

**Rethinking Activity Theory for the study of interagency collaboration  
on a policy-driven curriculum initiative**

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# **Rethinking Activity Theory for the study of interagency collaboration on a policy-driven curriculum initiative**

## **Abstract**

Using recent debates within socio-cultural theory around subjectivity, this research offers an analysis of a policy-driven curriculum initiative in the UK dependent on successful, local interagency working. The research uses Activity Theory to frame the analysis of the emerging partnership, and interventionist research instruments associated with this – in particular Development Work Methodology. It initially identifies partners' (subjects') positions, and subsequent motivation and positioning on the 'object' of the collaborative activity, and analyses contested critical sites between the partners over a two year period of curriculum development and implementation. It links partners' positioning to issues of roles and perspective and contested discursive practices in the emerging activity to trace the dynamics and impact of decision making in collective workshops, or 'boundary crossing' sessions. This gives access to the formal, discursive outcomes of these collective sessions, which are then traced through processes of implementation, or re-contextualisation, throughout the differential affordances of the partnership. Such an approach gives access to issues of power, formal and dispersed, and involves an analysis of the development of the activity system over both time and locality.

The curriculum is a Government inspired drive to widen participation in higher education, and is simultaneously targeted at expanding the higher level skills base of the UK economy. Called Foundation Degrees, they require collective development

ideally by a university, a series of colleges delivering the curriculum and employers, who provide the students for the programmes. The data for the research was collected through a sequenced series of individual subject interviews interspersed with boundary crossing workshops over two intakes of students for the developing programme.

The data demonstrates a degree of 'expansive' development within the activity system around the contested sites linked particularly to issues of pedagogy and assessment. However, the formal, collective accommodations at the boundaries are framed within the prevailing discursive practices of the dominant partner. Actual practice in the localities of the distributed activity system was subsequently shaped to varying degrees by local affordances and partners' priorities, and these impacted differentially on subsequent trajectories of collective development.

The thesis reformulates a notion of 'expansiveness' that is differentiated and decentred throughout the Activity System, and therefore one that impacts on collective development differentially. It concludes by modelling the process, based on this research, to accommodate issues of locality and time and the relational nature of partner activity systems with collective 'knotworking'.

In doing this it critically analyses Activity Theory and Development Work Methodology as tools of analysis and investigation in this case, and uses the data to provide an elaboration of both based on this research.

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## Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme

### Journal articles and book chapters:

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Doyle, M. (2007) A Reflexive Critique of Learner Managed Learning: an emerging curriculum model for a Foundation Degree, *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 193-207

Doyle, M. (2006) Foundation Degrees and Partnership Approaches to Curriculum Development and Delivery, in P. Beaney (Ed.), *Researching Foundation Degrees: Linking Research and Practice*, London: FDF, pp.123-145

Doyle, M. (2003), Discourses of Employability and Empowerment: Foundation Degrees and Third Way discursive repertoires, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 275-288

Doyle, M. (2002), Challenges to HE/HE Collaboration in implementing a widening participation strategy, *Education Through Partnership*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 7-33

## Published conference proceedings:

Doyle, M. (2006) Articulating the Shape and Purpose of the Knot in Collaborative Activity, and Unravelling it Back at the Ranch, *Education in a Changing Environment: Proceedings of the Third Learning and Teaching Research Conference*, Salford University, pp.202-212

Doyle, M. (2005), 'Knotworking or not working?' Meaning, perspective and context in partnership approaches to collaborative curriculum development, in G.Hawke and P. Hager (eds) *Proceedings of the The Fourth International Conference on Researching Work and Learning: RWL 4 2005*, CD-Format, Sydney: OVAL Research, UTS Sydney, ISBN: 1 92954989

Doyle, M. (2004), Partnering practices and complexities of collaboration, *Education in a Changing Environment: Proceedings of the Second Learning and Teaching Research Conference*, pp. 80-90, Salford: Salford University, ISBN 0 902896806

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## CHAPTER 1

### **The purpose and scope of the thesis**

In this introductory chapter I would like to outline the motivation for the research, indicate briefly its empirical dimensions, and also summarise its theoretical and methodological underpinnings. This will provide the context for the three research questions. The chapter will conclude by signposting the key strands of the thesis.

### **The reasons for this research**

This thesis was motivated by several issues. The first was as an Education Development professional in Higher Education I was in a meso position in a University and used to responding to policy driven curriculum initiatives. Such developments have involved increasing requirements for inter-agency working, where policy makers set the parameters, and require agencies to interact in the formulation and delivery of learning. 'Partnership' was normally taken as unproblematic, and the policy discourses and the prevailing practices around the experiences of collaborative development were not sufficiently reflexive around issues of dissonance, which in my experience were routine. Collaboration was under-theorised, and it was assumed that the commitment of capable boundary spanners (Wenger, 1998: 105) like me was sufficient to deliver such policies.

At the time of the research my 'project' was one of twenty nationally funded Foundation Degree prototypes. Foundation Degrees I subsequently argued (Doyle: 2003) were a 'Third Way' solution to the utilitarian need for a highly skilled workforce in a global economy, while attempting to meet a 'progressive' need to make access to higher

education more equitable. Foundation Degrees required collaboration between employers, universities and colleges of further education in the design and delivery of the curriculum, and in this case five colleges worked with three sections of an awarding university and five employers (the providers of the students) to bid for, design and deliver a new curriculum. This partnership provides the focus for this research.

Allied to the theoretical question of the need to problematise and better understand processes of interagency working was a more fundamental issue. My professional role was effectively that of a broker or 'boundary spanner' in 'fixing' and facilitating collaborative developmental practices, oscillating between policy or programme documents and practice, 'textualising' (Ball: 1993) discourses within (ideally) consensual 'sense-making' between partners in a constantly developing way. I needed a theoretical and methodological framework to question and analyse emergent collaborative practice, particularly for the Foundation Degree. My purpose was not to simply use the theoretical framework to analyse practice, but to question it, theoretically and methodologically in terms of its utility in this context.

My ontological and epistemological development at the time enabled engagement with a range of literatures and methodologies. As an education developer, socio-cultural theory, with an emphasis on practice and engagement, enabled me to feel comfortable with my position as researcher-practitioner for this research. In particular Engestrom's (2001) development of the 'third generation' of collaborating activity systems, along with his 'interventionist' Development Work Methodology, or DWM (Engestrom: 1990) seemed to provide an ideal conceptual and methodological framework to investigate the unfolding practices of this particular Foundation Degree. DWM was particularly suited to

this research, rather than, for example, Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism, as it facilitates both analysis of development, and a methodological and theoretical rationale for interventions to advance expansive learning through practice. It also provides a coherent and consistent rationale for my contribution as an insider researcher.

Therefore in the thesis I wanted to explore Activity Theory, to analyse what it offered in examining the interacting activity systems in this case. I also wanted to identify its limitations, and how it might need redeveloping to illustrate a more detailed elaboration of the emerging processes of this study in curriculum development. Finally I wanted to critically evaluate any proposed redevelopment of the theory in its analysis of this case.

### **The empirical dimensions of the research**

The focus for the research was the development of this Foundation Degree prototype, requiring collaboration between the awarding University (involving two University Schools and its Education Development Unit), the five colleges delivering the curriculum and the employers of the students on the programme (all local authorities). Chapter 2 gives specific contextual details about the policy, the partners and the Foundation Degree curriculum. Essentially the research involved working with those charged with interpreting the successful bid documentation and determining and constituting the actual curriculum. This work took place over a two year period, and two intakes of students. It involved me as both researcher and developer, an issue I deal with in Chapter 4, switching between those roles, in facilitating and investigating the development.

As well as access to formal documentation and observing formal meetings, such as Boards of Study, Exam Boards, and Annual Programme Reviews, I used combinations of semi-structured interviews with all participating partners in their localities, and sequenced these with collective, developmental Workshops, the equivalent of Engestrom et. al.'s (1999) 'knotworking', or 'boundary crossing laboratories' (Engestrom et al, 1996). The process is illustrated in Fig. 4.1. (page 87). Data from the interviews provided stimulus material for the subsequent Workshops. The second interviews between the Workshops are particularly important in providing data on processes of what I term re-contextualisation – the situating of collective Workshop outcomes within the affordances of local single college or employer activity systems. Such data is important in the critical perspective on Activity Theory that I develop in the thesis.

### **The theoretical and methodological dimensions of the research**

Socio-cultural theory, and in particular Activity Theory provided an important analytical framework for the research. As a developmental, or interventionist research instrument it also provided a means to me, as an 'insider' researcher, of formulating a theoretical and methodological approach to the development and research of this practice that I felt was ontologically and epistemologically consistent for me. However, I was also aware of certain limitations of particularly Engestrom's (2001) position on Activity Theory that would need to be problematised for my analysis of the data.

In particular, the 'unit of analysis' and the issue of subjectivity: accessing 'subjects' positions on the 'object' of the activity was a key issue for me in accessing how motivation and perspective impacted on the making of decisions. As the research

progressed this issue was also reflected in emerging literature on Activity Theory (for example, Daniels: 2005, and a special edition of *Mind Culture and Activity*, vol. 12, No. 1 in 2005). Equally important was the issue of power, not dealt with sufficiently by Engestrom, and how that framed and channelled the activity – for example, issues of discourse, practices, roles, tools and rules within the interacting activity systems. I was also interested in what happened away from the collective interface in processes of boundary-crossing – issues of context or ‘textualisation’ (after Ball: op. cit), and differential affordances across the collaborating activity systems. Finally, these issues led me to ask questions about the impact on expansiveness, for partners and the partnership momentum generally. I deal with these issues in detail in Chapter 3 and in the data analysis chapters.

Methodologically I needed a design that enabled me to access the subjects in phased stages of the development in their localities, as well as the collective boundary crossing workshops. I needed to conceptualise coherent connecting threads to link the interview data with the Workshops in ways that reflected my position ontologically and epistemologically; that such ‘contexts’ were relational in an emerging process of development, rather than a dualism of ‘context’ and ‘de-contextualisation’. I deal with these issues, as well as the ‘insider-outsider’ dilemma in Chapter 4.

## **The Research Questions**

There are three differently prioritised questions that motivated and occupied me in carrying out this research. Firstly, but second in priority, I wanted to explore Activity Theory as a theoretical framework that might both facilitate analysis of partnership

working, and enable intervention and development. I was driven by the fact that instrumental and rationalist 'tweaking' to deal with barriers to partnership working, advocated by the corporate management literature, seemed tired and somewhat counter to my prior experience. Equally, alternative Liberal Humanist approaches (such as Griffiths: 1998, Somekh: 1994), premised on normative Habermasian ideal speech arrangements, rarely worked over the course of a partnership. Partnerships, in my experience, were complex and 'messy', and notions of the 'double bind' (Engestrom: 2001) and the use of tension as a catalyst for development seemed worth researching. My first question therefore is: *what insights does Activity Theory offer in illuminating a case in which different activity systems come together to collaborate on a policy driven issue of curriculum development?* This question is addressed in the theoretical critique developed in Chapter 3, and subsequently throughout the three data chapters (5-7), and leads to a rationale for the expansion and remodelling of Activity Theory.

The second, and most important area of investigation for this research, is where in this case Activity Theory falls short in helping me to explain developments. The second research question is therefore: *what elaboration and development of Activity Theory is necessary to enhance its illuminating potential in this kind of case?* The data dealing with this question is in the three data chapters but especially Chapter 7.

The final question is: *how effective is the version of Activity Theory so redeveloped in illuminating such a case?* The focus for this is in Chapters 7 and 8, and particularly the conclusions and reflections on the research. This final question, although important in critically evaluating the research and its outcomes, is third in priority in this research.

## **The structure of the thesis and signposts**

In Chapter 2 I provide contextual information on the background to Foundation Degrees and the partnership which provides the focus for the research. I divide this into three contextual components, which I term 'policy', setting the framework within which the policy and the curriculum is framed; 'discourse', which provides analysis of the discursive contexts of 'partnership' within which the curriculum is developed, and finally descriptive information about the actual partnership and the curriculum being investigated.

Chapter 3 involves an analysis of the literature on Activity Theory. In particular I contextualise it within theories of practice, analyse the conceptual development of 'expansive learning' and its links to 'boundary crossing', and draw out the relevant issues for processes of collaboration in this thesis. I also problematise limitations in the theory, as discussed above, and briefly consider the implications of an interventionist methodology. This provides a link to the discussion of Methodology in Chapter 4.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 involve the analysis of data. Chapter 5 focuses on the position of the subjects prior to the first Workshop and after their experiences of teaching the first semester of intake 1. It differentiates pedagogical priorities by sector and individually, and this data feeds into the first Workshop. Chapter 6 deals with the processes of development and the dynamics and tensions of discursive practices at the collective levels in the Workshops over the period of the research. Chapter 7 deals with the

complexities of what I term 're-contextualisation'; situating collective decisions within the affordances of individual activity systems, and what the implications of this are in terms of the dynamic and development of collective 'knotworking' (Engestrom et al: 1999). I also consider the need for a decentred and differentiated notion of 'expansiveness' based on the outcomes of the data analysis, and this results in a remodelling of the process of activity throughout this Activity System.

In Chapter 8 I draw some conclusions from the research, revisit the Research Questions and reflect on the process as well as offering some thoughts on further research possibilities from the experience.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The research context**

My purpose in this chapter is to set the scene for the research by providing contextual information for my thesis. I have categorized the 'context' in three ways, reflected in the structure of the chapter. They are:

- the policy context
- the discursive context, and
- the partnership context

The three strands are interrelated and disaggregated for analytical purposes. In the first section I will provide a summary of the New Labour policy on Foundation Degrees and situate this within its development on debates around the need for such a qualification and how it might be developed. The second section focuses on the discursive context; in particular within the post-Thatcher transition in public policy from competition to collaboration, it contextualises the Foundation Degree within emerging discourses of governance that depend on partnership. In the third section I provide background information to the actual partnership and the partners.

### **The Policy context**

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment undertook a consultation exercise (DfEE, 2000b) on proposals for the introduction of the Foundation Degree. Its purpose is to meet a perceived skills gap at advanced technician level. This award was expected to become the dominant qualification at this level. As a consequence it was anticipated that institutions would re-develop existing sub-degree, or 'intermediate'

programmes (such as HND's) to conform with the requirements for Foundation Degrees. The expansion required for New Labour's commitment to a target of 50% 18-30 year olds to experience Higher Education by 2010 is to be focused on these sub-degree higher technical qualifications. It was anticipated that their delivery is largely to be in the Further Education sector in an attempt to make higher level learning more accessible. Colleges work in partnership with employers and a University, and the latter's quality and validation arrangements are utilised.

The rationale for such priorities in the context of a global economy lies in the shortage of, and increased demand for, people with intermediate-level skills across all sectors of the economy, who can operate effectively in posts generically referred to as higher technicians and associate professionals. It is also rooted in 'deficiency' conceptualizations of higher education and its graduates (Coffield, 1999), and in a perceived need to rationalize the range of qualifications below honours degree level.

Foundation Degree prototypes were expected to deliver within restricted timescales. Consultation was completed and reported on by April 2000. Consortia bids were required by October 2000, and prototypes were confirmed late in 2000. Effectively the prototypes had approximately 9 months to develop partnerships, prepare the necessary curriculum, market the courses, recruit, conduct the required staff development, and agree and implement the necessary quality procedures.

The Foundation Degree Consultation was announced on the same day as the Secretary of State for Education's 'Greenwich' speech, in which he proclaimed:

*I do not want to see the currency of higher education undermined by the creation of a stratified sector in which some forms of provision are considered excellent and others*

*second-rate...Our objective is expansion with diversity and excellence throughout the sector...Diversity with excellence will also mean identifying new routes into higher education and new forms of provision...We have to develop new higher education opportunities at this level (intermediate skills), oriented strongly to the employability skills, specialist knowledge and broad understanding needed in the new economy (DfEE, 2000a)*

Expansion of higher education, therefore, on campus, in the college sector and in the workplace, was to have the functional purpose of meeting skills needs required to enable Britain to compete economically in a global market place, and it is the function of government, through appropriate institutions, to meet this need for human capital. This is the culmination of a policy that was clear from Coffield's (1997) critique of the first Queen's Speech of the New Labour Government in 1997, which was committed to expanding human capital. Indeed Coffield assesses that the 'technocratic', functionalist approach of investing in human skills through further and higher education to deliver lifelong learning was the continuation of a policy on 'competitiveness' represented by three White Papers of the previous government (HMSO, 1994, 1995, 1996).

Coffield (op. cit.) is critical of how the 'economic' has dominated the 'democratic' imperative in educational policy discourse over the past twenty years in the UK. Indeed he cites Carnoy and Levin (1985:4) in questioning attempts to rationalise a compatibility:

*Relations between education and work are dialectically composed of a perpetual tension between two dynamics; the imperatives of capitalism and those of democracy in all its forms.*

However, New Labour policy was characterised by its reincarnation in the 'Third Way',

*...a radical centre ground approach to politics (Giddens, 1996);*

a 'modernisation' which reconciles apparent 'perpetual tensions'. Thus individuals have 'rights', but also 'responsibilities', and the economic imperative driving the Foundation Degree is presented also as a panacea for widening access to higher education by conceptualising this in a combination of communitarian and social integrationist discourses (Fairclough, 2001), which stresses the responsibility of the individual. 'Diversity' with 'excellence' is another example, presented in the Foundation Degree Consultation Document (DfEE, 2000b) as differentiation for higher education, to be available through 'partnerships' with further education and employers. Doyle (2003) has traced the policy origins of the Foundation Degree through Robertson (1994), Ball (1990) and Schuller (1990), to the Leverhulme Reports (1981-83).

According to Smith and Betts

*...the origins of the Foundation Degree were less to do with a carefully honed concept derived from the need for such an award across the academic community, but more to do with the Government's desire to achieve certain key policy objectives. (2003: 224)*

The New Labour project has involved a move from a neo-liberal Thatcher era of competitive contract bidding to a 'partnership culture' (Balloch and Taylor, 2001). Thomas (2002) provides a detailed account of this transformation. However, the significant issue is how partnership and collaboration is conceptualised by New Labour as central to its modes of governance, which 'sets government in surveillance and control mode in relation to the various partners' (Ozga, 2000: 100). Ozga's textual analyses of early New Labour policy demonstrates a conceptualisation of partnership which is 'much more diffuse, embracing the whole community and tying it into the

project of improvement' (op.cit.: 102). In such reconceptualisations she notes the 'very strong tendency to control and direct it from the centre...there is, in the tone and tenor... an underlying story of energetic, visionary government with zero tolerance of failure to respond to its vision' (op.cit: 102).

### **The discursive context**

Ozga's (op. cit) observations on New Labour governance are essentially Foucauldian in that partners are empowered to operate, develop and self-monitor within certain parameters and perspectives. The dirigisme is illustrated by Smith and Betts' (2003) observation that in spite of a bidding process to develop prototype Foundation Degrees, other unsuccessful consortia were also encouraged simultaneously to develop and deliver their own interpretations based on what was clearly a pre-determined specification. This specification (CVCP, 2000), according to Smith and Betts, is a political tactic of distancing while determining the development template.

*In one basket, called the Foundation Degree, the Government had placed many of the complex and radical pedagogic eggs currently on the HE agenda...It has then stepped back to see what emerges...It is a high risk strategy with the expectation that the risks will be born by the partners in the consortia, especially the HEIs and their FE colleagues, rather than the Government itself (Smith and Betts: 2003: 229)*

The strategy of enabling through partnerships is central to weaving together the economic and democratic agendas in the 'Third Way'. In the Foundation degree, this is to do with maximizing global competitiveness (Blunket's Greenwich speech, DfEE:2000a), and meeting social inclusivity agendas.

Herein lies the Third Way rationale for the compatibility of economic and democratic agendas for higher education in general, and the Foundation Degree in particular. Fairclough's (2001) analysis of Third Way language notes the use of communitarian discourse, with the stress on moral and contractual individual responsibility in the interpretation of remedies for social exclusion based on Levitas (1998). Emphases are on social integration and cultural change for the excluded rather than traditional 'leftist' remedies of redistribution, with the consequence that employment and skills are the routes to inclusion and empowerment.

The discourse of 'modernisation' is particularly relevant, linked to 'partnership', 'consultation' and 'democratic renewal'. Newman (2000: 47) encapsulates the process as

*A fundamentally political project to which rhetorics, narratives and strategies of management are harnessed.*

Through the use of a narrative of 'innovation', she claims that New Labour has constructed the 'imperative of the need for public services to change' in a way that results in a merging of managerial and political agendas.

Fairclough (2001) has illustrated the discursive practices used by New Labour which are constitutive of policy framing. The Foundation Degree is an example of this, and Doyle (2003) has provided a textual analysis of the Greenwich speech (DfEE, 2000a), and the Foundation Degree Consultation Document (DfEE, 2000b) to illustrate this. These

documents combine declarative statements with an imperative tone about the utilitarian interpretation of the role of higher education, particularly with regard to its contribution to the economy. Higher education is prioritised from an enterprise perspective within a discourse of partnership. Coffield's (1999) notion of 'deficit' is denoted in the text, and used to make generic points about higher education:

*Higher education must also equip all graduates with skills and abilities they need to perform effectively in the workplace...Experience of the world of work and the development of transferable skills should become universal in the sector. The introduction of Foundation Degrees will boost this provision (DfEE, 2000a:12)*

New Labour's communitarian, 'joined up' (Newton op. cit.) multi-agency, 'partnership' approach to policy delivery effectively behoves higher education to fulfil this utilitarian role. Its discourse of 'modernisation' for the public sector is made explicit in a higher education context, with apparently threatening consequences:

*All this will call for a better management of change...in the knowledge economy, entrepreneurial universities will be as important as entrepreneurial businesses...The 'do nothing' university will not survive – and it will not be the job of government to bail it out' (DfEE, 2000a:17)*

There is a clear template here for universities in the twenty first century. A consequence, from a post-structuralist perspective, is that

*..relations of power, identities, even bodies are textually or discursively constituted through the ordering and organizing practices of particular discourses. (Pritchard, 2000: 34)*

In this respect the bidding documentation for the prototypes is itself constitutive of the discourse. For example, the first three issues on the bid template include 'employability', 'employer representative input into the programme' and 'intended employment outcomes'. The focus of the bid in this research is wholly couched in the hegemonic discourse. For example, when requested to summarise the bid, including the strategic rationale, the emphasis is on local government change agendas, issues of 'best value', and it situates the bid around a quote from the Improvement Development Agency report on the Local Government Improvement Programme 1999-2000:

*With all the initiatives for local government either already here or coming soon, 'no change' is not an option. The challenge for local government is to change culturally, to seek new ways of working, and to reach beyond its organisational boundaries (cited in bid proposal document, University: 2000)*

The bid prioritises organisational change and learning within dominant modernising policy agendas as the priority for the learner. It is as if the bid documentation has been written, from a 'deficit' HE angle, as much to assure the contributing employers of its credibility and value to them. The document is a textualisation and reification of

discursive engagement, designed to meet all funding criteria. This successful bid document provides the starting point for subsequent development by the partners.

