, and the basis by which students form notions of right and wrong, or appropriateness and inappropriateness, of practices experienced and desired in teaching and learning interactions. *Habitus* determines mental models, shaped by years of unconscious learning, related to cultural assumptions, such as acceptable (or expected) passivity in teaching and learning interactions, expectations of creative pedagogy based on undergraduate experience, and norms and practices accepted at the workplace being also acceptable in the classroom. However, *habitus* can also be restructured, as evidenced by the non-Asian students who learn how to adapt to an Asian-dominated Singapore classroom.

Students' ability to navigate these *fields* is also determined by their understanding of the various explicit and implicit rules in place (*doxa*), and the leverage they have in the *fields* using the *capital* they possess. Students' *capital* is derived from their knowledge and experience as industry practitioners. However, Conception 2 is an example where students choose not to leverage on this *capital*, which would unlikely to be their normal workplace behaviour as managers. This phenomenon is a function of context, where *habitus* formed by previous educational experience dominates and is expressed in passivity. Conceptions 3 and 4 suggest a shift where their disposition as industry practitioners exerts dominance. Each student's subject matter expertise, derived from the *capital portfolio* accumulated by their years of operating as industry practitioners, is seen as an opportunity for collective gain. Hence, students seem to value collaboration and peer learning, which suggests some level of interdependence,

although it can be argued that this behaviour or cooperation is still motivated by individual utility. Therefore, it is not the actual teaching or experience in teaching and learning interactions that shape conceptions of effectiveness, but rather the congruence or dissonance between students' expectations as a result of *habitus* in relation to their actual experiences during these interactions.

8.4 Contribution to Knowledge

There are two broad strands of discovery in this thesis where the literature is largely silent, particularly phenomenographic studies of postgraduate student experience. These are the student-practitioner tension in teaching and learning interactions, and the notion of the Local Counsellor as a role model industry practitioner.

8.4.1 Practitioner Students' Orientation to Teaching and Learning Interactions – Student or Practitioner?

The students in this study are industry practitioners with several years of experience and varying degrees of domain expertise. It would therefore be logical to conclude that when they engage in teaching and learning interactions, they would be assuming the role of industry practitioners, harnessing their experience to add value by way of active classroom participation. However, this study suggests that there is a tendency for these industry practitioners to take on the role of students, waiting to be informed, taught or developed by the Local Counsellor. While there is a common expectation amongst these students for the need to be recognised and respected as industry

practitioners, at the same time they also expect the Local Counsellor to control teaching and learning interactions, very much like students would, rather than take charge of these interactions in service of their learning, as they would as practitioners at the workplace. Hence, there seems to be a tension of sorts. Are part-time MBA students in Singapore, who are industry practitioners, participating in teaching and learning interactions as practitioners, leveraging on their experience, or are they engaging in these interactions as students waiting for the Local Counsellor to take the lead, or perhaps a little of both?

The key reason for this tension is *habitus*. Each *field* has its own *habitus*, which is a structuring structure that shapes understandings, attitudes, and behaviours in that *field*. Students have experienced both the *field* of education as well as the *field* of industry practice, each with their own set of heuristics of appropriateness and inappropriateness. Students are therefore unconsciously conditioned to each *field's* taken-for-granted implicit and explicit rules of behaviour, or *doxa*. Students raised in an Asian education system, like that in Singapore, are generally likely to defer to the authority of the teacher, and prefer to listen and process information rather than openly discuss and challenge ideas, particularly those raised by the teacher. Years of socialisation in such an education system, embeds behaviours associated with a passive orientation to teaching and learning interactions. Furthermore, *capital*, in the form of knowledge and experience is assumed to be in favour of the teacher, which leaves little for the student to 'trade' in such interactions.