In the final section of this chapter I want to consider some of the operational issues and challenges to partners collaborating within the policy and discursive contexts outlined, and provide some descriptive information about the partner organisations being researched.

### **The partnership context**

Collaboration is being driven as the process of policy delivery in an environment characterized by competition and market values, which has dominated new public management practice and discourse. Whether these practices are competing or transitional is not clear. However, public sector drives towards competitiveness and sustainability are equated with efficiency, effectiveness and general 'performativity' (Lyotard, 1984). This involves the definition of 'core activity', maximizing the return on the 'unit of resource', and minimizing risk. A consequence for both Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) sectors for example is the need to maximize recruitment: funding units for the FE sector depend on recruiting students in a limited geographical area. Competition has been and is intense, and colleges have been driven by new public management practice in an attempt to maximize efficiency. Similarly, the local government employers in this partnership have also been subject to performative policy and funding driven practices, such as the 'Best Value' agenda.

Clarke and Newman (1997:147) highlight this tension between collaboration and 'performativity':

*Issues of strategy and purpose are posed in terms of a narrow sense of core business rather than a wider public purpose. This in turn means that being effective has a narrow definition – it is effectiveness in relation to a narrow set of goals. The focus on corporate culture can produce an ‘us against the world’ philosophy, which in turn means a lack of capacity to collaborate across boundaries and a number of deficits in terms of partnership working.*

They go on to say that:

*The focus on core business linked to outputs, and output based funding mean there are a number of ‘perverse incentives’ which inhibit inter-organisational co-operation,*

and observe an increasing tendency within the public sector towards ‘boundary management’ and ‘creaming’ and ‘dumping’ strategies in relation to ‘good and bad risks’. Inter-sectoral policy collaboration between FE and HE is being promoted by HEFCE in this context.

The ‘big bang’ approach to management since incorporation in 1993 in FE has been commented on by Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998), Whitehead (1999), and Ainley and Bailey (1997). Whitehead (1999) identifies a shift in culture from benign liberal paternalism to a ‘hegemonic masculinity’, a concept developed by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), brought about by a drive towards a rational, task oriented, instrumental, combative and competitive paradigm of management in the FE sector. Ainley and Bailey (1997) note the force of the maxim ‘the right to manage’ across the sector.

Aggressive managerialism (Jones, 1995) was legitimised through the dominant discourse which resulted in a 40% growth in the sector between 1993 – 1996 on less funding than in 1992. The discourses of competitiveness and 'performativity' have dominated, and coincided with the implementation of business models across the sector, such as TQM, IIP, BS5750, and Human Resource Management.

Managerialism has been more pronounced in the FE sector, but it is impacting on HE, and Galbriath (1999) in advocating the application of systems thinking to planning processes in Higher Education notes that managerial discourse has increasingly come to include terms that indicate a tension between 'dollarship and scholarship'. Although less intense in the HE sector, Henkel (1997) identifies the challenge this poses to traditional academic values and practices, particularly since 1985, with the increasingly utilitarian policy perspective of universities delivering wider policy agendas, such as 'employability' and access.

Clarke and Newman's (op. cit.) analysis does illustrate dilemmas facing FE and HE institutions in delivering the HEFCE Widening Participation and Employability policies. Collaboration within such a market driven, output rewarded environment has to be seen to have tangible benefits. Public policy managerial discourse and funding drivers (for example, the 'postcode premium', HEFCE (1998)), however, have enabled FE Colleges and Universities being given opportunities to define an element of core business within policy frameworks, such as widening participation, employability and inclusive learning, which necessitates collaboration to maximize the effectiveness of its delivery.

In terms of collaboration on Foundation Degrees, Smith and Betts (2003:227) have observed that 'in real terms the consortia are the awarding HEI's and partner FEC's'. They comment that although a

*much overstated part of the Government's vision, it is unlikely that employers will ever play a central role in the management and operation of the Foundation Degree or any other vocational award. They do not see it as their business...They can be partners, however, but real involvement will only follow self-interest.*

Smith and Betts' analysis notes that for universities such consortia provide a context for them to participate in new developments while 'keeping them at the margins'. However, the universities are responsible for quality assurance, and colleges have different cultures, learning philosophies, resource strategies and teaching and learning priorities.

The difficulties facing employers in such arrangements are understandable. Within the policy and pedagogic discourse of the collaborative curriculum development they are expected to contribute to work-based learning, student mentoring and assessment. Sophisticated, resource rich organizations with human resource strategies focused on the 'learning organisation' may be able to shoulder such responsibility. For others' priorities may differ.

I would like to conclude this section by providing information about the partnership being investigated, and an outline of the actual programme. The partnership consists of a university (specifically, a host School (Business and Informatics), a servicing School (Environment), and the University's Education Development Unit (EDU), responsible for

widening participation and staff and curriculum development: the EDU initiated the process), five of its nine Associate Colleges, and the local authority employers within which the colleges are located. The University first established links with the colleges in 1993, when it set up its 'FE/HE Consortium', a partnership with thirty five colleges across the Northwest of England, with the purpose of widening access through non-traditional routes into Higher Education before the HEFCE sponsored Widening Participation initiatives in 1998 (HEFCE: op. cit). The Associate Colleges were in effect a privileged group of this Consortium, with which the University had developed stronger and more strategic links.

In terms of the University's development, it is traditionally regarded as a 'technological' university, and markets itself as an 'enterprise' university. It underwent a merger with a local College of Technology (COT) in 1998. Before this the two institutions had had strong links, with the COT being the only Associate College of the University at that time. The COT had adopted the title 'University College' several years prior to merger, and delivered degrees awarded by the University. A 'bridging' unit had been established between the two institutions in 1993 to develop collaborative links with the FE sector through the 'FE/HE Consortium'. Merger involved the absorption of the COT into the new institution, which retained the distinct and strong collegiality of the University. Since the merger the University has been re-organised from eight to four faculties, and thirty eight departments have been restructured into seventeen Schools.

The University is characterised by a highly dispersed 'loosely coupled' (Weick, 1976) managerial framework in keeping with the collegiality characteristic of pre-1992 universities. The PVC Teaching and Learning, when interviewed, identified the

devolution of policy ownership into the newly established faculties and schools as the biggest challenge to management in such an organisation. Nevertheless the University is proud and respectful of its collegiality, adopting what Trow (1994) classifies as a 'soft managerialism' approach to developments, involving an incremental, devolved approach to change.

The thrust to bid for the Foundation Degree prototype came from the EDU, which also has responsibility for the University's links with the college sector. It has traditionally initiated on behalf of the University new forms of curriculum design, and sits at a meso level within the organization between organizational strategy on teaching and learning, and bottom-up delivery within the academic Schools. However, as a catalyst for change it is in a strange position in the University in that it is outside the faculty structure, and therefore has to 'court' the consent of 'host' Schools and their academic communities in engaging in the implementation of its developments.

In this case the EDU, with the Pro Vice-chancellor (Teaching and Learning) persuaded a school in the Business and Finance Faculty to host this development, and used interest from another School, Environment, which deals with employed public sector workers such as Housing employees, to service the host school's curriculum. The resulting internal curriculum network has distinct differences, linked largely to professional backgrounds and communities of practice to which the members belonged (Becher and Trowler, 2001; Trowler, 1998). The potential tensions in this arrangement relate to the perspectives and professional identities that the 'internal', University partners bring to the process of collaboration.

The colleges are varied in size and identity, but in common is the managerialism based on a dwindling unit of resource. There is one very large mixed-economy college (called FE 5) with over 30,000 students and accustomed to delivering HE courses at all levels, and with franchise relationships with a wide range of universities. There are two urban traditional further education colleges (FE 3 and FE 4), with a range of levels of teaching from special needs and basic skills to higher level vocational courses. These two are aspirational in terms of their desire to be more 'mixed economy', but geographical limitations of student hinterlands and competition from other colleges means likely expansion will be limited. Nevertheless, the participation in the Foundation Degree has marketing advantages for these colleges. The final two colleges (FE 1 and FE 2) are more traditionally sixth form colleges, with an emphasis on 16-19 and 'A'-Level teaching. One (FE 2) is located in a thriving town between the Merseyside and Manchester conurbations, and has a large college of technology also in the town, while the other is in a small town in North-east Lancashire.

Since incorporation in 1993 the colleges have experienced a varying degree of rationalisation of staffing and structures aimed to maximise effectiveness (defined by a range of indicators including cost, performance and retention), and responsiveness to local markets and communities, which have had a marked effect on management style and culture. Staff in the colleges have experienced to varying degrees institutional re-organisations, 'downsizing' and redundancy rounds, as well as resource cuts. Middle managers have throughout been required to take on more responsibility, and the perception of senior managers was that they were responsible for managerial and resource issues focused on 'efficiency' and target-related funding issues.

The employers have had much in common with the college sector, as analysed in Clarke and Newman's (1997) study of public sector management. For example, students in one of the local authorities were all made to re-apply for their posts during the first year of the research. Such instability created problems not only for the college delivering the programme, and of course the students, but also affected the commitment from the employer representatives in the development and delivery of the programme. The employers, in keeping with the position outlined by Smith and Betts (2003), demonstrated varying degrees of understanding and commitment to what the whole exercise was about. In only two of the five authorities over the period of the research was there a consistent commitment. Issues such as staff turnovers were a major factor in this. However, it must be said that some of the employers, despite consistent overtures, chose to not engage in the process as it developed, seeing it as not their responsibility.

This was not the case in the early stages of collaborating on the bidding process. The employers saw the Foundation degree as serving an important role in professional development for their staff. To an extent they responded to the overtures from Government and the University, and participated in discussions on the curriculum – to the extent that they insisted on changes to course and module titles (hence a course in Public Administration became 'Community Governance'). However, employer protagonists either moved to other jobs, or became pre-occupied with other issues and therefore became relatively detached.

With the colleges, too, there were difficulties. For example, in one of the sixth form colleges (FE 2) the principal was a key early 'shaper' of the partnership, but on his retirement the new principal saw his strategic focus as being not on higher level courses, but core 16-19 curriculum.

Difficulties are inevitable in a such complex structural and processual partnership development. Sectoral and inter-sectoral partnerships, seen as key units in policy delivery, are expected to and are assumed to be able to operate effectively on a regional basis. Policy makers and funding bodies, such as HEFCE, make little allowance for local tensions, potential conflict and widening market pressures. This was particularly the case between FE colleges (competing corporations since 1993) and employers, in collaborating with a local university. The Foundation Degree policy strategy seems essentially functionalist, based on an approach characterized by instrumental rationality (Sanderson, 1999) and premised on an assumption that partnerships between HEI's, employers and FEI's can and will develop and deliver policy.

### **The Foundation Degree in Community Governance**

A brief outline and explanation of the curriculum model for the programme follows. This is necessary for an understanding of the data analysis in the later chapters.

The employers have highlighted that there are underdeveloped opportunities for accredited study in modern local government, particularly for 'non- professional'

administrative staff at and below the level of Principal Officer Grade 5. That represents the majority of staff, who are also mainly non-graduate and not usually eligible for secondment; for example to traditional first degree programmes. At the time of initiating the programme existing public administration courses, for example the Diploma in Management Studies, had yet to acknowledge the new 'facilitative' and 'capacity-building' roles increasingly required of Local Authority staff within the New Labour 'modernisation' agenda.

Therefore the employers felt the time was appropriate for a new qualification, offering a fresh approach to Local Government. The strategy for regionalisation and community involvement in governance has put pressure on Local Authorities to change existing cultures and operations. The Foundation Degree would support the staff development required to facilitate the changes.

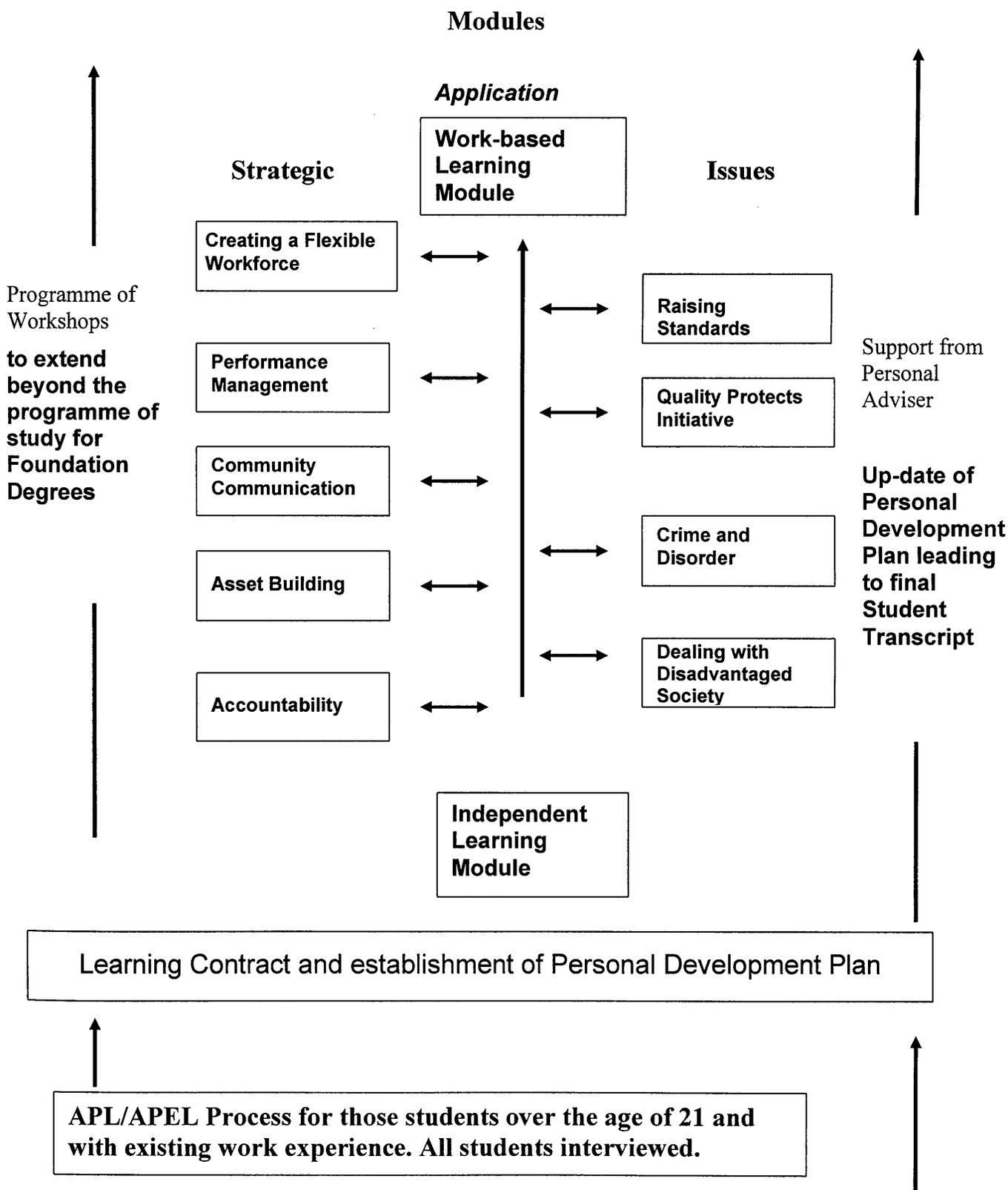
Programme learning outcomes therefore have an emphasis on the 'return' to the organization in terms of its staff. Of five stated programme learning outcomes only one is couched in terms of the individual, rather than the 'organisation', and this stresses the identification by the individual of 'ongoing professional development needs and strategies'. The programme has a work-related emphasis, with independent learning as its focus.

The curriculum model (Fig. 2.1, page 37) reflects the work-based focus of the learning: the Independent Learning, ILM (level 1) and Work-based Project (level 2) modules (categorized as 'Application' modules) are positioned centrally as the spine, developing from the accreditation of prior learning (APL/APEL) and Learning Contract entry stage.

The other level 1 modules are classified as 'Strategic', giving a foundation propositional knowledge base, and the level 2 modules more open-ended, classified as 'Issues', permitting choices reflecting professional interests.

The ILM is the first taken in the programme. Its purpose is to introduce students to the rationale and practices of self-directed, or 'learner managed' learning. It is intended that after semester 1 the reflective practices and learning strategies introduced will be further developed and monitored through a Personal Advisor and the use of Personal Development Planning. The curriculum model therefore emphasizes learner transition on a whole programme basis in preparation for lifelong learning.

**Fig. 2.1 The Curriculum Model – Foundation Degree in Community Governance**



Students negotiate the outcomes and assessment criteria for their learning. This enables negotiation and contextualization based on the learner's work practices. It requires the negotiation of a 'learning agreement' or contract within the first four weeks of the module, and the subsequent use of guided reflection throughout the semester. Processes of reflection are built into the module assessment. The module itself provided the model for the whole curriculum, at least discursively. A critique of the curriculum model has been published (Doyle, 2007).

The curriculum model and the ILM are rooted in experiential models of learning (Kolb, 1984); the aim being the development of autonomous, self-managed learners. The aims of the programme are organizational and managerial, while the curriculum model and learning strategy are embedded in conceptualizations of individual transformative learning. Data analysis in Chapter 5 enables access to partner perspectives on this curriculum, and how these varied perspectives and motives are demonstrated through actual practice, and impact on subsequent development.

In this chapter I have attempted to portray the policy, discursive and partnership contexts as separate strands. This has been simply for analytical purposes. In essence they are interrelated and mutually constitutive. I hope that the complex policy and discursive topography of the focus of my research is clearer. In the following chapter I deal with the theoretical and analytical framework for the research, provided by Activity Theory.

## Chapter 3

### Theorising and analysing collaborative development

For ontological and epistemological reasons, I want to locate my research within socio-cultural theory, and in particular Cultural Historical Activity Theory. There is also a pragmatic motivation in that the literature on partnerships is under-theorised (Doyle: 2006), and I am seeking to frame my research within a 'connectionist' (Knight, 2002: 151) theoretical model that also provides a methodology that allows me to conceptualise and access 'development'. 'Connectionist' is a metaphor by which I mean horizontal linkages at boundaries between representatives of collaborating organisations in ways that Knight (*op. cit.*) describes as 'sets of dynamic relationships between people, tasks, rules, materials and symbols'. My intention throughout this chapter is to take a critical perspective of this model and how it serves me in illuminating a case in which different activity systems come together to collaborate on a policy driven issue of curriculum development.

In doing so I will focus on Activity Theory as developed by Engestrom (1987, 1990, 1999a, 2001, 2003, 2004). My reasons are theoretical and methodological. Activity Theory, with its roots in Marxian notions of dialectical materialism (Engestrom and Miettinen, 1999), facilitates a conceptual framework for tracing and analysing development, transformation and learning appropriate to 'object-oriented' activity through partnerships. Accompanying the theory it offers 'developmental work research' as a methodology for applying Activity Theory, specifically the theory of expansive learning, in the world of work, technology and organisations' (Engestrom, 1999b: 2). This emphasis on researching development also provides me with a theoretical and

methodological basis for my role in the process as an 'insider-researcher', an issue I will deal with in Chapter 4.

It is the challenge of collaborative development recognised in the 'third generation' of Activity Theory (Engestrom: 2001), framed within interacting 'units of analysis', the activity system, that has led me to select this, rather than communities of practice theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Lave 1991, 1993, Wenger, 1998).

In using and evaluating this theoretical model to frame my research this chapter will:

- Contextualise Activity Theory within theories of practice and trace its development as it relates to this research.
- Analyse the conceptual development of 'expansive learning' as it links to 'boundary crossing', and draw out the relevant issues for the processes of collaboration and its development under investigation in this thesis.
- Problematise limitations in the theory as it applies to this research: in particular, issues for partners around formulation and articulation of the 'object' and its development in terms of perspective, partner priorities and practices, context and power.
- Briefly consider issues in using an 'interventionist' methodology. This will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4.

These issues provide the theoretical foundations to address the first research question of the thesis (page 14). The chapter will conclude by identifying theoretical issues which will provide a focus for the analysis of the data relevant to research questions 2 and 3.

## **Activity Theory**

Activity theory is associated with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of mediation between subject and object in the process of learning, and was subsequently developed by Engestrom (1987, 2001) with the concept of the activity system (see Fig. 3.1).

Alternative theoretical perspectives include Actor Network Theory (Latour, 1987; Law, 1994; Miettinen, 1999), situated learning theory, which I will refer to as Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), and sociocultural theory of mediated action (Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez, 1995). These approaches are also associated with Vygotsky, as they share an emphasis on mediation of human action by cultural artifacts. Yet Activity Theory differs from the other two in important ways for this research.

Engestrom and Miettinen (1999:11) note the unit of analysis for Wertsch (1995) is 'the individual performing actions in a sociocultural setting.' They state Wertsch and his colleagues distance themselves from 'historicity, object-orientedness and the collective nature of human activity, emphasising sign mediation and interaction.' (op. cit.).

Engestrom and Miettinen claims this causes problems when attempting to understand context. Individuals act in 'collective practices' which are not reducible to 'sums of individual action'. Collective social practice provides the unit of analysis for both theoretical strands on the basis that:

*When the individual action is the privileged unit of analysis, collective practice can only be added on as a more or less external envelope (op. cit: 11).*

It is the 'embeddedness of action in collective practice' (op.cit: 12) that is critical to development, particularly for Engestrom and Activity Theory, through Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development'.

For Lave and Wenger (1991) the central unit of analysis is the Community of Practice. Engestrom and Miettinen (1999:12) claim the central problem is one-way movement from the periphery to the centre. Communities of practice theory has its roots in anthropological perspectives of apprentices working with masters, and through 'legitimate peripheral participation' moving to mastery. Although Lave and Wenger acknowledge degrees of negotiation of identity 'interstitially' (1991: 64), particularly in the development of informal communities of practice in coercive workplaces, and later Wenger (1998:188) stresses the exercise of power within communities through the 'negotiability of meanings' in the formation and assertion of identities (particularly in his notion of 'economies of meaning'), the process is largely gradualist and emergent within the dominant discursive practices of the community. The image is one of absorption into prevailing cultural practices, even allowing for a limited recognition of conflicts in the process of 'continuity-displacement-contradiction' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:115-6), and developing power relations in this process.

It is this that moves Engestrom and Miettinen to comment:

*What seems to be missing is movement outward and in unexpected directions: questioning of authority, criticism, innovation, and initiation of change. Instability and inner contradictions of practice are all but missing. (1999: 12)*

For Activity Theory contradictions within the system are the basis for development and what Engestrom refers to as 'expansive learning'. Its advantage over Communities of Practice Theory is that it is dynamic, facilitating analysis of transition in the learning and practices of the members in the pursuit of the object. This is facilitated through the development of methodological instruments which are 'interventionist' (Engestrom, 1999: 2), giving access to 'the inner contradictions of practice'. Engestrom (1990: 105) describes 'development work research' as a 'testbed of activity theory', but asserts that it is not distinct from theory; rather it is a

*...laboratory where new theoretical concepts and methodological principles are created, not only tested. In this sense, the testbed is the centre of the theoretical endeavour.*

However, it has been criticised as functionalist (Trowler and Knight, 2000), and my view is that, as an emerging theory, it is underdeveloped in analysing innovation between activity systems (for this research, the partnership) when faced with issues rooted in power differences and competing or alternative discursive practices, particularly in articulating the 'object' and its subsequent development. I will consider these issues later in the chapter, and in the subsequent data analysis. Nevertheless it is a useful heuristic for analysing the emerging practice of this particular partnership. It provides access to processes of development, of emerging practice, and it is this that makes the

theory, and the associated 'development work methodology' so relevant and appropriate to this research.

Billett (2002a) has traced the emergence of Activity Theory and Communities of Practice to debates within socio-cultural theory between the 'situative' perspective (Greeno, 1997), stressing all learning is embedded in the situations where it happens (Hutchins, 1991; Lave, 1991), to other views which identify learning as arising historically from cultural practice (Scribner, 1985; Cole, 1998), and is constituted by situational factors. Therefore theoretical perspectives focusing on learning through participation in particular social practices have emerged, and in particular Activity Theory and Communities of Practice Theory 'have become popular bases whereby social practices may be identified and their influence on thinking and acting analysed' (Billett, 2002a: 85).

The concept of 'social practice' needs further explanation. Chaiklin, Hedegaard and Jensen (1999: 19) describe it as 'theoretically unsaturated', by which they mean 'no particular ontological or epistemological position is entailed by the general notion of social practice, defined as structured human traditions for interaction around specific tasks and goals.' They claim therefore that the concept can be used with various 'conflicting philosophical and theoretical perspectives', and that the term *social practice* 'is not unique to the cultural-historical tradition' (op. cit).

Reckwitz (2002) recognises this and attempts to position and differentiate 'practice theory' within 'Cultural Theory' (the other categories being culturalist mentalism,

textualism and intersubjectivism). Broadly these 'cultural' theories offer explanations and understanding of actions

*by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms (op. cit: 245).*

This reconstruction is related to social order:

*...embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures, in a 'shared knowledge', which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world (op. cit: 246).*

Therefore practice theory, according to Reckwitz, 'places the 'social' in practices' (op. cit: 249), defining a practice as

*...a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (op. cit: 249).*

Social practices therefore comprise interconnected elements through which

*...things are described and the world is understood...A practice is social, as it is a 'type' of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds (op. cit.: 250).*

Therefore the partners in this research will be used to their own social practices and ways of being and seeing. These may be 'routinized', but also discursive and even affective and perspectival, reflecting deeper normative and professional commitments. This does not mean that they will be confined within their own social practices in the emergence of the partnership and the development of collaborative practices; indeed Billett (2002a: 89) emphasises the 'co-participative relationship' between individuals and the social practices in which they engage, stressing a degree of agency. The research therefore will involve a degree of analysis of the coming together of a range of social practices associated with the collaborating activity systems and the ways of working of the partner representatives. Chapters 5 and 6 will address these issues.

In analysing processes of learning Engestrom (1990: 78-79), in keeping with the cultural-historical activity theoretical position outlined earlier, criticised cognitive approaches for excluding social and cultural contextual aspects. He similarly criticised phenomenological approaches for presenting contexts as interpersonal constructions detached from histories or culture. Lave offers similar criticisms of both positions in arguing for situated social practice, which:

*emphasises the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing...learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people engaged in **activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world** (Lave's emphasis) (1991: 66-67)*

The challenge is translating this 'into a specific analytic approach to learning' (op.cit: 67). Engestrom's response to the limitations of cognitive and phenomenological approaches is Activity Theory:

*For activity theory contexts are neither containers nor situationally created experiential spaces. Contexts are activity systems. An activity system integrates the subject, the object and the instruments (material tools as well as signs and symbols) into a unified whole. (Engestrom, 1990: 78-79)*

Activity Theory is associated with Engestrom's development of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of mediation between subject and object into an 'activity system', and includes additional components of rules, division of labour and community (Fig. 3.1).

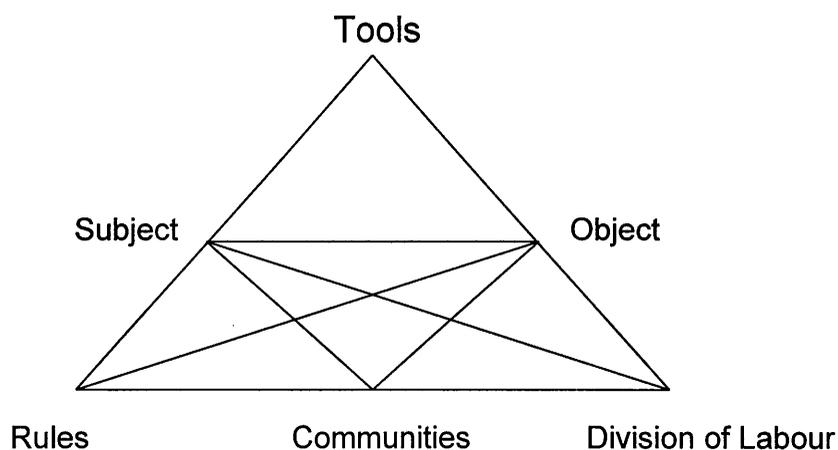


Fig. 3.1 The Activity System (after Engestrom, 1987)

The activity system is a conceptual tool; critically, what Engestrom calls a 'unit of analysis', within which isolated incidents can be framed and analysed. It is therefore a response to Lave's identified need for a 'specific analytic approach to learning'

(op.cit.1991: 67). In this respect, and for the purposes of my research, Activity Theory serves as 'a clarifying and descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive theory' (Nardi, 1996:7), particularly given the critique of the theory which I will elaborate and adapt.

Problematic for both perspectives is the notion of 'unit of analysis', and the inseparability of individual and collective levels of analysis: learning involves the transformation of the social practice of the group, and therefore analysis cannot in purist terms be reduced to what one person does or knows. Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom (2003: 30) assert that 'the individual's learning is understandable only if we understand the learning of the activity system.' The focus is on collective process and activity. It is the irreducibility of the unit of analysis that is problematic for this research case study of partnership.

However, in debating similar tenets in Giddens' structuration theory, on the ontological inseparability of the individual and the social, Layder (1987: 31) proposes that social theory retain a dualism of individual and social structure that 'does not necessarily imply opposition or un-relatedness' and that such a mutually constitutive dualism 'achieves the same theoretical goals at a lesser cost than inseparability' (Sawyer:2002, citing Layder: 1987:32).

Recent theoretical developments in Activity Theory are grappling with this issue. Examples include: debates on the position of the subject within the activity system (Daniels: 2005, Daniels and Warmington: 2007); on the 'privileging' of learning in the activity system rather than the 'learning needs of individuals' (Wheelahan, 2007: 194); on the constitutive relationship of emotion, motivation and identity with activity (Roth: 2007) and on the need to uncouple motive from object to access the subjects' perspectives within the unit of analysis (Nardi: 2005; Kaptelinin: 2005). Considerations of the self, rooted in Leontiev (1974), which link social and individual dimensions of

development, are also facilitating this theoretical debate (for example, Stetsenko and Arievidt: 2004). Such developments contribute to the theoretical basis for this thesis, as well as the conceptual framework for the data analysis.

Sawyer (2002) also notes the spectrum of perspective, and more significantly methodological practice, in socio-cultural theory, ranging from strict inseparability theorists (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Hutchins, 1995, Rogoff, 1998) to positions such as Valsiner's (1991, 1998) and Wertsch, who argues that individual and society are 'analytically distinct, yet inherently interrelated levels of analysis' (1994: 203). Sawyer (op.cit.) notes Valsiner's observation of Rogoff's empirical work; that it focuses on 'a *person's* (my emphasis) contribution to socio-cultural activity, responsibility, ownership of the activity, (and) relations with other people' (Rogoff: 1998: 353). Sawyer's point is that the actual empirical work of inseparability theorists is successful because it implicitly accepts analytic dualism: analysis of properties of individuals, of contexts, and the micro-sociological practice that mediate between the two. I raise this issue here because both Engestrom's notion of context, as cited above, and the activity system as a unit of analysis, in their purest forms of irreducibility, involve methodological and analytical difficulties for my research if I confine myself to this purist position. This is because the research involves activity systems with widely different pedagogical and professional starting points collaborating on a curriculum, as will be illustrated in Chapter 5. I will return to this point later in noting Engestrom's reliance on individuals articulating contradiction within the activity system. My approach enables access to partner perspectives in individual-institutional and collective contexts, facilitating access to data across different localities, and over time, within the activity system. These are

not presented as distinct; rather as inherently interrelated – a duality rather than a dualism.

The model of analysis for activity theory focuses on the emergent 'object', the 'horizon of possible actions, a permanently unfinished project' (Engestrom speaking at Lancaster University, 24.1.02: Personal notes.). At this seminar Engestrom, in dealing with 'multi-voiced' discussion and 'shared notion of objects', claimed these were not given, but constructed by actors as they 'grab and mould the materials...they...enact foci for actions and activity in 'projectedness''. He also claimed that the objects are not constructed arbitrarily on the spot: they 'have histories, built in material affordances and unpredictability.' Central to this dynamic is contradiction and disturbance, emanating from multi-vocality and resulting in what Engestrom (2001) refers to as the 'double bind', rooted in dilemma. It is from the dilemma that questioning of premises results in what Engestrom (op. cit) equates with Bateson's (1972) equivalent of 'Learning III': expansive learning.

*Development can be understood by tracing disruptions, troubles and innovations at the level of concrete modes of activity, both historical and current. (Engestrom 1990: 83)*

Expansive Learning is rooted in contradictions within the activity system, beginning with questioning, for example of prevailing practices, analysing, modelling and testing alternatives, leading to evaluation and ultimately changes in practice (Engestrom, 1999a, 2004). It is 'future oriented' and simultaneously rooted in history, and therefore appropriate to this developing partnership. Learning is not individual and cognitive, but

primarily distributed and social in nature. Engestrom uses Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone of proximal development' to explain this, and it provides a theoretical framework for the concept of the 'learning organisation'. In later developments of this theory Engestrom refers to the process of expansive learning through working professional groups as:

*...radical exploration...learning what is not yet there...the creation of new knowledge and new practices for a newly emerging activity; that is, learning embedded in and constitutive of the qualitative transformation of the entire activity system. (Engestrom, 2004: 4)*

However, Young (2001) rightly questions the utility of the concept of expansive learning when questioning within the activity system is seen as challenging and threatening to existing power relations – an issue to which I will return later, and one that I will address in the analysis of the data, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

Engestrom (2001) maps the development of Activity Theory across three generations, from Vygotsky (1978) to Leontev's (1981) use of the collective hunting metaphor, giving entry to debate on the relationship between the individual and collective and distributed learning. Engestrom in this article refers to the need for the 'third generation' of Activity Theory to develop conceptual tools to understand 'dialogue, multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems' (op. cit: 135). Earlier work in this area by Wertsch (1991) introduced Bakhtin's notions of 'dialogicality', and Ritva Engestrom (1995) linked Bakhtin's categories of 'voice', 'speech genre' and 'social language' to

Leontev's (1981) Activity Theory categories of 'operation', 'action' and 'activity'. Also Engestrom, Engestrom and Karkkainen (1995), in recognition of emerging multi-professional working practices, a 'new work paradigm', developed the notion of a horizontal sharing of expertise across activity systems, which in this thesis occurs through the partnership. 'Polycontextuality' recognised that

*experts operate in and move between multiple parallel activity contexts...(which) demand and afford different, complementary, but also conflicting cognitive tools, rules and patterns of social interaction...Experts face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts to achieve hybrid solutions (Engestrom et. al.1995: 319)*

The issue became one of crossing boundaries in complex interacting activity systems, leading to conceptual modelling with Actor Network Theory (Engestrom and Escalante (1996), Miettinen (1999)). Such movement required a conceptual development of 'expansive learning' to accommodate the emerging horizontal as well as the vertical dimensions. More recent developments increasingly stress the 'socio-spatial' as well as the 'temporal-longitudinal' dimensions of expansiveness (Engestrom, Engestrom and Kerosuo, 2003), and for expansive learning to 'take shape as 're-negotiation' and 're-organization' of collaborative relations and practices between and within the activity systems involved' (Engestrom, 2004: 5). In this article Engestrom claims that in developing practices between activity systems, expansive learning should be reformulated as horizontal 'learning in co-configuration' and 'boundary crossing (op. cit: 5)

Recognition of these issues in earlier work, particularly in the context of multi-professional health teams, led to the concept of negotiated 'knotworking' (Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho, 1999: 346), the knot being an issue which links interacting activity systems, functionally but temporally, 'with no individual or fixed organisational entity as the centre of control'; indeed they go on to state 'the centre does not hold' (op. cit: 346). The focus is on the objects of professional work and discourses. Such

*...objects serve as centering and integrating devices for regimes of expertise... (Knorr-Cetina, 1997:9)*

More recent conceptualisations of 'expansiveness' refer to horizontal, dialogical and transformative 'co-configuration', involving 'hybridity' (Engestrom, 2003, 2004), a concept first used by Engestrom, Engestrom and Karkkainen in 1995, and learning through 'experience' (Engestrom: 2007: 38)

In tracing the development of this emerging theory my purpose has been to provide a conceptual framework to theorise and analyse the emerging partnership which is the focus of my research. In doing this I am looking at the partnership as a coming together of a range of activity systems around the 'knot', the 'object', of developing and delivering the Foundation Degree curriculum. The 'unit of analysis' gives me a research instrument to analyse the practices of partnering and their development in this context. It also provides an instrument to access empirically processes of development in the form of

phased boundary crossing events. To support this it is necessary to consider further the concepts and implications of expansive learning and boundary crossing.

### **Expansive learning and crossing boundaries**

Notions of transformative learning through practices of partnering, as in this research, and knowledge formation and acquisition with and through others in situated activity, sit well with my social constructionist ontology. The notion of distributed cognition, learning as a social practice in a developing multi-professional context, stimulated by questioning of practices and learning from the perspectives, experience and practices of others, is an important conceptual and methodological basis for investigation. The notion of crossing boundaries seems to offer a conceptual parallel with Somekh's (1994) use of Bruner's (1986) notion of 'occupying others' castles', but the latter relies on empathetic, liberal humanistic processes of reasoning as the means of cognitive transition. Such a theoretical perspective relies also on espoused commitments to mutuality as a sufficient basis for collaborative working.

In contrast the Activity Theoretical processes of moving from Vygotskian experience, through reflexive 'internalisation' (Engestrom, 1999d, 2001), to subsequent collaborative 'externalisation'- the exploration, implementation and evaluation of new practices, and then, cyclically, their subsequent internalisation offer a developmental and processual response to the rather agential liberal humanism of Somekh's position (op. cit).

In this section I want to explore the processes and analytical tools that Activity Theory can offer in analysing development in partnering practices and learning – in particular through expansive learning and boundary crossing. I will explore the development of the notion of expansive learning through its transition from vertical to horizontal conceptualisations and ‘ideal-typical’ sequences in the ‘third generation’ of Activity Theory; consider processes of ‘instrumentality’ and ‘textualisation’ as tools in development across boundaries, and raise questions about the discursive implications of this for this thesis (for example, who’s instruments and practices prevail?). I will also reflect on issues from examples of research on boundary crossing.

For Engestrom (1987) expansiveness is cyclical, and is situated in context and ‘history’. The critical self-reflection associated with internalisation leads to externalisation, a search for solutions, which when identified and acted upon subsequently become internalised as tacit practices. Expansive cycles, for Engestrom (1999d: 34), are not ‘pre-determined courses of one-dimensional development...decisions are made locally...they are not arbitrary...’. Engestrom asserts that if contradictions are not dealt with, the cycle will be non-expansive. There are parallels here with liberal humanist and social justice discourses on which much of partnership working is premised, in both current academic literature (such as Griffiths 1998; Somekh: 1994), and approaches to public policy implementation, especially in Education.

In its vertical representation, the expansive cycle moves from questioning to analysing to modelling solutions, and then implementation and evaluation (Engestrom, 1999a ). In recognition of the expanded unit of activity – learning at and across boundaries in the

horizontal dimension, Engestrom (2003) reformulates expansive learning actions as boundary-crossing actions, within an amended ideal-typical sequence which anchors the stages (for example, questioning, analysing, modelling) as facilitation practices in moves to mutuality, understanding, modelling, conceptualising and patterning conduct across boundaries. In this article he asserts

*Boundary-crossing actions are always two-way interactions. If only one party attempts to cross a boundary but receives no response, the action is incomplete and cannot be recognised as boundary crossing. To be expansive such actions need to be characterised by mutual engagement and commitment to change in practices.*

*Moreover, whether or not a boundary-crossing action is expansive can ultimately only be determined in the broader context of transformation in the activity systems involved.*  
(Engestrom, 2003:4)

There are parallels here again with liberal humanist positions and Habermasian 'ideal speech situations' in terms of mutuality, and in stressing 'multi-vocality' in the process of questioning within the 'unit of analysis', the activity system, the premise is that voices are articulated, and moreover, listened to and acted upon. I will return to this point subsequently, and in my data analysis when considering issues of power.

Yet in an earlier article Engestrom, with Engestrom and Karkkainen (1995) claimed that boundary crossing does not have to achieve mutually accepted interpretations across the boundaries to be fruitful. This raises questions about perspective within the 'unit of analysis', and about the constitution of the object and processes of its formation. For example, is it 'collective concept formation' within the unit of analysis; an essentially

reductive and functionalist notion? Is the expansiveness necessarily systemic? Might it impact on the activity systems at the boundaries differentially? In other words might different partners have a completely different perspective on the object? Might the collective object as discursively constituted and framed mean different things for different subjects in different contexts (akin to Ball's (1993) distinction between 'discourse' and 'text')? Such questions are critical to the case study of collaboration being investigated for this research, and in attempts to redevelop the theory to illuminate this case study. This issue is acknowledged by Engestrom, for example in the variety of conceptions doctors have of their work (1991), but Blackler (1993: 871), notes Engestrom's position that

*...with the passage of time new or revised conceptions of activity are likely to emerge...yet traces of earlier outlooks can be expected to remain.*

Engestrom wrote:

*As the contradictions in an activity system are aggravated, **some individual participants** (my emphasis) begin to question and deviate from its established norms. In some cases this escalates into collaborative envisioning...(2001:137)*

With Tuomi-Grohn he explains:

*Expansive learning is initiated when **some individuals** (my emphasis) involved in a collective activity take the action of questioning the existing practice. (2003: 30)*

This raises questions about the roles these individuals have, who they represent, what their relative influence is within the 'collective', and which discourses and instruments they employ. Such issues raise questions about the 'unit of analysis'. There is an implied duality between the individual and the collective, which is not explicitly acknowledged. It does raise issues in processes of collaborative activity of accessing what 'differentially placed' (Willmott, 1999: 15) agents can do within specific situations that relate to this thesis.

Vygotsky's (1978) notions of mediation and 'mediating means' (Wertsch, 1991) are critical in focusing on the 'object-orientedness' of new multi-professional work practices, conceptualised by Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho (1999) as 'knotworking'. The original concept of 'boundary object' came from Star (1989), and has been developed by Wenger (1998: 106) as a tool that boundary crossers or 'brokers' bring to processes of change. For Tuomi-Grohn et.al. boundary objects enable

*People who have different approaches to what they do ... (to) co-ordinate activities around an object, which gives some common meaning across the settings where the activities take place. At the collective level, this object seems to be weakly structured, but for an individual actor it might be strongly structured. (2003: 5)*

Logically this point seems to support the position of Nardi (2005) and Kaptelinin (2005) in uncoupling motive from object, giving access to subjects' conceptualization of the purpose of activity.

For Engestrom, Engestrom and Karkkainen (1995: 322) the notion of boundary object is conceptualised as a common point of reference, which can be both 'a shared external representation of a problem', or 'shared mental models'. For my data analysis this notion will be helpful in identifying 'critical sites' on collaboration for the partners, their practices and their organisations – what they mean and to whom, and more importantly, the relative significance and priority within the emerging practices that they are given. Examples from my data might include the modes of assessment, the styles of teaching, the relative importance given to learner support, or the relative vocational (training) and academic emphases in teaching and learning strategies. They provide the mediational means for development activity. However, the notion of 'common' implies recognised and shared - given voice. This may not always be the case. Kerosuo (2001, cited in Kerosuo and Engestrom: 2003:347) concluded that boundaries occur when 'a person encounters a problem or dilemma as an expression of those boundaries'.