As industry practitioners, on the other hand, students operate in a very different manner in the workplace. They are expected to solve problems and seek information in order to solve those problems on their own accord. While there would likely be a manager who supervises their work, they are expected to work independently, or sometime in teams, challenging assumptions and data in order to arrive at suitable solutions. These experiences position these students with *capital portfolios* that allow them to 'trade' and assume positions in teaching and learning interactions in graduate management programmes, as they would at the workplace. It seems, however, that formal education and undergraduate *habitus* exerts its dominance, and students engage in the norms associated with a traditional teacher-student interaction in order to safely navigate these teaching and learning interactions. This would also account for students of Western origin, who are generally likely to be more vocal in such interactions, engaging in similar strategies. I would also argue that there are structural reasons for this. While teaching and learning interactions in the MBA are supposed to meld the *fields* of academia and industry, there is probably still a segregation of these *fields* in the minds of these students, which are shaped by structures like the classroom where the interaction occurs, the presence of a 'teacher', and the eventuality of an assessment as a determinant of successful qualification. Even students who adopt deep approaches to learning, and conceptualise effective teaching and learning interactions as learning and development, are still acutely cognisant of assessments as a definitive measure of success in the MBA. Hence, their dominant orientation to teaching and learning interactions as students rather than as industry practitioners. It is therefore the nature of the *field*, and the associated *habitus* that determine the type of orientation students adopt, because I would argue that these students are likely to

behave as industry practitioners, rather than students, if they were to interact with the same Local Counsellors as fellow industry practitioners in a workplace context.

When students remain passive in teaching and learning interactions, it is because their *habitus* is more deterministic in nature. It is formed through years of educational experience, in this case the specific context of the Singapore education system, of how to navigate teaching and learning interactions 'safely'. However, students also seem to be able to make a shift when the conditions of the teaching and learning interaction *field* appear favourable for their participation. The Local Counsellor is critical in mobilising students to make this shift from student to industry practitioner in teaching and learning interactions, leveraging on their *capital portfolios* for the cumulative benefit of the cohort. These actions by the Local Counsellor enable students' *habitus* to be restructured to enable new ways of navigating such teaching and learning interactions 'safely'. Nevertheless, the choice remains with students, whether *habitus* is deterministic, or transferable as restructured disposition.

8.4.2 Local Counsellor as an Industry Practitioner Role Model

Students' conceptions of Local Counsellors as being instrumental to teaching and learning interactions being 'effective' goes beyond the basic qualities of effectiveness discussed in the various sources of literature reviewed, and seems to be largely due to the influence of workplace *habitus* and the associated expectations of appropriateness. To these students, Local Counsellors are role models who represent the best of what industry practitioners ought to be. Other than subject matter and

academic competence described in literature, Local Counsellors' ability to juggle teaching, their own industry practice, as well as their personal and family commitments concurrently, while still able to deliver credible levels of professionalism during teaching and learning interactions, is motivation for students who struggle with a similar juggling act.

The sharing of real-life leadership and management experiences, with explicit contextual illustrations, is one area that students are particularly interested in as they too aspire to take on higher level managerial roles when they complete their MBA. While it is possible for them to have similar experiences at the workplace, the learning is likely to be incidental, whereas during teaching and learning interactions, such experiences can be structured into the sessions. Graduate management education is all about preparing these students for higher managerial roles at their workplace. However, the MBA curriculum is not specifically oriented to management and leadership skills, which students can only acquire either vicariously, or through the sharing from Local Counsellors.

Other qualities associated with such role model behaviour, but not prevalent in literature, is the Local Counsellor's accessibility and responsiveness. These are qualities that are valued in industry as 'time is money' in the business world, hence an expectation that a similar ethos is demonstrated in the classroom; congruence of such expectations shapes conceptions of effectiveness. In addition to accessibility and responsiveness is the importance of non-verbal cues used by the Local Counsellor to reduce power asymmetry, which then sets conditions for students to ask questions

and learn. Local Counsellors who are perceived as role models demonstrate these qualities and non-verbal cues, which are manifestations of workplace *habitus*. These physical predispositions, in terms of gestures and behaviour, help industry practitioners to build successful networks in the working world, which these experienced practitioner-tutors have structured in their *habitus*.

It is also interesting to note that Local Counsellors are also accorded a due level of respect, just based on the fact that they have 'done their time'. This perspective could be attributed to both workplace and academia *habitus*, where senior members of these *fields* are accorded respect even prior to actual interaction. There is an assumed *capital portfolio* comprising a combination of industry and interpersonal skills, as well as tacit management knowledge accrued from years of industry practice. Students' actual conceptions of effectiveness, nevertheless, are shaped during teaching learning interactions, depending on whether there is congruence or divergence between students' expectations and their actual experiences.

8.5 Methodological Contribution

The intent of this research was to discover the qualitatively different conceptions of teaching and learning interactions amongst students and Local Counsellors, who are both industry practitioners. Hence, the use of phenomenography as an approach to discover these range of meanings. However, the decontextualised nature of phenomenography is not fully able to uncover complexities that underlie these conceptions. As socially-situated practices, teaching and learning interactions are

complex at best, and their phenomenographic descriptions do not do justice to the complexities behind these conceptions arising from cultural and social nuances. Bourdieu's metaphorical concepts of practice theory provide a framework to understand these complexities. Hence, in approaching this thesis, the research used phenomenography to bring order to the messiness of the data collected, and then used Bourdieu's practice theory to unearth underlying complexities to better understand these conceptions. The value of phenomenographic research in identifying the qualitatively different ways in which practitioner students experienced teaching and learning interactions with practitioner-tutors was therefore complemented by Bourdieu's Field Theory, which provided cultural and contextual insights on the nuances shaping these conceptions. Such a complementary approach to investigating phenomena have the potential of adding to the richness of the data, and surfacing insights that might not be apparent using a single approach.

8.6 Areas for Further Research

The main limitation of this study is that the insights gained are based on a focused sample from the University of Strathclyde part-time MBA programme conducted in Singapore under the auspices of YMCA which is the local PHEI. Therefore, practical application is directly relevant to the University and YMCA, as well as the Local Counsellors and the staff of the University. Nevertheless, the research was conducted in the spirit of broader usability, particularly for the many other internationalized part-time MBA programmes that are run by the various PHEIs in Singapore, and perhaps in

the immediate region, given the probable demographic similarity of students who embark on such programmes, and also scholars of internationalisation.

An area for further research would be to conduct a similar study, casting the net wider to other internationalized part-time MBA programmes to build on the insights from this research. The sample participants could also be expanded to include current students, which would then mitigate the issues with memory and recall, but at the same time would have to include measures to overcome the impact dominance and power asymmetry might have on the data. It would also be interesting to investigate this same research from the perspective of identities that these practitioners assume when at the workplace and in the classroom.

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Appendix One Local Counsellor Class Evaluation Form



the Strathclyde MBA

Class Evaluation Form – Local Counsellor

Course	MG916 Operations Management
Class Title	MacGowan/MacInnes
Centre	Singapore
Local Counsellor	Mr Varma Sadanand

Your evaluations are important and an integral part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that the programme upholds the University's mission of being 'the place of useful learning'. Thus in completing the questionnaire, be honest in your evaluation and constructive in your feedback. If you wish your feedback to remain anonymous, **DO NOT** complete your personal details below.

Family Name	
First Name(s)	
Student Registration Number	

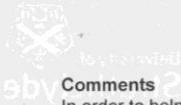
Answer Selection: ● or ○

1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

I found that the Local Counsellor...

	1	2	3	4	5
Managed well organized and structured class	○	○	○	○	○
Communicated clearly and effectively in class	○	○	○	○	○
Explained important concepts and ideas in ways that I could understand	○	○	○	○	○
Engaged in and developed discussion during counselling sessions	○	○	○	○	○
Stimulated me to think about my current practice and how I might change	○	○	○	○	○
Was responsive to the learning needs of class members	○	○	○	○	○
Provided timely and helpful feedback on assignments	○	○	○	○	○
Overall I was satisfied with the performance of the Local Counsellor	○	○	○	○	○





Comments

In order to help us develop the content of this class we would ask you to give us additional specific comments or suggestions you have as to how we might improve the content, delivery and/or organisation of it. Please supply two positive comments on what you learnt/enjoyed about the class:

Class Evaluation Form – Local Counsellor

Please supply two improvement points that we might address:

Local Counsellor

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation questionnaire.