The notion of boundary object is nevertheless helpful, and is linked to the concepts of 'instrumentality' and 'textualisation', essential in the process of development as conceptualised by Engestrom. Instrumentality is about 'tool creation and implementation' (Kerosuo and Engestrom, 2003: 345) in the process of externalisation. For example, in the health care context that provides the field for much of Engestrom's work he regularly uses the notion of a 'care agreement' in patient care as such a tool. In the context of horizontal boundary crossing, tools provide the means of 'interconnected instrumentality' (op.cit.). Kerosuo and Engestrom (op.cit) talk of tools evolving through phases of 'resistance', 'turning points' and 'stabilization'. They conceptualise instrumentality as 'jointly used instruments in a community' (op. cit: 349), but also claim

that 'talk and cognition in action are part of a contextual instrumentality that emerges in collective cognitive repertoires' (op. cit: 349). This could be seen to be idealistic, and an alternative perspective, particularly where collaboration and partnering is in process, might be one of normalising within contested hegemonic and subordinate discursive practices and instruments. Such instruments in this case study may relate to assessment practices, modes of teaching, or course organization, such as modularity. In this respect Engestrom fails to deal with the discursive nature of power in the form of adopted practices and tools as they apply in interacting activity systems or partnerships.

It is unclear whether the instruments, the boundary objects, are external to the process of development, constitutive of it, or emergent with it. For example, Engestrom (1999c) asserts the analytical advantage of Activity Theory over conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). He claims they are 'pure talk...not ostensibly embedded in any practical activity' (op. cit: 170). Rather, he claims that conversations are 'fixated and made durable ...by turning them into texts' (op.cit: 166), as tools, through a process of 'textualisation'. In arguing this he asks 'what is the relationship between discourse and 'object-oriented productive activity'?' (op.cit: 166). This conceptual differentiation is unconvincing, as his notions of instrumentality and textualisation have much in common with Fairclough's CDA (Fairclough, 1992), including discursive instruments and practices.

In particular, Fairclough's notion of intertextuality is also traceable to Bakhtin, and the notions of historicity, dialogue and 'futures'. Fairclough's (op. cit.) 'intertextual chains' correlate with the Activity Theory notion of historicity in development, but discursive structures, practices and tools, orders of discourse and processes of reification,

boundary objects, processes of normalizing and contested hegemonies have to be taken into account in the process of partnering across activity systems. For CDA, discourse is not external to activity or experience, but it frames it and is constitutive of it. In terms of mediational means, the outer points of the triangle in Fig. 3.1 are critical: what voice do the collaborating activity systems have in the choice and development of instruments? How is labour divided and stratified within the process, and who's rules and 'normalising' practices prevail? More significantly how are these issues likely to impact on the expansiveness of the experience? Engestrom's position fails to deal with the power dimension within an activity system and across systems, and this is an issue that I will address in my data analysis. This is precisely because of the irreducibility of the unit of analysis, even in contexts of interfacing activity systems.

However, in certain professional contexts, the notion of 'building a shared object', particularly in complex situations between a 'service provider' and a customer with a 'negotiation working model' (Karkkainen, Engestrom and Susiluoto, 2003) seems reasonable, but this also seems to represent a considerable narrowing of the concept, the contexts and the process, and might even be criticized as verging on consultancy rather than research (Avis, 2007: 161 accuses Engestrom of a 'technicist...conservative praxis'). Or perhaps it is one representation of activity systems which are becoming more complex, 'multiple, only loosely connected, emergent, abstract, and contestable' (Blackler, Crump and McDonald, 2000: 282). In such contexts of deliberation between sophisticated customer and service provider, based on an assumed symmetry between activity systems, and development based on 'co-configuration' (Victor and Boynton, 1998, cited in Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho, 1999, and Engestrom: 2004) and 'hybridity' (Engestrom, 2003), one might assume boundary crossing to be a more

predictable outcome. Such symmetry would provide opportunities for 'learning for co-configuration and in co-configuration' (Engestrom, 2004: 5); an instrument to facilitate transfer, but still premised on notions of articulation that is voiced and listened to.

What does the research into boundary crossing illustrate? Engestrom (2003: 3) defines boundary crossing as:

*...collaborative, mutually supportive building of new models, concepts, artefacts or patterns of conduct across boundaries.*

In theorising the 'horizontal' dimension of Activity Theory, he claims boundary crossing needs to be 'two way', and to be expansive the process must be 'characterized by mutual engagement' (op. cit: 4)

Concepts of 'mutuality' in this ideal-typical formulation again seem to parallel the Liberal Humanist literature on partnership. However, in his research Engestrom is attempting to develop and use conceptual and practical tools to empirically evaluate the crossing of boundaries. For example (2003) he adapts Cussins' notion of 'cognitive trails' to processes of boundary crossing, and in particular the notion of 'stabilization', a form of potentially generalized consensus on practice to be agreed and moved forward. In this paper he applies this to a multi-professional health group discussing patient care, and his analysis of the dialogue identified nine 'potentially expansive' (op. cit: 19) features of mutual engagement and commitment to change in practices. He notes 'none of the sets contained an interaction in which all four parties responsible for the practical creation

and implementation of an agreement or plan jointly engaged in the discourse' (op. cit: 20)

Of the nine stabilization attempts, none involved the participating patient or health centre physicians, the researcher made one, the administrator physician two, and the heart specialist and consultant three each. While acknowledging the 'medical hierarchy' as an issue in this, he does not analyse this power and status differential as a factor in the process of boundary crossing. In reflecting on this research Engestrom recognises the limitations of cognitive trails being only one dimension of research into the horizontal. He also anticipates the criticism of what happens outside the immediate context of the 'laboratory' – a point I will develop through my data analysis in modelling a redeveloped notion of Activity Theory to incorporate individual-collective dualities (as discussed earlier) and issues of differential local affordances in the re-contextualisation of collectively espoused goals in boundary crossing workshops.

This is a problem with the emphasis on the 'collective in context'. What happens outside this context? What do partners take away from this experience, and how do they 'recontextualise' it within the discursive practices and 'objects' of their own activity systems and communities of practice? How is it re-constituted? These questions are critical for this thesis and the reformulation of the theory. Engestrom's analysis of his data in this case involves examining individual contributions, or lack of contributions to collective development. Methodologically therefore he is implicitly recognising a duality of individual and collective levels. Yet he does not ask why 'mutual engagement and commitment to change in practices' does not often happen.

Blackler and McDonald (2000) provide another example of analysis of boundary crossing. In noting the essentially conservative nature of organisations they postulate the potential for expansive learning in developmentally oriented activity, particularly in circumstances of collaborative and 'de-centred' development, characterised by Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho's (1999) institutional 'knotworking'. Yet as an activity system of a research team, attempting to engage with a company being researched, they experienced similar problems to those being researched at the boundary, over issues to do with mutual understanding of priorities and methods in collaboration, and how previous experiences on both sides influenced approaches. There were different priorities in the formulation of the 'object'. Group boundaries and identities rapidly changed as a result, and without clear consensus there was no clear control. The result was that episodes of 'de-centred collaboration' were short-lived, and established outlooks and structures re-asserted themselves, with participants returning to familiar ground.

They criticise Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho's characterisation of knotworking – claiming it is not simply purposeful, functional and tactical. However, they assert, even in the circumstances they experienced, it is transformational (expansive) for the participants: it is '...not possible to shake free and walk away from the knot unchanged' (op. cit: 847). The process itself is developmental, and the skills that support de-centred collaboration include abilities to 'engage, negotiate, cross boundaries and contribute' (op. cit: 848) – these are social, cultural and discursive resources residing in individuals 'embodied', 'encultured' and 'embrained' knowing (Blackler, 1995: 1022), and coherent with Fairclough's notion of 'members' resources' (1992: 72). However, individuals are differentially placed within the unit of analysis in terms of these resources. They may

also have alternative perspectives on the object which may result in contested positioning. This contrasts with Engestrom's more systemic analysis; for example, in his criticism of ethnographic research, for focusing on 'actors' rather than systems (Engestrom, 2004: 9).

Certain issues and questions can be drawn from these limited examples of boundary crossing for this thesis. Are there necessary conditions for it to occur? Is it necessarily collective learning through the activity system or are subjects' perspectives, motivation and the differentiated discursive power of agenda setting, and blocking, issues in influencing the shared object under construction? What meanings are given to the object by the various subjects, and how do espoused agreements on modelling of development, made in a particular context and time, relate to practices and priorities when 're-contextualised', in my research, either in the colleges, the University Schools, or the various workplaces that the students are from?

Social practice theory stresses the 'relational interdependency of agent and world' (Lave, 1991: 67), but in a series of papers on situated cognition Resnick (1991: 15) notes Hastie and Pennington's (1991) conclusions that group decision making does not necessarily require convergence of interpretation, and individuals subsequently have to situate their own as well as (their interpretation and prioritising of) the collective outcomes within their own activity system.

At this point I return to the marker I set out earlier in this chapter: the provisos in Valsiner (1991,1998), Wertsch (1994) and Sawyer (2002) and recent developments in socio-cultural theory suggesting that an analysis based on a duality of individual and

collective perspectives provides a means of distinguishing while relating individual and collective perspectives and learning, and a means of empirical analysis of development at collective and individual levels. A related issue is whether the expansive learning is systemic, collective (or group), or individual, or even in a multi-layered partnership such as the one being investigated, even dyadic. For example some local practice in this research between a college and an employer might be richer, more diverse and have greater impact at both local and collective levels than that experienced elsewhere. This position provides a way forward in using Activity Theory to research this particular collaborative development, while accessing the individual and recontextualised aspect of partner perspectives on priorities and their development. Such an approach enables me to access data at both collaborative and individual levels in addressing my research questions in a way that is theoretically coherent and relational rather than separate.

### **Perspective, context, priority and power**

In this section I want to develop some of the issues raised in the previous section. In particular I will consider how the 'unit of analysis' needs to be adapted to deal with variation of perspectives and motives that partners (subjects) bring to the process of collaboration at the collective level of the 'knot', and how I might theoretically deal with this for my research.

Questions have been raised about the activity system as a unit of analysis, particularly problematic in the area of interacting activity systems, and the process of expansive learning in boundary crossing. Issues around the priority given to perspectives, voice and silences within the unit of analysis, partner interpretations and the processes of 're-

contextualising' development in different activity systems, hegemonic and normalising discursive practices and the effects on expansiveness are issues that the 'inseparability' wing of socio-cultural theory does not necessarily even recognise, owing to its process ontology and the systemic emphasis within the unit of analysis. This means issues of variation, of perspective and of power within the activity system, are either undeveloped or rationalised within existing theoretical premises. An example of this is Engestrom's (1999a) response to Holland and Reeves (1994). Yet, as in Valsiner's comments on Rogoff's own empirical analyses, which separate the individual's contribution to collective socio-cultural activity, so Engestrom (2001) too acknowledges the role of individuals in the process of questioning.

Holland and Reeves (*op. cit*) recognised the issue of diversity of perspective and its effect on the way teams constitute their contribution to a collective cognitive task – in particular they discuss the effect of perspective on how the 'object', using Activity Theory, is constituted by teams contributing to activity. Three groups of students interpreted their task in completely different ways – the tasks were modified by team members, and reflected issues, perspectives and cultural resources that they had been exposed to in other work and school situations, and that they were bringing to that particular context. The perspectives were diverse as 'they were also constructed by the teams contingently, from cultural discourses and symbols, specific to their experience' (*op. cit*: 19). Perspective recognises the tension in 'subjects' viewpoints on the 'object' within an activity system that may result in diversity in priorities and embedded practices. Activity Theory sees that tension as the dynamic of the double bind leading to development, but it may not necessarily result in synthesis, in dialectical terms.

Holland and Reeves differentiate levels of individual, team and collective activity. Individual perspectives 'relate to its (team perspective) production in a complicated manner'. Teams 'create talk and otherwise symbolize themselves and the project. To a degree they discursively construct, with the type of semiotic mediating devices emphasized by Vygotsky, representations of their stance toward their projects'. Use of these mediating devices 'solidifies their perspective and orientates their subsequent work' (op.cit: 17). In the analytical distinctions between individual, team and collective 'object' in these terms, 'perspective' provides parallels with Ball's (1993) distinction between 'discourse' and 'text' and Giddens' (1984) concept of the 'dialectic of control' in terms of processes of implementation. In essence for Ball this means the local interpretation and contextualising of policy, where for Giddens it means the dependence of hierarchies on those responsible for instantiation.

More recently Billett (2006: 54) has raised the issue of the 'relational interdependence' between individual and social agency in work contexts; a duality 'viewed in terms of individualizing the social, and socializing the individual.' In recognizing the limitations of Activity Theory in this respect (and theories of Distributed Cognition and Communities of Practice), Billett notes its failure

*...to adequately account for how individuals engage with immediate social influences or provide adequate bases for understanding the influences of pre-mediate experiences (eg., individuals' subjectivities) on that engagement. (op cit: 55)*

The tensions for individual 'perspective makers, takers and shapers' (Blackler, Crump and McDonald: 2000) at moments of 'double bind' within the unit of analysis is one

issue. Equally significant for this thesis are the outcomes subsequently, away from the 'knot' in processes of re-contextualisation.

Engestrom, with Escalante (1996) recognised the multi-faceted nature of the 'object', and Engestrom's (1999a: 382) response to Holland and Reeves (1994) acknowledges perspective as a 'hedge' against 'simplified views of context that ignore the unsettled and conflicted relations between different positions and actors'. In a reflexive moment in this piece he asks if perspectives can merge, and follows this by outlining how 'expansive learning', 'ascending from the abstract to the concrete', offers a process of perspective merger, centripetally. Expansive learning 'involves actions directed toward constructing a shared understanding', and this involves 'construction and resolution of successively evolving tensions or contradictions in a complex system that includes the object or objects, the mediating artefacts and the perspectives of the participants' (op.cit: 382-384). It also provides a means of

*...analysing the interplay of the object under construction, the mediating artefacts and the different perspectives of the participants in a progression of collectively achieved actions' (1999a:384)*

This comment is based on observed behaviours in meetings, the result being 'a new team perspective emerged' (op. cit: 400) that went beyond initial (individual) perspectives. Engestrom acknowledges, however, that the new team perspective was not unanimously shared. This could be a dialectical synthesis, or it could have more to do with individuals in structural roles and contested hegemonic discursive practices (although he acknowledges initial positions and how they developed were not rooted in

traditional demarcation lines). This distinction between role, discourse and social position within networking activity systems, of direct importance to this thesis, has been highlighted by Daniels (2005), and Daniels and Warmington (2007), and will be considered later in this section.

Engestrom gives little thought to relationships or group dynamics within the development process of the 'unit of analysis'. This contrasts, for example with the work of Hastie and Pennington (1991). Their work on mock juries indicates who talks is an issue of social status and hierarchies (this correlates with the data for this thesis also – particularly in the boundary crossing workshops, where one of the college lecturers tends to act as the informal spokesperson with the apparent consent of the others). They also distinguish individual levels of analysis, which are evidence driven, and group levels, that are verdict driven. Resnick comments, on the role of individual thought in socially shared cognition:

*...we will only come to understand shared cognition if we focus simultaneously on the individual processes that are engaged in the social setting (1991: 15).*

This is not about the separateness of the individual and collective levels of analysis, but rather analysis of differentially placed agents both within the collective 'knot', and in processes of re-contextualisation away from the knot.

I have made reference to 're-contextualising' throughout this chapter. This has been an attempt to conceptualise, within partnership practices in my research, the responsibilities and efforts of 'boundary spanners' (Wenger, 1998: 105) outside the

physical contexts of the 'boundary crossing laboratories', the Workshops, to make sense of the decisions made in that setting in the process of implementation in the subjects' own activity systems. Lave (1993: 22) discusses the traditional dualism between contextualisation and de-contextualisation when context is seen in conventional terms, with the latter losing specificity in the process of generalisation. Lave (op.cit.) states there is no de-contextualised social practice. Re-contextualisation involves a greater degree of specificity, by engaging across contexts and locating interpretation of discursive intent within the constraints and affordances of institutional and professional discursive structures, meaning systems and practices of aligned partner activity systems, which themselves are role and rule governed. Fuller and Unwin (2004: 127) have developed a similar emphasis through 'affordance' by referring to an 'expansive-restrictive' continuum for workplace learning within debates on formal and informal learning. This notion is applicable for this research to the opportunities partners have away from the dynamic of the collective Workshops, and in the process of re-contextualising the outcomes in their own activity systems. It means partnerships and Activity Theoretical analyses need to consider not only the emergent temporal-longitudinal dimensions of expansive development, but also the socio-spatial – the boundary spanners at the collaborative interface, the 'knot', having to interpret, prioritise and implement espoused actions within the expansive-restrictive affordances of their own activity systems. I consider this issue in modelling the research process for this thesis in the first section of the next chapter, on methodology, and in the final data chapter.

A final comment in this section is reserved for the issue of power. The partnership context for this research involves heterogeneity such that in probability

*...different participants' interpretations are based on different contextual social positions with inherent differences in possibilities, interests and perspectives on conflicts arising from different locations (Dreier 1993, cited in Lave 1993: 15).*

In such circumstances there are

*...always conflicts of power, so mislearning cannot be understood independently of someone imposing his or her view (Lave:1993: 15)*

This represents Lukes' (1974) one dimensional view of the exercise of power, and in the context of this research I am interested in more discursive perspectives linked to Foucault's (1980) concept of 'power-knowledge', and notions of discursive structures and practices, associated with Critical Discourse Analysis. However, Willmott (1999: 8) notes 'structures place limits on what differentially placed agents can do within a concrete structural situation'. This is not a determinist position: individuals can resist, and agential motivation and affordances influence the contested, emergent outcomes of the 'double bind'.

Engestrom does not adequately address issues of power within his Activity Theory. He makes occasional, tentative references, but given his structural perspective around the unit of analysis, conflict as the basic fuel of development is not analysed, but rather seen as a catalyst giving impetus towards expansiveness. At several points through the chapter so far I have raised issues of voice, silence and dominance within the activity system. The discussion on perspective and Engestrom's response to Holland and Reeves is an example. In explaining 'disturbance, innovation and contradiction' as a theoretical tool, he comments:

*While power and domination are at work in contradictions, it is important to distinguish contradictions from a general assertion of asymmetrical power relations (1999c: 178)*

This depends on how power is conceptualised. In terms of discourse and power-knowledge issues one would find it difficult to uncouple ‘contradictions’ from ‘asymmetrical power relations’ in the particular context of this research, in terms of how they are articulated and dealt with.

As well as contradictions, he stresses multi-vocality in the process of development. Such multi-voicedness is multiplied in interacting activity systems. Division of labour and roles are characteristics of activity systems. How is the labour stratified? Are the rules negotiable? In collaborative activity whose priorities prevail, and within who’s rules and discursive practices? For example in discussing the ‘third generation’ of Activity Theory (2001) Engestrom graphically presents two activity systems of equal size as sharing an apparently merged object – the graphics and text imply and preface notions of symmetrical ‘co-configuration’ (see Fig. 3.2).

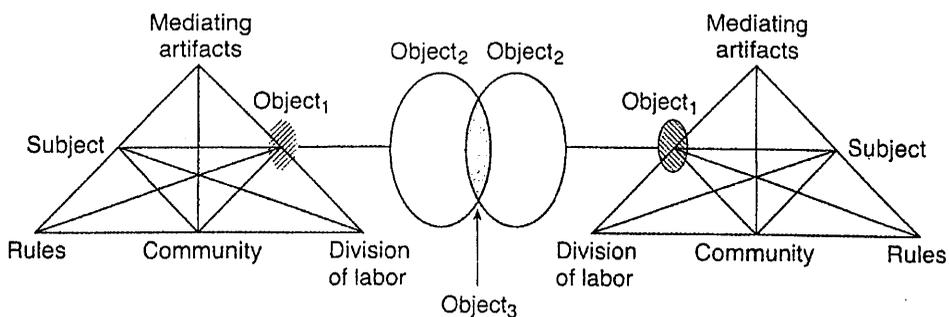


Fig. 3.2 Two interacting activity systems as minimum model for the third generation of activity theory (Engestrom: 2001: 136)

Engestrom comes to recognize, or rather assumes such necessary conditions of mutuality need to prevail for development to occur. For example in discussing the role of researchers in giving direction to development, he comments:

*...the different voices involved in the determination of direction...are identified, and clashes between them are regarded as an opportunity to get toward a clearer view of the contradictions. Such an approach does not eliminate the power relations and constraints at play, but it helps demystify them and potentially to re-arrange them by capitalising on grey areas of uncertainty. (2000:165)*

This again seems very close to a Liberal Humanist position, and indeed in his more recent writings (2003, 2004), as previously mentioned, he stresses issues such as reciprocity and 'mutuality' for boundary crossing to occur. The strength of Activity Theory for this thesis is in its methodological and theoretical approach to development, particularly in the social domain and when focused on activity systems in teams and organisations. Its focus on the unit of analysis presents difficulties when using it to analyse collaborative development and transition within the activity system.

Engestrom's recognition of the need for some form of mutuality for development is bringing him closer to Wenger's (1998) position, particularly on interacting constellations of practice.

In analysing interacting activity systems mutuality does not necessarily imply equality, but that interests, perspectives and motives (Nardi, 2005) within collaborative processes are recognised, accommodated and given voice. Issues of relative priority within the activity system (the ongoing emergence of the espoused object) and of process (tools, signifiers and other mediating means, roles and labour divisions, and rules) are of

critical importance in multi-vocality and negotiability of identity within the developing partnership. Therefore the effects on development of perspective and motive, discursive structures and practices, processes of ordering within which priorities are framed and contested in particular contexts, roles allocated (or assumed and adopted, based on identity, positioning and dispositions (Daniels: 2005)), practices monitored and the instruments used in the case study under investigation will need to be considered in this research. Such foci will provide access to empirical evidence of partnership practices, and development.

This will need to be done at two levels, and over a period of time. The first is an analysis of the perspectives and motives that the collaborating subjects from the interacting activity systems bring to the 'knot' from their own activity systems. The second is at the collective and formal level (in terms of developments, modelling, stabilization and action planning – Ball's (1993) equivalent of the level of 'discourse') in meetings and 'boundary crossing laboratories', and then subsequently back at the individual partner (subject) level, where processes of interpretation, prioritisation and recontextualization are attempted (Ball's notion of 'text') within local affordances. These levels are not distinct, but relational, and interdependent (Billett: 2006, Ozga: 2000).