Student Registration Number

First Name(s)

Family Name

1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

I found that the Local Counsellor...					
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Overall I was satisfied with the performance of the Local Counsellor
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Provided timely and helpful feedback on assignments
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Was responsive to the learning needs of class members
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stimulated me to think about my current practice and how I might change
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Engaged in and developed discussion during learning sessions
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Explained important concepts and issues in ways that I could understand
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Communicated clearly and effectively in class
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Managed my organized and structured class



Appendix Two Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: What Students' Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Tell Us About Measurement Tools in Higher Education: A Case Study of Part-time MBA Students in Singapore

Research Student: Sadanand Varma
Tel: +6597882941
Email: s.varma@lancaster.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Kirsty Fynn
Tel: +44 (0) 1524 595123
Email: k.finn1@lancaster.ac.uk

Date:

Dear ,

I would like to invite you to take part in my PhD thesis research with the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to uncover the various ways in which part-time MBA students in Singapore perceive effective teaching, and how this teaching-learning interaction influences their learning.

What participation involves and how to withdraw if you no longer wish to participate

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited because of your previous experience as a part-time student in the University of Strathclyde MBA Programme conducted by the YMCA Education Centre in Singapore, and the insights that you have gained in the various teaching-learning engagements during the programme.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Any relationship you may have with me, as a former student will be neither positively nor negatively influenced by your decision to take part or not.

What will taking part involve for you?

What will you have to do?

The study will involve a face-to-face semi-structured interview with me. The venue, time and date will be arranged to suit your convenience. Interviews should last approximately an hour. It is vital that you feel able to speak freely during the interview. The interview will be digitally audio-recorded, and a written transcript made.

If you are willing to take part, please contact me, on my email or mobile number, to ask any questions, and arrange a convenient meeting time. When we meet, prior to starting the interview, we will go through a consent form, which you will need to sign to ensure you are happy to commence with the interview.

What if you change your mind?

You are free to withdraw from the study, without giving any reason, and with no consequence to yourself up to the time the data has been incorporated into the analysis. However, once your data has been anonymised and incorporated into themes as part of the analysis, it might not be possible for it to be identified and withdrawn.

Protecting Your Data and Identity

What will happen to the data?

'Data' here means my field notes, audio recordings and any email exchanges we may have had. The data may be securely stored for ten years after the successful completion of the PhD *Viva* as per Lancaster University requirements, and after that any personal data will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be transferred and stored on my personal laptop and deleted from portable media.

Identifiable data (including recordings of your and other participants' voices) on my personal laptop will be encrypted. With devices such as portable recorders where this is not possible, identifiable data will be deleted as quickly as possible. In the mean time I will ensure the portable device will be kept safely until the data is deleted.

When your interview has been transcribed, a copy of the transcription will be emailed to you for your comments or any changes you might request to the transcription. Data may be used in the reporting of the research (in the thesis and then potentially in any papers or conference presentations). Please note that if your data is used, it will not

identify you in any way or means, unless you otherwise indicate your expressed permission to do so.

Your data will have full protection via the Singapore Personal Data Protection Act, as well as the UK Data Protection Act. The completion of this study is estimated to be by January 2019 although data collection will be complete by Jun 2017.

Data will only be accessed by members of the research team and support services, this includes my supervisor and secretarial services for transcription. I will be transcribing the first few interviews and will thereafter seek professional services for the remaining transcriptions. Any professional transcribing services engaged by me will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure that your data is protected. All data related to the interviews will be kept by me. The research may also be used for journal articles and conference presentations.

How will your identity be protected?

A pseudonym will be given to protect your identity in the research report and any identifying information about you will be removed from the report. All pseudonyms will be securely stored and kept by myself.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study hopes to identify gaps between what is currently being measured as teaching effectiveness by Private Higher Education Institutions and what students consider as effective teaching, which then promotes learning. The findings of this study will provide a basis for reviewing the measurement of teaching effectiveness and identify possible intervention measures to improve teaching methodologies.

Who to contact for further information or with any concerns

If you would like further information on this project, the programme within which the research is being conducted, or have any concerns about the project, participation or my conduct as a researcher please contact:

Professor Paul Ashwin – Head of Department
Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443
Email: P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk
Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.



Sadanand Varma

Appendix Three Consent Form

Title of Project: What Students' Conceptions of Teaching and Learning Tell Us About Measurement Tools in Higher Education: A Case Study of Part-time MBA Students in Singapore

Name of Researcher: Sadanand Varma

		Please Tick
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated _____ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary. I also understand that my contributions to the study will be part of the data collected for this study and my anonymity will be ensured. I give consent for all my contributions to be included and/or quoted in this study.	
3.	I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study, without giving any reason, and with no consequence to myself, up to the time the data has been incorporated into the analysis. I also understand that once my data has been anonymised and incorporated into themes as part of the analysis, it might not be possible for it to be identified and withdrawn.	
4.	I consent to the interview being audio recorded.	
5.	I understand that the information I provide will be used for a PhD research project and the combined results of the project may be published.	
6.	I agree to take part in the above study.	
<p>Name of Participant:</p> <p>Signature</p> <p>Date</p>		

Appendix Four Research Interview Guide

Research Questions

- a. How do part-time MBA students in Singapore understand and define teaching and learning experiences as 'effective' through their interactions with their Local Counsellor in the teaching-learning interaction?
- b. In what ways do students' experiences and preferences add credence towards the different practices and processes in an MBA teaching-learning interaction?
- c. How do students' orientations towards the MBA teaching-learning interaction reflect and/or challenge established and apparently objective measures of effectiveness?

Interview Guide

The interview will start with mutual introductions and also a quick run through of the intention of the interview in terms of outcomes.

Main Questions	Follow-on Questions	Additional Questions
When were you a part-time MBA student?	What were some of the modules that you were taught?	
What was the experience like, being taught in the part-time MBA programme? What was the most memorable part of your experience?	Could you elaborate by citing specific incidences or stories of your experiences? How did it make you feel?	How did the experience make you feel? How did those feelings impact on your desire or ability to learn? Why?

<p>What were your expectations of the tutor in a teaching-learning interaction?</p> <p>What do you think was the purpose of the MBA?</p>	<p>What is your conception of desired practices in a teaching-learning interaction?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was your conception of an ideal classroom environment? - What did you expect from the tutor in the classroom? - Why did you feel that way? <p>Could you elaborate with some specific examples or incidences?</p>	<p>What were your expectations of teaching styles that ought to be adopted in a teaching-learning interaction?</p> <p>What about your expectations of etiquette and behaviour? Why?</p> <p>What worked for you? Why? Could you cite some incidences where this occurred?</p> <p>What did not work for you? Why? Could you cite some incidences when this occurred?</p>
<p>What do you think was the role of the tutor in a teaching-learning interaction in the classroom?</p> <p>Why did you feel that way?</p>	<p>What did you think was your role in that teaching-learning relationship?</p>	
<p>When did you feel that the teaching-learning interaction was particularly effective?</p>	<p>What were some of the specific things or actions that made you feel that the teaching was effective?</p> <p>When did you feel that the teaching-learning engagement was not as effective as you had hoped to be?</p>	<p>Could you share some stories related to those experiences?</p> <p>What made you feel that way?</p> <p>How did you respond as a result of those feelings?</p>
<p>Could you describe what it means to you to be learning as an adult student?</p>	<p>What motivates you to learn in a teaching-learning interaction?</p>	<p>How did you know you were learning?</p>

	<p>Could you describe incidences where the teacher helped you to learn?</p> <p>What were some of the challenges you experienced? Could you give some anecdotal examples?</p>	<p>How did these challenges impact you and why?</p> <p>What did you expect from the tutor when dealing with these challenges?</p>
<p>What are some of your thoughts on the post-module feedback?</p>	<p>What other suggestions might you have?</p>	