Recent theoretical developments in Activity Theory reinforce this position. Daniels (2005), and Daniels and Warmington (2007), for example, have raised the issue of positions adopted by the subjects on an object in processes of networking, manifested through practice in subjects' dispositions. They use Holland et al's (1998) notion of 'figured worlds' ('...which shape and are shaped by participants and in which social position establishes possibilities for engagement' (Daniels, 2005: 6)) to demonstrate how identity in practice involves the taking up of positions and positional identities

(dispositions) on issues which link to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus'. Such an approach gives access to constituents of the 'unit of analysis', also facilitating access to issues of power and control within the activity system, particularly through empirical observation of the exercise of rules and roles (the division of labour) in espousing and contesting the object, and the way these are constituted through discursive practices. Daniels uses concepts of 'voice' and 'message' to demonstrate how division of labour and principles of control (rules) are brought into social position in practice. Daniels concludes that Activity Theory needs to develop a language of description that 'allows for the perimeters of power and control to be considered at structural and interactional levels of analysis' (op cit: 10). This, argues Daniels, involves treating division of labour and discourse within the same terms for analysis, and not as distinct items.

This theoretical development has paralleled other recent debates (on the position of the 'subject', discussed earlier) within Activity Theory on the need to differentiate within the unit of analysis. For example, an edition of *Mind Culture and Activity* (2005) is devoted to debate on the nature of the object. Of particular relevance to this thesis are the articles by Kaptelinin and Nardi. Kaptelinin emphasizes the need to uncouple 'motive' from 'object', on the basis that

*...objects of activities are dynamically constructed on the basis of various types of constraints. These constraints include the needs that the activity at hand is striving to satisfy, available means, other potentially related activities, and other actors involved, each with their own motives and objects. (Kaptelinin, 2005: 17)*

Kaptelinin identifies preliminary criteria for “successful objects” of activities, including ‘*balance...inspiration...stability ...and flexibility*’. Balance is rationalized as ‘effective motives should be properly represented; if a motive is systematically ignored, the activity may face a breakdown’ (op cit: 17). Again this position echoes Wenger’s (1998: 203) stance on ‘negotiability’ and ‘economies of meaning’ – in other words, voice, within a community of practice. It also has synergy with Engestrom’s (2004) recognition of the need for ‘mutuality’.

Nardi (2005: 38) criticizes the preoccupation of cognitive and situated approaches with ‘a focus on lower level actions that reveal the how but not the why of activity’. She claims (after Leontiev, 1974) that an understanding of ‘passions and desires’ in conceptualizing the object are essential in understanding collaboration. Nardi proposes

*...a distinction between constructing and instantiating objects; a distinction between motive and object in activity systems of multiple motives; and the foregrounding of the power and passion inherent in the “desire” animating objects in Leontiev’s (1974) original formulation (op.cit: 39).*

For Nardi constructing the object is its formulation, while instantiation refers to the activity that goes into realizing it, to achieve an outcome. She empirically demonstrates distinct motives within a particular activity (profit (management motive), scientific interest and humanitarian desire to help by developing new drugs (researchers’ motive)), but stresses that these motives were linked

*...bound to each other through relations of power, resistance and acquiescence. It was the struggles to align the motives-not merely the tasks-through these relational processes that gave rise to a single activity system, rather than a set of individually coordinating systems. (op cit: 40)*

Nardi concludes in agreement with Kaptelinin's modelling of the process as:

*n motives – 1 object – 1 activity (op cit: 41)*

The key was the successful aligning of motives – management was driven by economic and corporate issues, but these were framed, discursively, within the motives driving the researchers. The 'object of desire' was multi-faceted.

*These objects link people in diverse relations in collective activity systems, articulating the multiple voices we are beginning to listen for. (Nardi, 2005: 50)*

The significance of recognition of partner perspective and other affective dimensions on the object, of aligning motivation, of consensus and recognition of the complementarity of expertise within the division of labour are important dimensions in the effectiveness of the activity system, and the exercise of power within the system needs to facilitate these issues.

To conclude this section I want to summarise the issues for my research. The collective unit of analysis is problematic in attempting to access data on the working of partnership and its development. It is reductive, and does not consider adequately power issues

(roles, rules and discursive practices), aspects of mutuality and complementarity such as expertise and motive, the socio-spatial dimensions of re-contextualisation, and the relational interdependence of contexts away from the 'knot'. Pre-occupations with the collective perspective of the object at the 'knot' means data is confined to the formal, the espoused, and in Ball's terms the 'discourse'. In consideration of perspectives and motives of the subjects, of interpretation and meaning both for 'differentially placed agents' (Willmott: 1999) at the collective interface of the 'knot', and within the affordances away from the knot (Ball's 'text'), and subsequent, emergent interaction and dialogue with the knot, I will access data around the sites of the meaning of activity for the subjects, how these are contested and develop, and how they might be considered as expansive.

Therefore in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I will use the data from the phased interviews and boundary crossing workshops to analyse :

- The unit of analysis and the issue of subjectivity: accessing subjects, contested perspectives on the object and the issue of motivation – key sites will be identified from the data, including teaching and learning, assessment and student support, and these will provide the focus for subsequent analysis of the data
- The power dimension and how that frames and plays out the activity and sites for the data being investigated: in particular issues of discourse, practices, roles, tools and rules

- Issues of context and differential affordance across the activity system in implementation
- How these issues impact on expansiveness

Activity Theory as an aspect of CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory) is an emerging and developing theoretical framework. It is of particular importance to this research as it is examining emerging practice, knowledge as it is being produced. It is consistent with my role as participant –observer, and with my ontology rooted in a socio-cultural perspective. As an emerging theory I have been keen to use recent developments on the position of the subject within the activity system to develop a perspective on issues of motive, power and context, and these I will argue enhance the analytical potential of Activity Theory in this research.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

There are several aims to this chapter, reflected in its structuring. The first is to provide a descriptive overview of the research design and rationale linking into the research questions. Hence the first section provides a detailed outline of the research undertaken, including how the data used in the following chapters was generated. In doing this it also has a theoretical purpose in that I intend to demonstrate how the methods used are conceptually consistent with my criticisms of Activity Theory developed in Chapter 3. In particular I want to address the issue of relational collective and individual development within the expansive process. What follows in the subsequent sections is a reflexive analysis of the approach, but one that reflects a consistency rooted in my constructivist perspective.

A second aim is to explain my ontological and epistemological position, and the consequences for this research. The issue of my role as 'practitioner-researcher' is then evaluated from the perspective of the challenge of 'breaking out', or using Alvesson's (2003: 176) metaphor, the 'run away researcher' challenged by 'de-familiarisation' (Alvesson and Deetz: 2000: 166). Conventional issues of validity and reliability are then considered critically in the contexts of the position outlined, the methods used and the data gathered, before I move on to critically discuss the generalisability to theory of any claims that my data might be used to make.

Promotional and performative discourses of collaboration and partnership are prevalent in public policy, and the research of these issues is theoretically limited and often

framed within prevailing discourses (Doyle: 2006). The methodology in summary is an 'insider's' attempt to use an 'interventionist' research strategy to access boundary data on initial conceptualisations of the collaborators on an emerging curriculum, and how they prioritise and oversee its subsequent implementation. The methodology involves contextualising the emerging practice within prevailing discourses, as well as evaluating how partner practices influence their prioritising of interpretations and subsequent implementation. The data produced will be important in accessing issues of subjectivity, the exercise of power and aspects of context and affordance in processes of local implementation of decisions made at the 'knot'. Such issues directly relate to Research Question 2.

This demonstrates a commitment to investigate the collective and the individual as a duality, and the issues of context and 're-contextualisation'. In this respect boundary crossing is not simply a recording of what happens in the collective context; it is also investigating the moving of what has been agreed back across the boundary and its re-contextualisation within a different activity system.

Engestrom (1999b: 2) situates 'interventionist research methodology' within what he calls 'developmental work research as an agenda of application'. As researcher and developer it therefore is highly appropriate for me. In this conceptualisation 'research makes visible and pushes forward the contradictions of the activity under scrutiny, challenging the actors to appropriate and use new conceptual tools to analyse and redesign their own practice' (Engestrom, 1999b: 6). The chapter therefore raises and explores a range of methodological issues relevant to this process.

## **Focusing the lens – applying an interventionist methodology**

The vehicle chosen to enable me to access data to address my research questions (Chapter 1) was the collaborative development and implementation of teaching and learning strategies on a particular Foundation Degree. One purpose of this study (Research Question 1) is to use Activity Theory to enable an understanding of processes of multi-agency collaboration in the conceptualization, interpretation, development, implementation and subsequent evaluation of a curriculum within this multi-cultural framework. Programme aims and learning outcomes represent a rationalist, espoused approach to the framing of learning. The meanings and interpretations of the collaborating communities in the process of active development of the curriculum, rooted in priorities shaped by situated practices, need to be explored and analysed.

In particular I wanted to explore how the range of collaborator perspectives, rooted in situated and discursive practices, impact on and influence conceptualisations of learning priorities and how these develop through 'partnering practices' in this context. The research therefore focuses on emerging and developing practices and understandings in the context of the original policy and discursive parameters, in keeping with recent theoretical developments in Activity Theory, such as Nardi (2005), discussed in the previous chapter.

My research design therefore needed to provide me with access to initial conceptualisations of learning priorities across the range of collaborators, and a means of building in evaluation of 'expansive' development and transformation. In this sense the design needed to be 'interventionist' (Engestrom 1999b: 2), either in the sense that the research instruments brought the collaborators together at key stages of the

development, or that the research used equivalent 'naturally occurring' events in the phased implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. Such naturally occurring data sources have included moderation panels, exam boards, annual programme reviews and informal curriculum review meetings, as well as the actual equivalent of Engestrom et. al.'s (1996) 'boundary crossing laboratories'. For this research I call such instruments 'Workshops'. The research design and rationale is summarised in Table. 4.1. The actual research sequence and rationale for the process is represented in Fig. 4.1, which also illustrates how the socio-spatial, as well as the temporal- longitudinal dimensions are built into the design.

The case investigated was 'naturally occurring', and indeed I was an integral part of the process of development as participant-researcher. The subjects of the research were equally part of this process, occupying roles at the boundaries of collaboration between the participating organisations. Therefore as the researcher I had little choice in who the research subjects were: rather I was researching a situated developmental process using the theoretical framework of Activity Theory in a critical way. The actors selected by their organisations had a diversity of roles, perspectives and status, and these were factors that I had to take account of in the research as likely to impact on development both at the collective level of the partnership, and in processes that I refer to as 're-entry' or 're-contextualisation', back into their own organisations.

In designing the research I used data from the phased interviews to provide starting points for collective questioning in the Workshops. This is consistent with Vygotsky's method of double stimulation, outlined in Engestrom (2007a). In double stimulation experiments 'the subject is put in a structured situation where a problem exists (...) and the subject is provided with active guidance towards the construction of a new means to the end of a solution to the problem.' (van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991:169). The

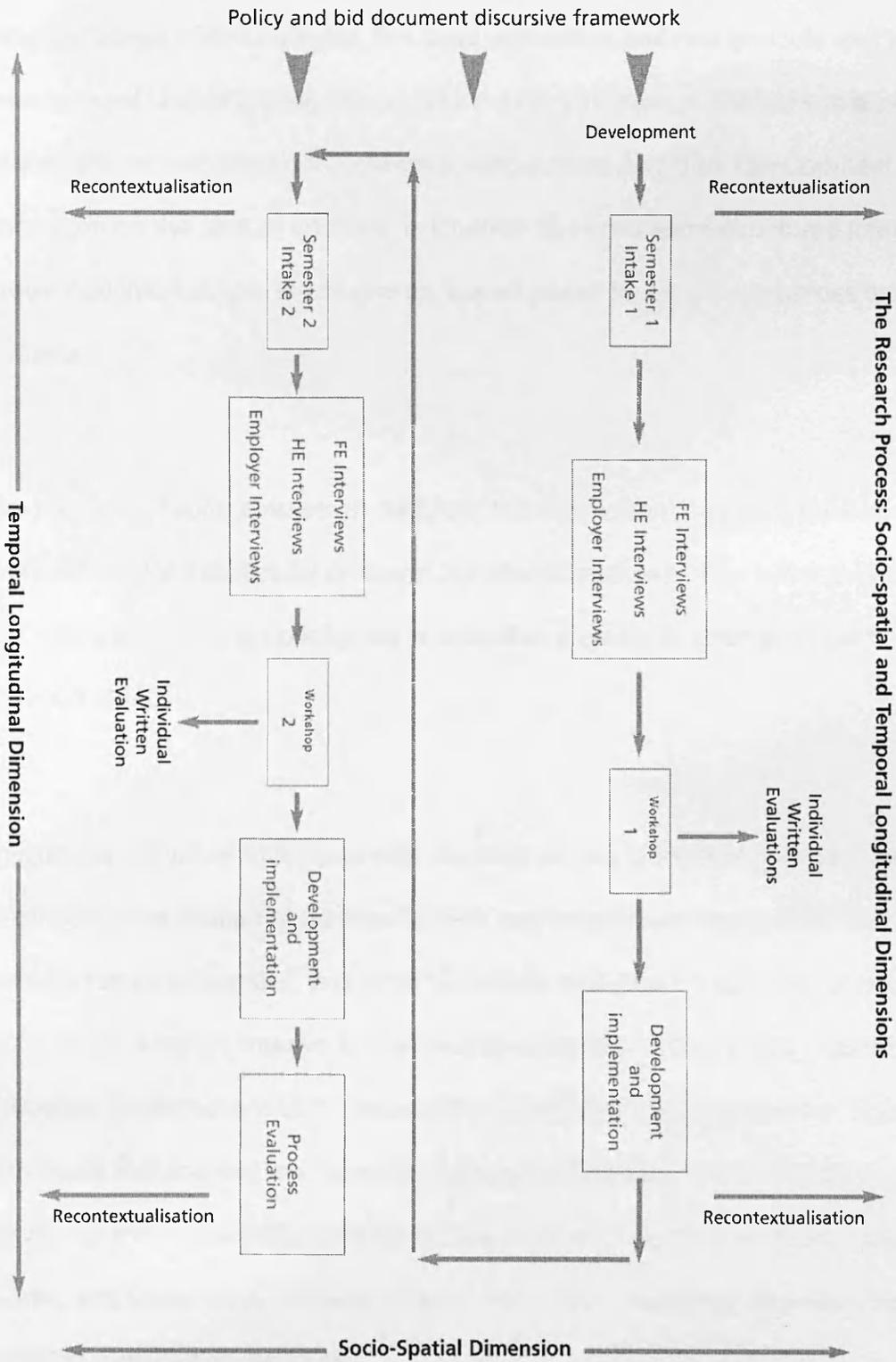
Workshop events therefore provide an experimental setting, a 'structured situation' (op. cit.). The data from the interviews provides the second stimulus, the 'active guidance' (op. cit.), the detailed issues to be addressed. The double stimulus can 'trigger (but not 'produce') the subjects' construction of new psychological phenomena' (van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991:399, cited in Engestrom: 2007a:365).

In Chapters 5 and 7 I attempt to provide a detailed portrayal of the research subjects, their positions and their positioning on key issues, and I consider the consequences of such factors for the dynamic and development of the partnership. Issues concerning the transparency and robustness of such an approach are dealt with later in this chapter.

What follows in the remainder of this section is an outline of the data collection methods, a rationale for this approach and a summary of how the data has been analysed.

	University	FE Colleges	Employers
<b>Research activity</b>  Ongoing	<b>A.</b> Documentary analysis: minutes, course documents, annual review, publicity, organizational structures/goals/policies		→
	<b>B.</b> Semi-structured interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme manager (1)</li> <li>• Academic – servicing School (1)</li> <li>• Education Development Unit Co-ordinator (1)</li> </ul>	• Curriculum Leaders and teachers (5)	• Training/CPD managers (4)
	After Semester 1 for intakes 1 and 2		→
Approx. 3 months after each phase of interviews	<b>C.</b> Workshops and reflective commentary		→
<b>Research rationale</b>	<b>A.</b> Detailed understanding of organizational and cultural policies practices and discourses, supporting 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973)		→
	<b>B.</b> Understanding and analyzing expectations, experiences, interpretations and priorities, and their development/transformation. Informing, reflecting on and evaluating Workshops. Accessing re-contextualised, individual perspectives and practices		→
	<b>C.</b> Workshops: 'expansive cycle' tool. Distributed learning and development forum. Collective experience. Subsequent individual reflective commentary on outcomes and experiences and impact on perspective		→
<b>Table 4.1 Research activity and rationale</b>			

**Fig 4.1 The Research Process**



- **Data collection – an overview**

The focus of this research is complex: the developing understandings and practices of representatives of five colleges, five local authorities and two Schools and an Education Development Unit of the lead University – a constellation of distinct social practices. To obtain data on individual and collective perspectives and their development (see the discussion on the ‘unit of analysis’ in Chapter 3) I used semi-structured interviews and sequenced Workshops, structured as ‘expert panel’ focus groups across two intakes of students:

*The purpose of such a research design is to involve them (experts) not only in finding explanations for a particular problem, but also to motivate them either to find solutions in their own practice or to collaborate in collective projects to solve a problem (Chioncel et. al., 2003: 498).*

This meant individual interviews with representatives of the five colleges, four of the employers (one would not be interviewed), representatives responsible for training and professional development, and three University staff (the Programme Director within the host school, a representative of a ‘servicing’ university school and a member of the Education Development Unit, responsible for initiating the programme). These individuals represented the ‘boundary spanners’ (Wenger, 1998) of the interacting activity systems. The initial interviews took place at the end of semester one of the first in-take, and these were followed up with Workshop 1, which all interviewees were invited to attend (see Fig. 4.1).

The initial interviews explored a range of issues, starting with understanding of the policy issues behind Foundation Degrees, and moving to their understanding of the primary learning goals of the course. This led to asking individuals to prioritise actions or changes for the second intake of students to improve delivery of their conceptualisation of the primary learning goal. The outcomes of this final question were anonymized and used to initiate the discussion in Workshop 1 (the process of 'double stimulation', as explained on page 84).

Engestrom's boundary crossing laboratories (2001, 1999a, 1996) have a formula linked to the phases of expansive learning discussed in Chapter 3. I structured the phases of Workshop 1 around this cycle (see Fig. 4.2 below), starting off with issues arising from the interviews relating to conceptualisations of the primary learning goal (Engestrom's 'questioning' - I termed these 'what ' issues, stimulating discussion based on interview data).

The second phase of Workshop 1 was structured around 'why' issues (Engestrom's 'analyzing'), enabling the group to reflect on problems in the delivery of the planned curriculum and reasons for variation in interpretation and priorities. The final phase focused on 'how' issues: priorities agreed by the group for change to be implemented for the second intake of students. Individual confidential written feedback in the form of a reflective evaluation was provided after the Workshop. My reasons for this are discussed later in the chapter, but relate to the situated discursive dynamic ('voice' and 'message' (Daniels and Warmington, 2007)) of the group experience, or the possibility of intimidation or strategic silence by group members. This phase mapped against Engestrom's (1999a: 383) 'modelling', and 'concretizing' the new model.

At the end of the first semester for intake two I again conducted interviews with each of the collaborators, reminding them of their initial interpretations of the primary learning goal, of the outcomes of Workshop 1 and exploring the extent to which the primary learning goals had changed for them. They were asked to reflect upon the extent to which the outcomes of Workshop 1 reflected their priorities, and how they had subsequently interpreted and prioritised them in terms of their own practices for intake 2. The second Workshop returned to the stages of the expansive learning cycle, evaluating espoused transitions (outcomes from Workshop1- the proposed new model) in terms of actual practices; effectively Engestrom's later stages within the expansive cycle of reflecting on process and evaluating practice. Engestrom's expansive learning cycle is illustrated in Fig 4.2 below.

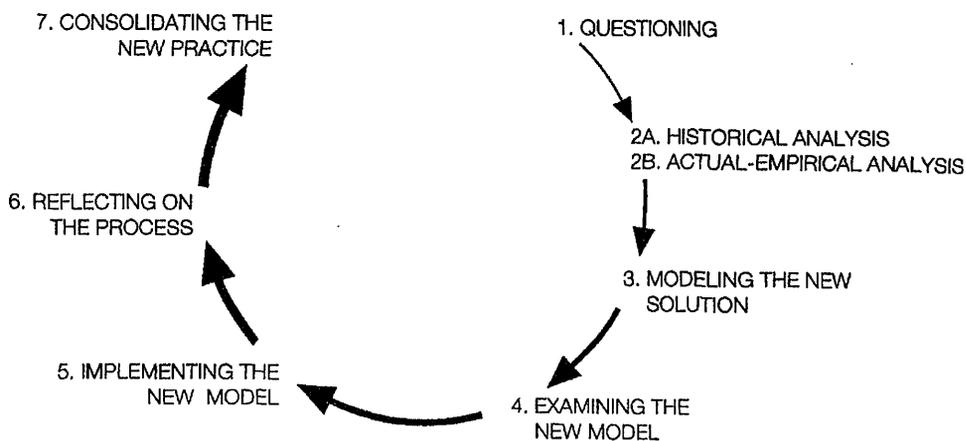


Fig. 4.2 Sequence of epistemic actions in an expansive learning cycle (Engestrom: 1999a: 384)

- ***Rationale for and reflections on the design***

Two issues stand out: firstly, the use of the theoretical lens of Activity Theory to analyse the emerging data, and how I ensure I address what I outlined as its limitations for me

methodologically – in particular the collective-individual duality, discussed in Chapter 3. The second is the process of 'intervention' and my role in that process. I will briefly summarise my position on both.

Engestrom (1999b: 2) argues the need for an 'interventionist research methodology' aimed at 'pushing forward, mediating, recording and analyzing cycles of expansive learning in local activity systems'. He asserts this methodology is being applied more frequently as 'an emerging new wave of contextualist studies of work' (op. cit.), and is reflected in the methods I use in this research.