Appendix Five Ways of Experiencing Teaching & Learning as Being Effective

Category	Description	Representative Quotation	Remarks
Local Counsellor Competence/ Character	Knowledge of module content and structure	<i>"...the lecturer would of course have to know the structure of that course, what's the final objective, the teaching objectives that is required for that particular lesson in class." (p. T1-2)</i>	Competence
	Industry and teaching competence	<i>"Why am I saying that is because, ya, some tutors might be really experienced in their field but if they do not have enough experience in teaching they might not be able to give examples that some students who are not of that particular discipline to really appreciate. So I think it is like experience in both the teaching aspect as well the industry." (p. T1-3)</i>	Competence
	Openness to students' perspectives	<i>"So I would think that it should not be really like undergrad type of style, ya, where you are truly authoritative... my expectation of the tutor is that he must be more willing to listen rather than say "you should just listen to me while I deliver my lecture". So, it is more like a two-way kind of dialogue I think would be more enriching." (p. T1-3)</i>	Character
	Ability to control class	<i>"...I feel that while the tutor or lecturer should be more open, but I feel that it should not go beyond a point it becomes too cordial that he loses control of the whole class... So, I think a certain degree of authority is still required..." (p. T1-4)</i>	Character
	Approachable	<i>"I think in a nutshell, he should have an approachable personality, and able to communicate effectively to the different adult learners..." (p. T1-10)</i>	Character

Conduct of Teaching and Learning Interactions	Clarify students' knowledge gaps	<i>"Well, I would actually try to express what my concerns are, what is it I don't understand. Hopefully, he will be able to, maybe not give an answer, but at least guide me to how I can actually realise the problem better." (p. T1-9)</i>	Provide knowledge
	Delivery methods that stimulate learning	<i>"Whereas, things like doing focus group studies in some of the modules, those were like more interesting and I think the synergies created within such groups work I felt allows me to learn more, and more effectively." (p. T1-2)</i>	Pedagogy
	Facilitation of student' thinking as subject matter expert	<i>"The first word that comes to mind is facilitation. Ya. And (long pause) be able to facilitate for the group to synergise and think critically. And, uhm, be an authoritative enough source to provide feedback that might trigger further thinking." (p. T1-5)</i>	Peer learning
		<i>"So, having said that, he will come out with various topics, argumentative topics, where each of us, each of the groups, will have to present their points. So, it's more like a facilitation, it's more like a facilitation. I think the best value from it is within the group because now instead of one person speaking and we are just receiving, it becomes like a discussion and this multitude of dialogues between all the individuals is able to enable each of us to view different perspectives." (p. T1-2)</i>	Peer learning
	Leverage on student peer knowledge	<i>"So, I think this is part of what I think adult learning should actually encompass; leverage on the whole cohort kind of experience to bring out even bigger value than what's just beyond the textbooks." (p. T1-8)</i>	Peer learning
Create climate for conversations	<i>"Ya, maybe some are small gestures like moving closer to the participants or students to be like, as part of the classroom rather than I am standing right in front, and the students are at the back. So, I think small gestures like this could bring a little bit... you should ease the tension a little and start to break the ice, and allow the conversation to actually begin." (p. T1-4)</i>	Learning environment	

Create conditions to challenge students' thinking	<i>"We were just thrown into a room and I think it was after a two-hour seminar, lecture, we were thrown into a room to solve some questions. Ya. That, I felt that was, it is challenging and effective because it really put us in certain situation, like we were doing a project with a very tight timeline. So it really tests us on how we manage team dynamics." (p. T1-5)</i>	Learning environment
Simulate workplace conditions	<i>"I think it's to really maybe like simulate a war zone, kind of. Because these things do happen in real life, where we were tasked with something in the tight timeline and we have to work with the whole team to resolve certain things." (p. T1-6)</i>	Learning environment
Reinforcing student learning through feedback	<i>"So, but, at the end of it, when we do the presentation, the feedback are given by the lecturers, and comments an feedback, will reinforce our understanding and adds on to what we have discussed earlier." (p. T1-3)</i>	Learning Feedback
Instil reflective thinking	<i>"I think it's good training during that time although I wasn't able to get really a good grasp of reflective thinking, during that time, but I think it was a starting point for me. Hence I think the training to be reflective was really valuable and I appreciate it now." (p. T1-7)</i>	Skills
Teaching-learning engagement as a dialogue	<i>"I felt that as adult learners it should not be a monologue. It should be really more, there should be more dialogue, and that would make the whole time spent more worthwhile." (p. T1-7)</i>	Process
Enable workplace application of theory	<i>"Well, of course, as the learner, as the name suggests, I am still there to learn, but on top of that there should be something more than just content learning... Practical stuff and how I can actually contextualise it and apply to my own work..." (p. T1-8)</i>	Application

Relationship Between Local Counsellor and Student	Coach/mentor	<i>"I think for adult learning, rather than a teacher-student relationship, it should be more like mentoring-coaching kind, where they guide you rather than feed you, kind of environment."</i> (p. T1-9)	Non-threatening
Student's Understanding of Learning	<p>Ability to apply theoretical knowledge at workplace</p> <p>Affirmation of prior knowledge</p>	<p><i>"Certain subjects it's really a lot more apparent, like, now if I pick up a financial sheet, it's not just a bunch of numbers to me. At least I'll be able to make some sense of it. Before that it's just like a bunch of numbers."</i> (p. T1-9)</p> <p><i>"But certain activities that happen after that allow me to say, actually, "Oh, ya! I knew this, ya, I read this somewhere, I heard this somewhere." So, I was able to appreciate, you know, beyond, what was just seen on the surface. Ya, I know why they did it this way, because I have studied this before. Both ways, so I would say it is both ways."</i> (p. T1-9)</p>	<p>Application</p> <p>Affirmation</p>

Field Theory:

- T10 is from an Arts and Social Science background (*field, habitus, doxa*) so having concrete structures within the teaching-learning engagement was an important part of the experience (*doxa*). (p. T10-4)

Appendix Six Pool of Meanings (Sample)

Ways of Experiencing Teaching & Learning as Being Effective	Collated Descriptions [Clustered/Refined]	Initial Pool of Meanings [Possible Sub-themes to Support Categories of Description]	Revised Pool of Meanings	Proposed Categories of Description
<p>Qualities of the Local Counsellor that shape perceptions of effective teaching and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical and theoretical subject matter expertise Subject matter expert Industry expertise/experience Industrial currency • Actual experience running business Professional experience 	<p>Possesses industry experience and subject-matter expertise</p> <p>Possesses competence as a practitioner</p>	<p>Teaching and learning is 'effective' when the Local Counsellor is a subject-matter expert with industry experience</p>	<p>Teaching and learning interactions are 'effective' when the Local Counsellor is an experienced and competent industry professional and practitioner-tutor</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of module content and structure Knowledge competence equivalent to UK lecturer Understands assessment criteria • Academic competence Skilled at teaching adults Teaching experience 	<p>Possesses knowledge of content and curriculum</p> <p>Possesses academic teaching experience</p>	<p>Teaching and learning is 'effective' when the Local Counsellor possesses academic teaching competence</p>	

Appendix Seven Categories of Description (Sample)

Categories of Description	Pool of Meanings	Pool of Meanings (Sub-Factors)	Supporting Quotations
<p>Teaching and learning is 'effective' when classroom knowledge can be applied effectively within and beyond the workplace</p>	<p>Teaching and learning interactions enable students to link theory to workplace practice</p>	<p>Theoretical content presented in the classroom is seen to have practical value at the workplace</p>	<p><i>“Well, of course, as the learner, as the name suggests, I am still there to learn, but on top of that there should be something more than just content learning... Practical stuff and how I can actually contextualise it and apply to my own work...” (p. T1-8)</i></p> <p><i>“Of course the one at the workplace. If they give more examples on how we can apply in the workplace that would be the best.” (p. T3-6)</i></p> <p><i>“Because this topic is actually quite useful. I find that is quite useful so when I am working, then I find that actually this problem issue can be used. We can use this scenario planning. Actually help us solve our problem so that even brings make me increase my interest.” (p. T3-5)</i></p> <p><i>“I think what I appreciate more is the tutor that not just read from slides but rather able to relate practical example through the theories.” (p. T4-3)</i></p> <p><i>“Instead of just listening to theory after one day of work it's very tired and you come here to sit down and listen to description of product, place and people and but that is not what I think that is part of it but more of it is really to input a lot more of practicability into that teaching.” (p. T4-5)</i></p>