Activity theory offers a useful heuristic to frame the design and analyse the development for several reasons. It provides a theoretically coherent model for developing practice, incorporating processes of mediation between subjects and the emerging 'object', and acknowledges operational contexts, which are rule governed and dependent on divisions of labour. It also provides a conceptual and theoretical basis, through, for example the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, Engestrom, 1987), to analyse 'collaboration' and constructions of knowledge in processes of its emergence. For Blackler (1995), this means that communities may enact new conceptions of their activities, in contrast to communities of practice theory (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, Lave and Wenger, 1991), which conceptualises learning as socialisation.

Engestrom's (2001) third generation of Activity Theory also incorporates collaborating activity systems, and further develops the concept of 'expansive learning'. It provides in this context a means of conceptualising transition and development within the practices of the collaborators. Roles within the activity, operating within rule governed behaviours and existing and emerging 'partnering practices', provide a means of constructing an interpretation of the collaborative activity. This will be based on partners' prioritised

sites linked to the emerging 'object', evidenced through discursive practices around these sites.

Moreover it facilitates a theoretical and methodological means of researcher intervention through 'development work methodology', as in the case of Engestrom et. al's (1996) use of 'Boundary Crossing Laboratories', or using, as in this research, 'naturally occurring' situations as their equivalent in processes of knowledge development and expansive learning. In this respect the research process provides a legitimate, ontologically consistent and ethically robust forum for me to use such interventionist processes, simultaneously for both development and research purposes. I will address this issue in more detail throughout this chapter.

My purpose also is to access power dimensions within the activity system, which I consider to have been under-emphasized and under-theorized within Activity Theory, owing largely to the irreducible conceptualisation of the unit of analysis particularly in Engestrom's work. In this respect Activity Theory provides an important analytical tool, but one that I believe is currently limited in its effectiveness in determining issues such as who's 'object', and who's discursive practices constitute priorities for the collaborative processes, and what happens away from the 'knot' in processes of implementation. Such issues will provide the bases for my analysis and rethinking of Activity Theory, enabling me to ask and address all three of my research questions.

- ***Data analysis***

The methods selected, and the analytical framework of Activity Theory, have provided me with a means of inductive and deductive coding. The deductive element, linked to

research questions, is framed by Activity Theory, while the inductive element has enabled me to identify a range of codes linked to emerging practices, such as perceptions of the policy framework, educational philosophy, values and normative frameworks, perceptions of others, power, collaborative effects, as well as a processual coding within the interviews and Workshops enabling data gathering on issues such as 'supporting', 'agreeing', 'contradicting', 'blocking'. All of these coding categories have sub-codes. For example, within educational philosophy I sub-code into 'functionalist', 'instrumental', 'progressive' and 'radical', with extra codes emerging through the data analysis, such as 'didactic' and 'constructivist' related to perceptions of learning and teaching.

I have used the equivalent of the 'constant comparative method' (Silverman, 2000: 179, 2001: 238) in coding the data and generating new codes, requiring me to revisit previously coded transcripts, and all transcripts, including the Workshops have been coded within NUD\*IST. I also recorded interviews and the Workshops digitally (using PC Memoscriber software), enabling me to store the data electronically, and simultaneously listen to it whilst reading transcripts. This has facilitated a more effective and detailed paralinguistic analysis, involving extensive 'memoing' and the insertion of analytical and reflective text units, enabling the checking of detail, of interpretation and verification with interviewees, enhancing the robustness and transparency of my research procedures.

Within NUD\*IST I have coded the partners by sector, category within the sector (such as 'Sixth Form College', 'Mixed-Economy College', and 'Traditional FE College') and role (such as 'management' and 'teacher', and in some cases both). I have done the equivalent for the employers and the University partners, enabling a degree of 'member categorisation' (see Silverman 2001: 139, Baker 1997). This permits categorisation of

the data, facilitating an analysis of individual responses, as well as the range of similarities and variations within and across the member categories in a phenomenographic way in both the collective and individual contexts. This approach gives me access to categories of partner priorities and their development within the collaboration, and such data will be important in issues of subject positioning within the unit of analysis for Research Question 2, and negotiation around contested sites, or 'double binds' (Engestrom: 2001).

My strategy has been to use the coding to conduct a detailed analysis of the data from the phase 1 interviews and Workshop 1 to identify these contested sites (linked to subjectivity and motivation), relevant to my research questions, in order to trace development in the analysis of phase 2 data (the second intake). Examples of these sites include: conceptualisation of learning priorities (effectively, subject positioning on the 'object'), aspects of pedagogy and assessment and student support. These represent broad themes of subjects' priorities and identities. The contested detail is around discursive structures and practices, for example to do with pedagogic structures and practices, definitions of quality and hierarchies of 'expertise'. Activity Theory provides an analytical framework for these issues in terms of the significance of roles and divisions of labour, rules and instruments. Using the elaboration of the theory outlined in the previous chapter, in particular the debate on the subject-collective dimension, and the processes of 'knotworking' and subsequent re-contextualisation, it is intended the data provided will give access to an opportunity to elaborate and redevelop Activity Theory (Research Questions 2 and 3) in Chapter 7.

As well as coding individual paragraphs of data, facilitating cross-sectioning around themes, I have used an episodic/narrative coding (Flick, 2002: 96) for the data, facilitating detailed thematic analysis within co-constructed interviews and the Workshops. Examples of episodes from the transcripts are provided as appendices. In so doing I am able to trace individual responses to themes throughout the interviews, but also across the whole research process (not all of this data will be necessary for this thesis). I discuss the significance of this towards the end of the chapter, with particular reference to the importance of analysing processual data in 'events'; the whole 'moving picture' as well as 'snapshots' (Catterall and MacLaran, 1997)

The use of interviews and Workshops is not an example of multiple methods designed to meet traditional requirements for triangulation. To a limited extent, depending on ontological and epistemological stance, there might be a claim that the Workshops test the validity of the interview data. Anonymized interview data was used to reflect back issues to the Workshops, but the dynamic within the group and role and status differences would limit the validity of any claims made on this basis. However, the two are integrated in a developmental process in interventionist and analytical senses, as discussed in the debate on the dualistic link in the previous chapter. I will address other theoretical issues of conceptual consonance-dissonance between the two methods later in this chapter.

### **Accessing and representing the experience**

In this section I want to address issues of my ontological and epistemological position, particularly as an 'insider researcher'. The concept of 'reality' as external to the researcher and the research process is premised on assumptions that reality exists

outside of experience, and that meaning can be extracted, decontextualised and presented through texts as a mirror of reality. As Usher asserts:

*Methodology works through de-contextualisation where methods separate subject and object, the researcher and the researched...through de-contextualisation both are taken out of language and the shared socio-cultural context to which they 'belong'...Thus methodology is taken to be the guarantee that the knowing activities of the researcher will not leave a 'dirty footprint' on what is known. (Usher, 1996:40)*

The research process is one of observation, selection, interpretation and representation, by the researcher. More appropriate in social and, therefore, educational research is to recognize the role of the researcher as participant in the research context and process, the interpreter of others' interpretations, which are likely to be espoused and constructed versions of their practices. This is particularly relevant in the methods used in this research, and in my role as participant-researcher:

*... research is not simply a matter of representing, reflecting or reporting the world, but of 'creating' it through a representation (Usher, 1996: 35)*

Research then is a social practice, but one which also engages the researcher in the context of the researched, if not necessarily in the terms of the researched. Indeed Steier claims:

*...we as researchers construct that which we claim to find (Steier, 1991:1)*

This is the 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences (Van Maanen, 1995, Alvesson, 2002), with language as the means of representation through texts (the 'linguistic turn' (Alvesson (2002: 65)). It is doubted that social researchers can

*...directly capture lived experience. Such experience, it is now argued, is created in the social text written by the researcher. This is the crisis of representation...It...makes the direct link between experience and text problematic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:17)*

I broadly go along with this view. It poses particular challenges for me in addressing the 'so what?' question in any claims my research may attempt to make, particularly in terms of traditional research issues of validity, reliability and generalisability. In this section I will situate my perspective in a way that I hope will justify my approach, which emphasises the development of theory rooted in systematically compiled empirical data, rather than the making of 'generalisable' claims.

My use of interviews and boundary crossing interventions, structured as expert witness, developmental focus groups has given me, according to Schutz (1962: 59), 'constructs of the constructs made by actors on the social scene'. Language and discourse frames and constitutes such constructions. Schutz's perspective, however, is based on subjectivities, 'multiple realities', which are premised, in a phenomenological way, on individual interpretation. This would appear to be logically reducible to individual perspectives in a relativistic way. My position is that reality is external to the individual,

but that experience of it is mediated through language and collective experience in a developmental and relational way.

*The acceptance of a reality independent of the researcher does not contradict the possibility of many interpretations of that reality. (Pring, 2000:114)*

Language however needs to be distinguished from meaning in the sense that Saussure (1966 (1916)) distinguishes *langue* from *parole*. By this I mean the situated use of the language in context to discursively constitute shared social practice. For my research this entitles me to ask 'who's discourse', and 'who's social practices' prevail to access issues of who's power in which settings? This further facilitates a differentiation of analysis based on relational contexts of the partnership.

In this research there are different and possibly competing social practices and meaning systems that the research subjects are bringing to the emerging practice of 'partnering'. Meaning, therefore, is not a solipsistic array of subjectivities, but 'the agreed rules of social behaviour and of language' (Pring, 2000: 103), and what these mean in the discursive practices of the partners. An issue here for collaboration is the extent to which the 'rules' are agreed, or even understood, particularly at the outset of the process of collaboration. Pring (2000) distinguishes the subjectivity of phenomenology from the 'reality' of meaning construction and sharing through the social rules, language use and discourse of communities, which can be studied ethnographically. In terms of collaboration, however, what is agreed at the 'knot' has to be repositioned within the social rules and organizational practices of the partners.

An issue is how the researcher accesses such social rules and practices if she is external to them (Miller and Glassner, 1997), effectively Ball's (1990) challenge of 'entry' as well as 'access', which I will develop later. Pring (2000:107) acknowledges that while the researcher may impact on the group being researched, the problems can be exaggerated, particularly where the social setting is well established and rooted in traditions and practices which are deeply internalised. This may be the case in this research, where my role as developer is at least as prominent for the research subjects as my research role.

However, although I have a background in Further Education and have worked closely with the sector in recent years, and I am aware of the agendas and issues driving local government, I would find it difficult to argue complete familiarity with the varying discursive practices of the institutions within those sectors, or even indeed a real 'insider's' understanding of two of the three sections within the university that I am researching. In effect I have been a 'boundary spanner', and my research has required me to constantly review details, question assumptions and check meanings with 'subjects' in developmental contexts in an ethnographic way.

The corollary to this issue of 'entry' for the 'insider' researcher-developer is the challenge of 'breaking out'. Both challenges require critical reflexivity by the researcher in terms of how the research is structured, carried out, evaluated and reported.

In terms of the 'so what?' issue, however, even if the social practices are accessible to the researcher, a critique could be that each group will be defined in terms of its own

negotiated and emergent meanings and practices. Pring's pragmatic response to this is that the differences can be exaggerated. He terms this the 'uniqueness fallacy', which is to argue

*...from the fact that everyone or every group is unique in some respect to the claim that everyone and every group is unique in every respect. (Pring, 2000:107)*

Consequently, while I accept qualitative research involves accessing and then constructing symbolic worlds through language (Goodman, 1978, Flick, 2002), those worlds are 'an inherited feature of the world we are born into' (Pring, 2000:101). The historicity within cultural-historical activity theory therefore fits with this perspective, and in particular the relational, dialogical means of attempts to interface social practices in Engestrom's (2001) third generation of Activity Theory.

A common thread between Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2001), constructionism (Gergen, 1999), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) is Bakhtin. Bakhtin's (1986) work emphasised the importance of the dialogical relationship in the production of meaning. For Engestrom (2001), after Vygotsky's (1978) 'scaffolding' and zone of proximal development, this is central to the expansive, distributed and essentially social nature of learning (the process of 'questioning and 'contesting'). For Fairclough (1992) it provides a basis for his concept of intertextuality (the interdependence any text has with others that have preceded it). Gergen derives conceptual foundations for his notion of 'relational being' from Bakhtin:

*...we find that the ability of the individual to mean anything - to be rational or sensible – is owing to relationship (1999:131)*

Therefore the challenge for me is accessing meanings that are distributed and emergent through initially different, situated, and increasingly collaborative social practices. Of course the normative premise underpinning this last statement may be shown in the data to be problematic: prevailing partner discursive practices may compete and result in limited collaboration, or hierarchical relationships around dominant practices and divisions of labour.

In interpreting data around social practice, Alvesson (2002: 121) distinguishes levels of text, meaning and practice in social science research, particularly with the use of interview data, and other such data, which depends on interpretations of language and discourse. He asserts that it is a fallacy in social analysis to unreflectively use empirical evidence stemming from one of these levels of language use to draw conclusions about aspects concerning the other levels. This reflects the intention behind the process of my research design: examining texts (course documentation as well as transcripts), testing meanings in situated, developmental meetings (Workshops), and observing and participating in practice. The method is structured to enable me, and the research subjects to reflect on the phases or levels of the activity.

My constructivist position, however, does not mean that I eschew the importance of data or of empirical material.

*Empirical material cannot unambiguously falsify or verify theories, but it can generate argument for or against the championing of theoretical ideas and a particular way of understanding the world...But data cannot prove anything, (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2001: 275-6)*

other than supporting interpretations.

Nor does it mean that I have difficulty with 'objectivity' and the way I will apply this in my approach to my research. Eisner (1992, in Hammersley, 1993: 54) contended that 'objectivity' can be achieved through 'frameworks of understanding' shared through communities that produce commonality: knowledge is constructed relative to a framework, a cultural code. I agree with Phillips' (1989) position on Eisner, claiming he does not see the dangers of bias within such frameworks, with objectivity possibly being compromised by 'consensual validation'. In contrast Phillips argues for objectivity within frameworks by distinguishing between 'objectivity' and 'certainty':

*Objective is a label we apply to inquiries that meet certain procedural standards, but objectivity does not guarantee that the results of inquiries have any certainty. (1989, in Hammersley, 1993: 61)*

It is possible for me to be 'objective' in my research even though I accept that, as Ratcliffe (1983: 148) asserted, 'all data is theory, method and measurement dependent'. This understanding of objectivity is linked necessarily to reflexivity, which is a research resource facilitating objectivity in these terms, permitting a self-critical appraisal of

premises, including those of being a 'researcher - developer'. Therefore I am more concerned with issues of integrity, transparency, robustness and judgement in evaluating my research rather than with more conventional and even positivist positions which emphasise 'validity' and 'reliability'. Clyde Mitchell (1983: 190), in considering the issue of making inferences from single case studies, asserted that 'the extrapolation is in fact based on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events.'

Reflexivity is critical to enabling me to attempt to be objective in Phillips' (1989) terms. My reflexivity is along the lines of Alvesson and Skoldberg's (2001: 255) 'reflexive interpretation'. They define 'reflexivity' as:

*...ability to recognize and break away from a frame of reference, recognizing what it is not saying at a meta-theoretical level. (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2001: 255)*

Such an approach is essential for me as a researcher – developer, supporting me in the process of 'breaking out' from the paradigms of practice, and developing a critical perspective through attempts at distancing and 'de-familiarisation', which I will explore in the following section.

### **'Complete participant', 'marginal native' and the process of 'breaking out'.**

In coming to terms with the researcher-practitioner role in this process I need to offer a reflexive critique of it in anticipation of conventional methodological criticism. In this

interventionist process, I am researching something in which I have an active, professional involvement. From a realist perspective this will be questioned. In this section, therefore, I will review issues around the 'insider/outsider' debate in field relations, and how I am using reflexivity in a process of 'self-ethnography' (Alvesson, 2003) to facilitate a degree of distancing, and 'de-familiarisation' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000), to enhance the integrity and robustness of my theory building.

- ***Negotiating an identity as 'observing participant'***

*According to outsider myths, insiders invariably present their group in an unrealistically favourable light. Analogously, insider myths assert that only insiders are capable of doing valid research in a particular group and that all outsiders are inherently incapable of appreciating the true character of the group's life.*

*Insider and outsider myths are not empirical generalizations about the relationship between the researcher's social position and the character of the research findings. They are elements in a moral rhetoric that claims exclusive research legitimacy for a particular group. (Styles, 1979:148)*

Styles accurately summarises a polarity which taken to extremes exposes the realist methodological underpinnings of the outsider argument. This polarity is rooted in the purist positions of outsider 'complete observation', and the alternative 'insider argument', with 'complete participation' as the ideal for the researcher, 'totally immersed' (Jules-Rosette, 1978, a and b) in a native culture. Conventional 'toolkit'

methodological texts, such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) warn against such positions, particularly the latter, on the basis that the risk for the researcher is:

*...failing to understand the perspectives of the participants...seriously misunderstanding the behaviour observed. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 110)*

They also cite Miller (1952) as an example of the risk of over-familiarisation with research subjects, and Willis (1977), who they claim appears unwilling or unable to distance himself from the accounts of the subjects. They conclude:

*While ethnographers may adopt a variety of roles, the usual aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives, but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport.*

*(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 112)*

A typology of roles between such poles was first produced by Gold (1958), and Junker (1960). These ranged from 'complete participant', 'participant as observer', 'observer as participant' to 'complete observer'. For this latter stance, Werner and Schoepfle (1987:259) claimed it would be too difficult to maintain, claiming 'observer as participant' as an acceptable compromise. Adler and Adler (1987: 33) proposed a modification of Gold's typology in recognition of the increasing significance of what they termed 'membership roles'. They identify a gradation of 'researcher membership', from 'peripheral', 'active' (involved, even assuming responsibilities that advance the group, but not fully committed to members' values and goals) to 'complete', where researchers

'celebrate the subjectively lived experience', but use membership 'so as not to alter the flow of interaction unnaturally' (Adler and Adler, 1994: 380). I find this typology useful, and see strands of my activity within the 'active' and 'complete' categories.

Werner and Schoepfle (1987) adapt a typology of observation to place the focus on processes rather than roles. This involves a distinction between 'descriptive' observation, moving to 'focused' observation (involving defined activities), through to 'selective' observation, with the focus on attributes of types of activities. Such emphasis on process is helpful for my own research, particularly given the interventionist nature of the work linked to development, as well as research. The transition from initial interviews to Workshop 1 through to the second phase of linked interviews and Workshop 2 broadly follows the logic of Werner and Schoepfle's typology. However, it does not necessarily reduce the impact of researcher role for the subjects, who may not be attuned to the logic of the process.

Yet the spectrum of researcher positions across the typology is still underpinned by a realist perspective, with images of data mining rather than data construction predominant. For example in considering 'complete participation' Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 105) consider the 'attractions':

*...one can travel incognito, obtain 'inside' knowledge, and avoid the trouble of access negotiations. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 105)*

They assess the risks to be possibilities such as consequences for the researcher should 'cover be blown' (op. cit.).

Such images of 'breaking and entering' (Alvesson (2003) refers to the 'burglar' researcher) not only pose ethical questions about the process, but also raise issues about the validity of outsider perspectives, particularly when framed within a 'naïve' realist treatment of data.

*What is this ethnographer's magic, by which he is able to evoke the real spirits of the natives, the true picture of tribal life? (Malinowski, 1922, cited in Van Maanen, 1995: 1)*

Van Maanen (op.cit.) maps the 'end to innocence' revealed in Malinowski's comment, identifying the post-modern challenges posed to ethnographers by issues of representation and the linguistic turn. However, for the researcher this makes issues of 'access' and 'entry' (Ball, 1990) even more important, and problematic. Access is not just about location and timing; it is about consent and authority. 'Entry', in Ball's terms, requires

*...the conscious and deliberate linking of the social processes of engagement in the field with the technical processes of data collection and the decisions that that linking involves (Ball, 1990:33)*

This 'reflexivity' connects dialectically the 'social and the technical trajectories' of fieldwork, considering impact on the process. Entry therefore requires a sensitivity, through reflexivity, and ideally an engagement with the 'habitus' of the researched. For Ball the data has a relational dependency on the processes of engagement, and this is in keeping with my interpretation of the research process as relational and dialogical (after Bahktin). Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000: 678) in a similar vein consider the need for 'conscious adoption of situated identity' (for example 'role making' to facilitate 'membership').

Ethically, my approach from the outset has been to fully inform the research subjects of my dual purpose and roles, and to base the whole research process on their informed consent. A key aspect of this process is confidentiality, in terms of how the data is used, and who, particularly within the community being researched, has access to what data. Therefore in summarising aspects of the outcomes of interviews for Workshop 1, these were made anonymous, but also framed within discourses that would be seen as directly linked to moving curriculum and programme development forward – they were task oriented and presented as developmental. Confidentiality has also been an issue in the way I have subsequently used the formal documentation of the partnership. For example in Chapter 5 I quote from the original bid document. In referencing this at the end of the thesis I have anonymised the sources, but these are available and logged formally with QAA.

I am not the leader of the programme, but have had responsibility for one of the modules. Within the typologies outlined I have moved between participant observer in my more developmental role to observing participant in my research role. As 'observing participant' I have operated with the consent of all parties in making notes in

developmental contexts, as well as in switching roles when collecting data in interviews and the Workshops. The Workshops were agreed by the Programme Leader and the programme team, as a part of the evaluation strategy for the programme. I have aligned the roles of 'participant-observer' and 'observing –participant' for the respondents. From an ethical perspective I have been keen to keep them fully informed of my plans, my roles and my activities. At all stages consent was sought and obtained.

In Ball's (1990) terms, however, my problem is not entry but a form of exit, of distancing. In terms of the validity of the data, I defend this from my constructivist stance: indeed the relational nature of situated, dialogically constructed data I would argue poses similar analytical problems for both outsiders and insiders. My advantage is knowledge, relationships, awareness of discursive structures and practices and insight – what Alvesson (2003:168) summarises as 'micro-anchoring'. However, the balance I have to strike, as Alvesson indicates, is between closeness and closure.

As Styles (1979: 148) argues, there is no 'exclusive research legitimacy'. The challenge for all researchers is reflexivity to ensure 'objectivity' (Phillips':1989) and integrity. This approach allows me to make considered judgements about the status of my data, and the interpretations, and claims, I might make. To facilitate this I would now like to discuss methods I intend to use to create sufficient distance from the data to enable me to evaluate it reflexively.

- ***The 'run-away' researcher: the challenge of self-ethnography***

The metaphor of running away represents the contrasting challenge to the traditional researcher of access and entry. I had grappled with the issue of being an 'insider' researcher and had developed a series of strategies to develop the critical perspectives that would inform my process of reflexivity, from the outset of the research. These included recognition of my interpretive stance and the development of a broad theoretical base through contrasting literatures to facilitate an extended interpretive repertoire, enabling me to 'read' empirical material in a variety of critical ways.

My reflexivity involved using a range of strategies in my different research contexts (meetings, discussions, e-mails, exam boards, document reading, planning groups, as well as the structured research activities). I simultaneously and consciously switched between roles, recording thoughts and constantly questioning the premises for decisions, opinions and actions, as well as reflecting on my interpretations and efforts to 'unfreeze' my own perspectives, rooted in the discursive practices of my own community of practice. This was particularly important in listening to the range of voices from the colleges and the employers, using and problematising their perspectives, in helping me to create distance and 'de-familiarise' my practices. The switching of roles involved a constant process of reflecting 'in' as well as 'on' action in the 'swampy lowlands' of the field (Schon, 1983).

I had encountered the concept of 'self-ethnography' or 'auto-ethnography' in Van Maanen (1995: 9), where 'the culture of the writer's own group is textualised'. Such writing for Van Maanen is characterised often by:

*A passionate, emotional voice of a positioned and explicitly judgemental fieldworker, and thus obliterates the customary and, ordinarily, rather mannerly distinction between the researcher and the researched. (Van Maanen, 1995: 9).*

My approach is more conventional, in keeping with Alvesson's (2003) advocacy of self-ethnography over interviews and conventional ethnographic observation, for 'insider' research in higher education settings. In self-ethnography

*... the researcher works in the setting and then uses the experiences, knowledge and access to empirical material for research purposes. (Alvesson, 2003: 174)*

While acknowledging that such an approach needs to 'take the problem of 'breaking out' seriously', Alvesson recognises that it also offers opportunities for theoretical development which are more well grounded in experience and observation than is common. Familiarity with the setting is an empirical starting point. Examples of such research include: Watson (1996) who studied his interactions with his students; Tierney (1993) in analysing policy changes on homosexuality in universities using a fictional form; Fairclough (1993), using his application for promotion in analysing the 'marketization' of universities, and Alvesson himself (1993), using his own university department in developing the concept of 'multi-cultural configurations' to characterise organisation cultures in higher education.

The risk is awareness of 'blind spots' in carrying out such work, and the recognition of sensitive issues and the extent to which they impact on and possibly inhibit the researcher. My response to this has been an openness and clarity from the beginning, including an explanation to the respondents of the ethical parameters within which a researcher is expected to work, and as stated, clarification of my dual roles. At key stages in my design I have used opportunities to obtain feedback and verification of my data, although I appreciate that the authenticity of respondent validation techniques is questioned (for example, Silverman, 2000: 177).

My approach differs from Alvesson's in that my research is systematic, with a structure and a design, linked to particular questions, and theoretically framed. He characterises the process as emergent and spontaneous:

*...the researcher does not find the empirical material, it finds her. (Alvesson, 2003: 181)*

Yet breaking out is still my challenge. Alvesson (2003) claims in traditional ethnographies 'breakdowns' occur in the process of researcher 'entry'. He advocates the creation of breakdowns in self-ethnography to accelerate the necessary distancing and critical de-familiarisation. Examples include questioning, identifying and challenging premises, problematizing the self-evident, understanding the discursive hegemonies for 'orderliness and naturalisation' (Fairclough, 1995: 27), and the 'ordering and organising' (Law: 1994) of discursive practices.

Alvesson and Deetz (2001: 167) recommend the open-minded employment of a framework offering a 'systematic counterpoint'. Thus I am using Activity Theory as a conceptual framework to understand and theorise, but I am looking at this mindful of asymmetries between collaborating groups in terms of discourses and practices. They also recommend reflexivity, using, as I am doing, theory and literature to counter 'cultural parochialism', and Alvesson (2003: 186) extols the need to 'unfreeze positions within personal histories', leading to a 'reflexive methodology' (Alvesson and Skoldberg: 2000), whereby favoured interpretations should be subject to interpretation from a meta-theoretical position. Such a perspective and technique constantly acts as a check for me.

This position is important in the way I structure and conduct my research, but more importantly in the way I intend to analyse my data. In the final section of this chapter I address questions of validity and reliability of my methods, reflect on the ways the data has been gathered and consider the bases of any claims that my research might be used to make.

### **Assessing my research methods: a reflexive critique**

In this section I will consider the methods I have used and evaluate their scope in entitling me to make empirical claims related to an elaboration and development of Activity Theory. The section is structured as follows: I address key issues from the literature on each of the methods selected in turn, and consider the implications for the status of my data. Therefore I consider the interviews and Workshops separately, although my analysis will re-fit the jigsaw of the collective and individual duality, and

rationalise the process as organic and developmental. I will consider traditional issues of validity, reliability and generalisability within a pragmatic and reflexive response to my epistemological position.

The challenge is drawing empirical conclusions from data that represent espoused constructs of 'reality' as it is experienced by my research subjects. This may seem a tentative starting point, but I hope to illustrate how a critically reflexive analytical use of the social and discursive practices evident in the data will help me to address the theoretical perspectives which are the focus of my research questions.

- ***Interviews: constructs of constructs?***

My approach to interviewing has not been constrained by 'toolkit' perspectives framed within an expectation of accessing 'real' world views, thereby requiring a minimalist interviewer engagement in the process. This is based on a neo-positivist perspective assuming 'objectivity', attainable through technicist skills development to minimise errors and maximise interviewer distance (Hammersley and Atkinson: 1983, Fontana and Frey, 1994, Kvale, 1996). Such a perspective is based on a naïve view of the data mirroring and corresponding with respondent articulations of experience.

*...only by following misleading correspondence theories of the truth could it have ever occurred to researchers to treat interview statements as accurate or distorted reports of reality. (Silverman, 1985: 176)*

Alternative perspectives are what Silverman (2001:90) refers to as 'emotionalist' (and Alvesson (1999) as 'romanticist'), constructivist and a postmodern critique of interviews as texts (Alvesson, 1999, 2002). I have used aspects of all three in carrying out and analysing my interviews.

The 'emotionalist/romanticist' approach is rooted in realism, but it sees humanist interpersonal approaches as a means to access the subject 'beyond the person', or 'the lived experience'. Interviewers are to see the process not as data extraction, but as an inter-subjective experience aimed at opening up the subject and facilitating a supposedly symmetrical experience. Reason and Rowan (1981: 205), for example assert:

*Humanistic approaches favour 'depth interviews' in which the interviewee and the interviewer become peers or even companions.*

This approach is criticised by Silverman (2001:92) for its 'open-endedness' (also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:110), and cultural and 'common-sense' assumptions taken on uncritically. While I agree with these criticisms, I have been guided by an intuitive humanist perspective in my interpersonal approach to my respondents, aimed at facilitating and maximising responsiveness, as well as 'access' and 'entry' (Ball 1990).

Unlike Fontana and Frey (1994: 371), who champion engaging in 'real' conversations with 'give and take' and 'emphatic understanding', I do not subscribe to the view that a more honest, expressive and interactive interview will result in a more 'realistic' picture.

My constructivist perspective means that my interviews are not

*...simply representations of the world; they are part of the world they describe.*

*(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:107)*

Therefore my interviews involve me in the co-construction of meaning in 'active interviews', rather than extracting from 'empty vessels' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, Mason, 2002). In this sense, and given my 'insider' status, the interviews were not necessarily snapshots of de-contextualised opinion giving, but active and developmental episodes of meaning construction and sense-making. I was as much a part of this process as the interviewees. Indeed it might even be argued that this process can be conceptualised as an integral part of this as an activity system. However, in making this statement, am I justified in making claims for my interview data beyond 'local accomplishment' (Baker, 1997)? I will come back to this question.

In 'active interviewing' Holstein and Gubrium assert

*The focus is as much on the assembly process as on what is assembled...The analytic objective is not merely to analyse the situated production of talk, but to show how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied. (1997: 127)*

This focus on 'what' as well as 'how' is problematic for constructionists. Silverman (2001: 98) asks whether such questions are actually the concern of realists, and responds by using Miller and Glassner (1997) to illustrate how subjective experience is

articulated within 'objective' social structures, with respondents using 'culturally available resources' to construct their stories. Similarly Richardson argues:

*Participation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general understanding of the stock of meanings and their relationship to each other (1990:24)*

This brings me back to my discussion of Pring (2000), earlier in this chapter, and his distinction of the subjectivity of phenomenological approaches from meaning construction and sharing through the social rules, language use and discourse of communities. It is through such resources that meanings can transcend the contextual. This enables a response to the 'interview as local accomplishment' (Baker, 1997). If the focus is on 'how's' in a local context it privileges form over content, and this polarity is misleading:

*By analysing how people talk to one another, one is gaining access to a cultural universe and its content of moral assumptions. Such a position is intrinsic to Garfinkel's (1967) argument that accounts are part of the world they describe. (Silverman, 2001: 113)*

Therefore the process is discursive and constitutive. Access to shared discursive frameworks (for example, Fairclough's (1992) 'members' resources') facilitate this, but it is no guarantee that the 'whats' can be taken at face value: the interview data do not give me access to 'experience', but to narratives framed within social and discursive practices. Within these narratives I am sensitive in my data co-construction and analysis

of the need for a reflective approach that is sensitive to language and discourse, enabling me to go beyond the face value of the data. My position as a reflexive 'insider' is therefore an important and valid research resource.

Alvesson (1999) has developed a series of metaphors to support this process; for example, the interview as 'establishing and perpetuating a story-line', as 'identity work', as 'cultural script application', or as 'political action'. Such metaphorical tools are helpful in analysing the data (from both interviews and Workshops) to facilitate a reflexive critique to enhance the validity, or rather the theoretical reach of my analysis beyond local contexts. Such an approach has helped me in the interviews to go beneath the 'cultural scripts' of professional clichés and discourses, to explore meanings within the data gathering events, and to cut across these events through coding to construct theory.

The significance of this is illustrated by transformations within interviews, and across interviews. For example when interviewing FE 4 for the first time I was aware of a need in the early stages of the interview to handle pre-perceptions rooted in already constructed identity projections, and these did influence the opening interchanges. I had only met him on a couple of occasions before the first interview. This was a classic case of 'reflection in action' (Schon, 1983) by me, and of the need to respond sensitively to the subject, using interpersonal and scene setting strategies before engaging with the detail of the interview schedule. The formal relationship and perceived identities were asymmetrical, rooted in my objective and perceived relative status and experience (FE 4 had been teaching in FE for only one year, and had previously had a career in marketing. It was clear from the early exchanges that individual roles and perceived

status, as well as an apparent acceptance of a perceived structural hierarchy between the university and the colleges were factors in this).

Therefore after explaining my role and identity in this context as 'observing participant' researcher, rather than 'participant observer' developer, I used open and general questions to facilitate a phase of opening up and reassuring impression management.

This was a period of identity negotiation, which resulted in a more relaxed, informal and spontaneous response. Early in the interview I noted comments and non-verbal responses where the respondent was apparently struggling to reach a compromise with himself on my role.

This was evident in the positive impression management strategies he was assertively employing, using 'culturally scripted' responses structured within professional discourses. My response was to listen, and be active, open and supportive in my use of non-verbal signals, and ask supplementary questions enabling me to dig beneath his responses. This technique was successful in that throughout the interview the 'game-playing' became less significant and he became more relaxed as well as direct and open in his responses to my behaviour and 'unpacking' of his replies. This was a process of co-construction, and not an explicit strategy to loosen the guard to access 'reality' (Fontana and Frey, 1994). An extract from the opening phase of this interview is in Appendix 1.

The interview was in the early phases of the collaborative development, and the data from all phase one interviews needs to be analysed in terms of such processual

transition within the interview and across the subsequent stages of Workshop 1, interview 2 and Workshop 2. My techniques of themed coding across the data, coding of episodic narratives within the individual interviews and Workshops and tracing developments of individual responses to themes within interviews and the Workshops are geared to providing a comprehensive, systematic and robust analysis of the data in terms of content and process linked to events and their contexts.

A consequence of this approach is that my use of the data is likely to be more reflective than conventional 'tool and pipeline' approaches to interviews.

- ***Workshops: situated, discursive events?***

The Workshops represent 'developmental work research as an agenda of application' (Engestrom, 1999b: 2). They are also equivalent to 'expert panel' focus groups, the object of which is 'to find solutions in their own practice or to collaborate in collective projects to solve a problem' (Chioncel et. al., 2003: 498). In designing the research, I was not thinking of interviews and 'expert panel focus groups' as a multiple method design, but an integrated developmental research strategy using Activity Theory and my critique of it to frame and analyse the process of development at collective and individual levels.

The Workshops served a dual purpose: developmental, in the sense that they were a forum for experts to come together on an area of common professional involvement; and research, in that they were structured in a way, to the knowledge and with the approval of the participants, that would provide data linked to my research questions.

The use of interview data to frame and focus Workshop discussion and development is illustrative of the interventionist approach.

The literature on focus groups ( stressing an interpretive, social science perspective, not positivist market research (Frankland and Bloor, 1999, Cunningham-Burley et. al., 1999) is consistent with my use of, and the data generated by, the Workshops. Powell et al define a focus group as:

*A group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (1996: 499)*

Focus groups rely on 'interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher' (Morgan, 1997:12). The key issue is the insight and data produced by the interaction between the participants. Kitzinger (1994) advocates the use of existing groups over the pulling together of individuals into organized events, and Morgan and Kreuger (1993) advocate their use when there are power differences between participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, as is the case within the Workshops.

For Kitzinger (1994), interaction is the crucial feature. This raises issues about how the utterances of individuals are to be interpreted (Hyden and Bulow, 2003) in the sense of in what capacity and from what perspectives do they talk? The discursive impact on interaction is as significant as the content, and indeed is constitutive of it. Therefore it is the situated process that is significant. Smithson (2000) questions how the analysis can

take account of the interactive nature of the data, and how the group can be the unit of analysis (Kreuger, 1994, Morgan, 1988) if dominant voices suppress interaction. Hence my questioning of voice, articulation, being listened to and the significance of silence within Chapter 3.

My view is that this is problematic if the unit of analysis is the individual, and focus groups or group interviews are the only method of research being employed. Mitchell (1999) warns against using focus groups as a single method, advocating their use with individual interviews. This fits with my interest in both the 'what' and 'how' data (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 1997) from the Workshops, but also supports my use of this method: data constructed in this context will not be decontextualised and analysed to make realist claims. Rather, the discursive dynamic within the group as a situated entity is important in accessing the formal, espoused and contested voices on key issues and decisions at a particular moment and in a specific context. This will subsequently be related to actual priorities in practice in processes of re-contextualisation, and explored in the individual interviews.

In this regard the analysis will address the constitutive, relational and dialogical nature of the Workshop data. Equally important in my (researcher) use of the developmental methodology is what individuals say in interviews prior to the first Workshop, the opinions they express and issues they raise (or just as significantly, not) in the Workshop, and how the individuals outside that context then interpret and prioritise that dialogue and processes within their own contexts and practices, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

- ***Validity, reliability and generalisability?***

As the research is framed as an 'emerging' case study, depending on the ontological perspective of the users or readers of this research, it may need to address issues of validity and reliability. I have been keen to stress my ontological and epistemological position throughout this chapter. While the context for this research is a single study of collaboration on a particular curriculum, it is my intention to use the data to generalise to theory; building and extending theory using the detailed evidence from the case study.

In this sense 'naturalistic generalization', after Stake (1978), and Lincoln and Guba (1979), sit comfortably with the approach of this study. In this, the external validity of an enquiry is of less significance than the provision of sufficiently 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) to allow someone interested in issues of lesson transfer to make a judgement. The work has involved a significant analysis of data sources to enable an understanding of the institutional, professional and discursive contexts within which the social practices, values and attitudes are developed. However, this seems perhaps defensive.

Criticisms are likely to be framed within an approach which is empiricist rather than analytical or inductive. Pre-occupation with causality, transferability and 'evidence based practice' need to be answered. For example, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000: 238 - 239) assert:

*...explanations rely on assumptions about general causal relationships which cannot be validated solely through study of a single case,*

and go on to assert the need for case studies to be compared:

*Comparative method requires that data be available from more than one case...such that the effects of various candidate causal factors can be controlled or assessed.*

In contrast to this Alasuutari (1995:156-7) argues:

*Generalisation is ... (a) word...that should be reserved for surveys only. What can be analysed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand...extrapolation better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research.*

In responding to these potential criticisms my approach to theory building is rooted in a critically reflexive analysis of the empirical data. I am not seeking or asserting causality. Rather, I am attempting to 'produce explanations which have a wider resonance' (Mason, 1996:6). The purposive and theoretical 'sampling' involved in my data gathering is contingent on the partners I am working with, but it is theoretically grounded. This is in keeping with Mason's view that

*...theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position...and most importantly the explanation or account you are developing. (1996: 93)*

Technically the single case study of my research can be broken down to its constituent contributors. My coding, for example, facilitates analysis of the different categories of partner and deconstruction of those categories facilitating identification of patterns and variability. I have made some reference to the limited way the structuring of the design might facilitate triangulation across the methods, as well as a degree of respondent validation, but I share Silverman's (2001: 235) reservations about the claims that one can make using such tests. As a constructivist I am wary about such tools and claims. Bloor, for example, argues that triangulation and member validation

*...have their roots in one general unwarranted assumption; namely, that techniques of validation can be treated as unproblematically generated, whereas in practice all validating techniques are social products, constituted through particular and variable methodological processes. The very methodological frailties that lead sociologists to search for validating evidence are also present in the generation of that validating evidence. (1997: 49)*

Rather than 'validity' and 'reliability', my determined integrity, robustness and 'objectivity', in Phillips' (1989) terms, underpinned by a detailed analysis of the interview and Workshop narratives, an informed and extensive interpretive repertoire and a constant critical reflexivity, as explained throughout this chapter, have provided the bases to enable me to draw a coherent theoretical understanding of what went on in this case study.

Therefore the judgements I make in this research are based on two issues. The first is the detailed and comprehensive nature of the data analysis, involving the varied coding methods that are reflective of my research questions. These have been largely inductive and guided by Silverman's (2001: 238) advocacy of a refutability approach involving theory building through constant comparison and comprehensive data treatment. The second is the status I am ascribing to the data and the way I have constantly attempted to question premises, building processes of critical reflexivity into my ways of working.

The comprehensive nature of the data analysis for this research, outlined in this chapter, I feel entitles me to use this single, but complex case study to make generalisations to theory which relate to the elaboration and development of Activity Theory, and critically analyse the effectiveness of the version so developed. These themes form the basis of the analysis of the data in the three chapters that follow.

## Chapter 5

### SUBJECTS, PERSPECTIVES AND THE OBJECT OF ACTIVITY

Chapter 3 raised questions about the irreducibility of the unit of analysis (for example, Engestrom: 2001; Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom: 2003). Therefore, a key purpose of the data analysis will be to access the subjectivities and identities of the partners, both as individuals and categories (University, College, Employers) through interviews prior to, and after the collective boundary crossing sessions, and in the Workshops themselves. The purpose of this is to access perspectives and motives on the object of the activity, the key sites for development for the partners, in order to critically analyse how Activity Theory, as modelled through the methods of this research, can be used as an interventionist methodology to advance and analyse processes of expansive transition and development for the subjects and the partnership. This theme, developmental throughout the three research questions, will be dealt with throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The rationale for the three data chapters, and their links is summarized briefly.

This chapter focuses on the subjects' perspectives prior to the sequence of Workshops, but with the experience of the first semester behind them. The focus is on subjects' understandings of what their shared activity is about, what they expect from it and what part they expect to play in the partnership. This fits with Kaptelinin's (2005) and Nardi's (2005) uncoupling of motive and object, giving empirical access to what I describe and subsequently develop as the 'critical sites' for the partners. These espoused 'sites' provide the foci for the partners to determine the instantiation of their purpose (Nardi: op.cit), both in negotiating priorities at the 'knot' (subsequently analysed in Chapter 6), and in processes of re-contextualisation in their own localities (in Chapter 7). By this I

mean, after Daniels (2004:125) on Cole (1996), 'the active construction of context in action', within the affordances of their own activity systems. Such an analysis over the process represented in Fig 4.1 (page 87), needs to be framed within partners' negotiated, at times contested and even strategically silent positioning on the object, and their part in determining the transactional meanings and purposes of practice in processes of re-contextualisation.

Chapter 6 therefore analyses processes of development and decision making within the situated dynamic of the Workshops. In particular, this includes investigation of the extent to which these processes are framed by discursive practices, the roles adopted (both formally and enacted in the division of labour), the rules observed and the instruments used in processes of reification at this espoused, discursive level. It also includes the extent to which, over the period of the research, these are contested and adapted in ways that might be interpreted as expansive at this collective level.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are therefore also concerned with aspects of identity, positioning, motivation and contested and differentiated agency within the activity system. It also enables an analytical link between subject positioning, discourse and division of labour, as advocated by Daniels (2005), and discussed in Chapter 3, in the development of the process. After analyzing processes of re-contextualisation, Chapter 7 also subsequently models the process in attempting to reformulate the theory to critically explain and evaluate what happens throughout this particular activity (Research Question 3).

With reference to Activity Theory, data analysis in this chapter focuses on the triangle between subject and object (see Figure 3.1, page 47). This disaggregation of the

activity system has a heuristic purpose: essentially this consideration of subject positioning on the object and how this is accommodated within the activity system in terms of degree of complementarity of perspective, reflected subsequently in division of labour, is important in identifying the development and tensions that emerge over time, and the degree of expansiveness and transformation in the outcomes of those tensions. This starting point is also important in framing the power dimension.

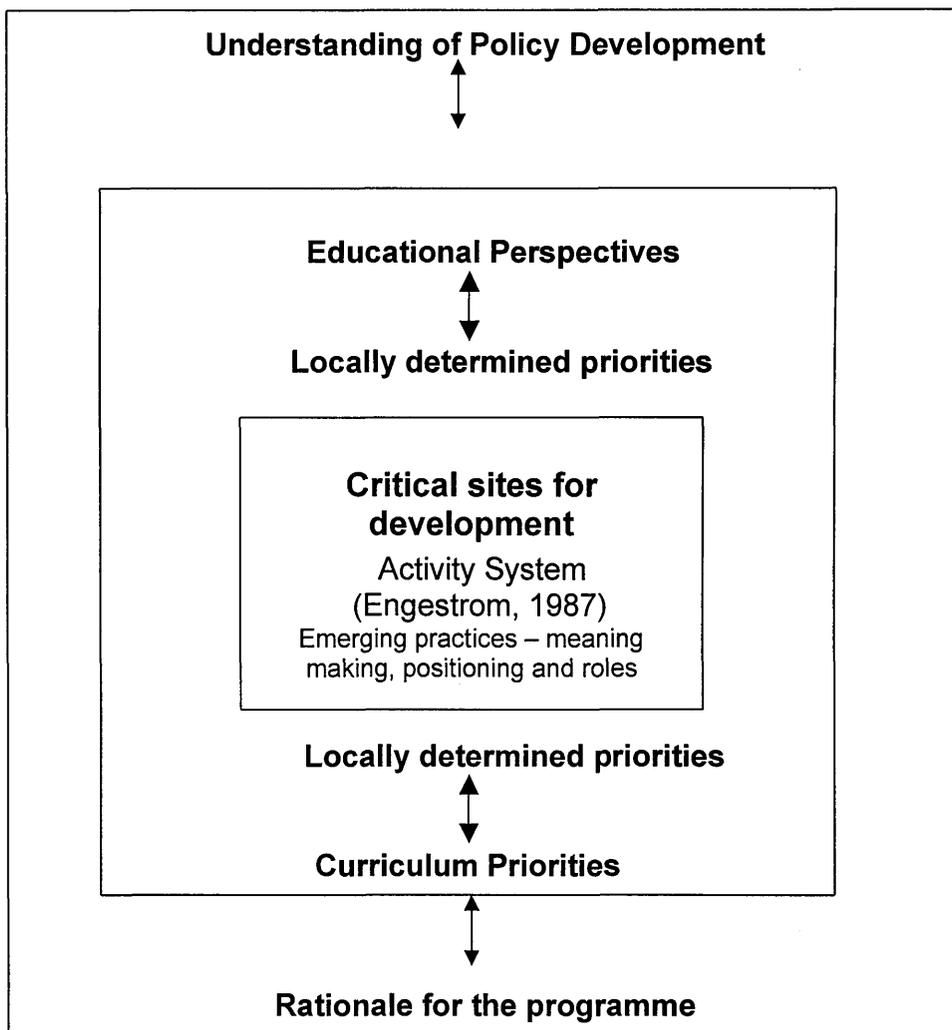
This chapter therefore provides an understanding of what the subjects are bringing to the process of 'knotworking' (Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho: 1999), or collaboration in terms of their understandings of the policy, their epistemological and pedagogical philosophies, and the consequent priorities for teaching and learning. These priorities and perspectives are contested, linked to identity and provide potential 'double binds' (Engestrom: 2001) for expansive development of the activity system. I use 'perspective' in this research to relate to a spectrum of positioning on professional priorities, from 'routinized' behaviours in some cases to ideologically committed practice in others.

The structure of the chapter and the data analysis is reflected in Fig. 5.1: an interdependent layering of levels, 'ascending', in Engestrom's terms (1999b: 2) 'from the abstract to the concrete'. The first part therefore briefly summarises the constituencies' (employer, college tutor, university tutor) and individuals' understandings of the policy context for Foundation Degrees, the rationale for the programme itself, to begin to construct identities and positioning on issues at a broad level. It also provides a summarized analysis of the data on educational and curricular priorities. This is also

important given the 'subjects' were not selected in conventional methodological terms, and therefore a degree of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) is appropriate.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the inner core in Fig. 5.1 providing a detailed analysis of subjects' positioning on the critical sites for development such as learning, assessment, support for learners and means of delivery, as well as the roles adopted in their own practices and at the collective level subsequently in the Workshops, through processes of 'perspective-taking' (Blackler, Crump and McDonald: 2000) and positioning rooted in identity.

Throughout the analytical layers of this chapter I segment the data by constituencies to identify themes and issues. I also, however, differentiate within constituency data by individual to enable variation to be identified and to compare and contrast across the constituencies. In doing this I have been keen to be sensitive to individuals' previous experience and the professional and organisational cultures within which they are used to operating in coming to this collaborative experience. Identified perspectives, expectations and motives for collaboration within the activity system by the subjects provide the framework for analysing developments prioritised and carried forward within the Workshops.



**Fig 5.1 Subjects' sense-making and prioritising of activity**

**Subjects' understanding of the rationale for the programme and their educational perspectives**

The policy context for Foundation degrees has been analysed in Chapter 2. The data is from representatives of collaborating constituencies at the foot of the 'implementation staircase' (Reynolds and Saunders: 1987), and what has preceded this is the stage of policy announcement, and bidding for funding to deliver the Foundation degree prototype, summarized in Chapter 2. The individuals involved in that intermediate stage

were senior managers from the collaborating institutions. The data is drawn from those actually charged with interpreting and implementing the curriculum, and explores their understandings of the rationale for the programme and the pedagogical perspectives they bring to the developmental process. In Table 5.1 I provide a categorised summary of the research subjects.

**Table 5.1 The 'Subjects'**

<b>University</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Employer</b>
<p><b>HE 1</b></p> <p>Programme manager: School of Accountancy, Economics and Management</p>	<p><b>FE 1</b></p> <p>Manager/teacher Business Studies 6<sup>th</sup> Form College</p> <p>Links with E 1 for students</p>	<p><b>E 1</b></p> <p>Head of Training and Development, Small unitary local authority</p>
<p><b>HE 2</b></p> <p>Senior Lecturer: School of Environment and Life Sciences</p>	<p><b>FE 2</b></p> <p>Teacher Business Studies/CPD 6<sup>th</sup> Form College</p> <p>Links with E 3 for students</p>	<p><b>E 3</b></p> <p>Trainer Local Authority</p>
<p><b>HE 3</b></p> <p>Education Development Co-ordinator: Education Development Unit</p>	<p><b>FE 3</b></p> <p>Foundation Degree Co- ordinator/Teacher Business Studies FE College</p> <p>No employer contact, but students provided by the Local Authority</p>	<p><b>No employer participation</b></p> <p>City Local Authority in large conurbation</p>
	<p><b>FE 4</b></p> <p>Teacher Business/Marketing FE College</p> <p>Links with E 2 for students</p>	<p><b>E 2</b></p> <p>Member of Borough Corporate Management Team Large urban borough</p>
	<p><b>FE 5</b></p> <p>Curriculum Manager Business Studies Large 'Mixed-Economy' College Links with E 4 for students</p>	<p><b>E 4</b></p> <p>Department Training Manager in a medium sized unitary Local Authority</p>

## **Employers**

Four of the five employers agreed to be interviewed and participate in the research. However, only two of the four were able to be interviewed in the second phase (E1 and E2). One had moved to work for a charity (E3), and the other declined to participate (E4), claiming there was nothing to add to what she had told me in the first interview. Only one (E1) participated in the Workshops. Of the four interviewed, two (E2, and particularly E4) saw their function as primarily purchasing a training service. This is in keeping with conventional links between employers and educational providers rooted in technical-rational perspectives, rather than contributing to an emerging professional and personal staff development strategy on a partnership basis. Smith and Betts' (2003) critique of employer involvement in educational and training policy development, particularly with regard to Foundation Degrees, mirrors this.

Yet the bid document reflects back to policy makers their discursive priorities. It stresses 'the view of the employer members of the Consortium', that

*...the time is right for the introduction of a new qualification which offers a fresh approach to the issues relating to Local Government. The strategy for regionalisation and more community involvement in governance has put pressure on local authorities to change their existing culture and way of working. It is their view that the role of the Foundation Degree would be to support the internal staff development required to facilitate the changes needed within Local Authorities (University, 2000: 3)*

For the employers the bid therefore discursively conceptualises that the course provides an instrument to deliver changes in processes of governance (Ozga, 2000: 100-102), closely tied to prevailing Blairite themes of 'modernisation' (Clarke and Newman: 1997), to give employees 'the ability to manage uncertainty, take risks, cross boundaries and develop different decision-making approaches in conjunction with elected members' (University, 2000: 3)

The employer representatives broadly reflect these approaches in espousing positions on the policy and the rationale for the programme. It has to be remembered that local government managers, as civil servants, are used to responding to, at least formally, policy agendas of central government. Responses to questioning in the interviews (all carried out on employers' work premises) about their understandings of Foundation Degree policy and the rationale for the programme were largely framed by centrally driven imperatives of the need to modernise within a global economy, and interwoven corporate priorities of the need to provide 'best value'. There were consistent references across the four interviews to 'responsiveness', 'skills gaps', 'corporate planning', 'performance management' and 'employee development' to ensure services become 'customer focused'. Effectively the programme is seen as an instrument of corporate development, with 'human resource' perspectives prioritised. There was only occasional reference by any of the employers to social inclusion agendas.

Rather, for E1, Head of Training for her local authority the whole process is seen in terms of cost-benefit, in terms of her time and the development of staff. At this early stage she is satisfied that the employers' voice is recognised and represented in the

way the learning is conceptualised because she sees the development in terms of her corporate human resource strategies, identifying

*...the key issues about managing performance and linking it in to the best value regime, because it's so crucial to all of us.*

From a pedagogical and curricular perspective the overriding issue for all employers is the relevance of the propositional knowledge which they are 'purchasing' from a service provider, and the transfer and impact of that knowledge in the workplace by the employees. This emphasis is exemplified in E2's comment:

*We trust the University and the College to develop a curriculum that is going to meet the needs of a local authority in today's changing climate.*

Their expectations of the programme and of its role in the development of staff is highly conventional – didactic, decontextualised knowledge provided to employees by a third party, to be evaluated by the employers on the basis of returns in terms of improvements in working practices and relevance to immediate workplace priorities.

This is in spite of the aims of Foundation Degrees, the expected role of employers in the shaping and contextualising of learning, and their actual involvement in the initial articulation of learning priorities in this case. Other common strands across the employer interviews include the relevance and adaptability of the knowledge to the wider 'modernisation ' agenda, alignment with human resource and corporate employee development strategies, and issues of sustainability after the funding for the pilot finishes.

Issues of relevance of knowledge to the workplace and immediacy of impact through enhanced 'human capital' varied across the local authorities, depending on stages of internal strategic and organisational development reached, and support from management at both organisational and departmental levels. This point is important in evaluating the issue of affordance in Chapter 7.

E1 had very clear priorities for her employees from the course. Her focus was 'performance improvement', and knowledge from the programme was evaluated in these terms. For example, she has implemented a system across the local authority, and all staff, including managers, have regular interviews on this issue. On this basis she was happier with the semester 2 modules, one of which was 'Performance Management', in contrast to the generic, Independent Learning (ILM) module of semester 1.

In contrast E4's marginal position limited affordances for her to influence the curriculum and use it to shape what she needed to do – she has no role outside her department and little opportunity for a wider strategic impact for the curriculum.

The employers' view of knowledge is utilitarian. They see their role as not central in development, and are therefore happy to be 'semi-detached' purchasers, using modules that have most currency, aligning with immediate, local, corporate and wider policy agendas. They are not positioning themselves to have a central say in the constitution of knowledge and learning, and are deferential to, or even uninterested in, issues of pedagogy and assessment.

## **College Tutors**

The Further Education (FE) sector has a history of working with employers in training staff, and this is broadly reflected in their conceptualisations of the rationale for the programme. There is acknowledgement from the respondents that the Foundation Degree is filling a void in work-related learning provision created by an academic drift within HNCs and HNDs. Yet there is a spectrum of opinion on this, with tutors used to responding to employers up to FE level 3 (A-Level equivalent) more acquiescent in the discourse than those with experience of teaching degree level work, particularly FE 5. FE1, for example, with a background in Business Studies, was excited about 'a qualification based on the workplace'. Although operating in a sixth form college, FE1 was used to servicing the needs of industry and business on a market driven basis, and his understandings combined the human resource agendas of the local authorities with Blunkett's priorities in the Greenwich speech (DFEE: 2000a: 7), of meeting the intermediate skills gap of the UK in a global economy.

At this initial level of analysis, FE 2, a Business Studies tutor also based at a sixth form college, but previously experienced in a more traditional further education college, conceptualised his sector's role as meeting and supporting the employers' and the Government agendas of modernisation. For FE 2 the rationale is for the students in local authorities to have an understanding of

*...the new issues which would be put to them by Government on an issue of 'best value', the change in working practices that would be thrust upon local authorities. This*

*sort of answerability to different agencies and the public...and how they would cope with it.*

This is a form of embodied discursive capture, in keeping with Ozga's (2000) conceptualisation of governance. The result for him would be the implementation of policy reflexively by the employees, enabling him as tutor to facilitate processes of active governance. Students would therefore evaluate:

*How did they apply it? How did other people apply it? How did they evaluate it? How did they share knowledge? Did they share best practice – or did they do things in their own little annexe somewhere?*

FE 4, in mid-career and having only taught for one year, refers to contrasting dimensions of 'the economic', but at the student level, articulates the importance of 'self-actualization'. With a marketing background he identifies this aspect as a 'niche market' for selling a new product. FE 4's students were employed by E 2, and the local authority was undergoing a significant transformation in terms of strategy and staffing. The programme for FE 4 was also about dealing with such risk and uncertainty by the students at personal and individual levels:

*It's not just 'best value', it is just basic nuts and bolts. It's basically what is my role? Will I have a job next week? Am I going to be phased out? How will I cope with the changes? Does the organization care a damn about me?*

FE 5, also with a Business Studies background, is experienced in teaching HNDs and franchised part-time undergraduate programmes at a large mixed economy college, and sees Foundation Degrees as a narrowing of a 'training' rather than an 'educational' focus 'to have people more specifically geared up and have the skills for that particular area of employment that they are in'. She feels traditional HNCs are slightly broader, and expresses concerns about 'Taylorist control mechanisms'. Universities and colleges have a responsibility to counterbalance rationalist and utilitarian agendas in favour of 'the critical and progressive' in the interests of the students, in her view. FE 5 sets out a marker from the outset for the educationalists within the partnership in interpreting the curriculum priorities:

*...let's not be narrowing peoples' choices...let's give them what they need for that, but give them other things, so that they can take them on, take them further.*

The college tutors' position on knowledge acquisition is fundamentally constructivist, with starting points not being driven by module content and learning outcomes, nor assessment regimes, but individualised student learning diagnoses and subsequent journeys. The pedagogical priority for the tutors was supporting processes of 'coming to know' (Trowler and Knight: 2000), and these processes were centred on the person rather than the corporation, on development rather than knowledge transfer.

Thus although there was some concern about responsiveness to 'external' agendas (for example FE 1, working very closely with E 1, expressed similar concerns over 'currency', 'value' and 'national recognition' of locally determined schemes) there was a strong emphasis on students 'becoming' reflective practitioners generally, and not just in

the workplace, but in an empowering and emancipatory way, developing analytical and critical thinking skills. Such a holistic perspective based on personal development is in contrast to the selective instrumentalism towards knowledge of the employers, with tutors stressing the learner rather than components of the programme.

The tutors were used to such approaches. The practices and pedagogic expertise in supporting processes of coming to know, such as diagnosis, guidance, reflective skills development and formative assessment, were asymmetrical with the University's hierarchical and hegemonic discursive structures and pedagogic practices, premised on knowledge transfer in a segmented and didactic way, and therefore based on modular rather than programme structures. These differences were to provide the bases for the 'double binds' (Engestrom: 2001) in the subsequent Workshops.

The dominant pedagogic emphasis on knowledge transfer did not sit easy with the college tutors in the first interviews. In particular, issues of 'volume' of knowledge to be transferred in both the limited class time and students' own limited private study time, and the weekly schedule (effectively topics within modules) caused problems to tutors, although used to working to external syllabi. In Lave and Wenger's (1991) terms they were deferential apprentices working with perceived masters, unaware of a degree of potential agency and selectivity within their teaching at this stage. FE 1 had questioned the Programme Leader (HE 1) about the volume of reading expected to be covered by the students (as he perceived it). HE 1's response stressed that volume would be expected on an undergraduate (full time) course, with no allowance for the type of student, mode of learning or type of knowledge. In desperation FE 1 had turned to HE 3

who was actually delivering some of the teaching in one of the colleges (covering FE 4's absence):

*There was a turning point...I asked what do I need to do?*

HE 3, as master with an apprentice, had provided insight about how apparently hegemonic module specifications might be interpreted and prioritized. FE1's position was also reflected in FE 4's assertion:

*We are student driven. We have to meet the student where they are at and try to bring them along, because they are all at different levels.*

Although the most sceptical of the college tutors regarding processes of learning thorough work, FE 4 expressed a frustration at his sector's expertise being unrecognised and unvalued: where 'knowledge' is produced by the 'masters' and delivered through apprentice teacher 'labourers'. In meeting a Module Leader (at the University) he talked of 'being shunted in and out of there':

*What it came down to was a forty five minute rushed session on 'here's the materials...blah, blah... this is what you need to do.' We need more time to reflect on that process...they are not giving us much time to give them some input into that.*

Perceptions of volume of content were reinforced by modular structures which seem to impose a rigid structuring and social division of labour within the activity system, as perceived by the college staff, limiting more agential and interactional opportunities for

pedagogic practice, at least at a formal level. These issues provide parallels with notions of contested and hegemonic discursive structures and practices that I will use later to analyse issues of power and development within the emerging activity system and 'unit of analysis' – hence my need to look at subjects' perspectives in uncoupling object from motive, and 'discourse' from 'text'.

The modular focus on fragmented propositional knowledge and the perceived need by the college tutors for a whole programme emphasis on learner development, with the Applications Modules of Independent Learning and Work-based Learning as the core (see Fig 2.1, page 37), was particularly stressed by FE 2:

*Make **that** (his emphasis) the focus of the course, rather than learning bits of knowledge.*

The college tutors after the first semester, although having no formal direct contact with each other outside the events organised by the University, had formed a clear view of the instrumental approach of the employers to programme content, and the fragmented knowledge transfer emphasis of the University, reinforced by discursive structures and practices. Their expertise and ways of working were at this stage of the research and development cycles, marginal and unacknowledged.

## ***University Tutors***

The host School at the University did not initiate this curriculum partnership. The Programme Leader (HE 1) had to be from the host School, however, and he joined the process at an advanced stage of the development of the bid. He had been a programme leader for an HND in Business Studies within the Faculty, in which there was an existing structural tension in that students 'topping up' the HND to honours degree (a '2+2' arrangement) experienced this in a different School in the Faculty. This School, according to HE 1 in the first interview, saw the Foundation Degree initiative as a threat to the existing arrangements, and a risk to the student numbers entering their degree programme at level 2. HE 1 welcomed the Foundation Degree, and echoed the discourses of Blunkett's Greenwich speech (DFEE: 2000a), about 'competitiveness'. He has a utilitarian and functionalist conceptualisation of higher education in that it is essentially a preparation for meeting the needs of the economy.

HE 2 has a professional background in Housing, and runs part-time programmes leading to the Institute of Housing professional qualifications. She is used to dealing with local government employees in this capacity. Like HE 1 she recognised that 'students are being pushed towards honours degrees' that 'weren't actually the best answer for them'. Nor, she claimed, were these degrees providing the 'kind of increase in skills that employers said they wanted to see.' While welcoming the Foundation Degree for these reasons, it also posed a dilemma for her in positioning herself, as a critical voice, between democratic and economic agendas within Foundation Degrees (Doyle: 2003), championing student over employer interests:

*...employers want a lot of different things. They want them in short term ways. I don't think it's our role to...just accept we are just delivering things which are actually not best for the students...I don't think we should be at the behest of the employers.*

She is unsure of what she is likely to be able to achieve, however, as organisationally she is outside the host School, and even the Faculty.

HE 3 is in a similar position, but this is nothing new for him, as staff in the Education Development Unit (EDU) are used to working with different 'academic tribes' (Becher and Trowler: 2001) across the institution, with academic staff within the Schools interpreting and prioritising issues on their terms. HE 3 has a background in Further Education, and a broad professional experience in and commitment to supporting learners, through things such as mentoring and widening access.

Essentially the tutors' position on knowledge and pedagogy is didactic. The emphases are on knowledge transfer, differentiating knowledge from skills development, and operating within discursive structures and practices that reinforce the segmentation and classification of knowledge. This requires that processes of transfer need to be tightly controlled in terms of scheduling and 'standardisation'. However, within the tutors there was a tension between the 'Social Science' perspectives shared by HE 2 and 3, and the more instrumental and technicist Business Studies' perspective of HE 1.

HE 1 emphasised the importance of equipping the students such that they can 'hit the ground running' in the workplace. In his terms cognitive knowledge has to be in place

first. For example, rather than seeing the Independent Learning Module (Fig 2.1, page 37) as the start of an ongoing reflective journey, he asserted:

*...if you are teaching people to be independent learners you should do that at the start (of the course) and not at the same time as they are trying to become independent learners.*

The process is centred on the module and the passive learner. In contrast, HE 2 and HE 3 recognise the role of the learner in the process of knowledge acquisition. For example, HE 3, reflecting a frustration at his marginal position outside the host School, expressed concerns about a Finance module the students were taking at that time, with a business-accounts emphasis, instead of addressing wider resource issues of relevance to local government workers in a way that would encourage them to question

*...why do I do what I do, why does our organisation do what it does...what are the constraints and the opportunities...that shape policy?*

HE 1 conceptualises professional hierarchies within the University tutors, linked to expertise in his prioritised aspects of knowledge, which are reflected in classification systems based on modules and their 'ownership'. For example he was insistent that his module, 'Asset Building' should have been the first module of the programme, but he conceded this as 'the School got involved only when the curriculum had been laid down'. HE 2 refers to a 'dissonance of two strands of subject matter', Business, and her own Environmental Studies. She is critical of Business, seeing it also as

*...taken off the shelf...which won't reflect that work-based practice which should be a new approach.*

Yet despite these differences, relative power positions reinforced by roles, discursive structures and practices, all three reinforce the vertical discursive hegemony in dealings with other partners on the issue of knowledge transfer. HE 3 for example stresses the importance of the University sessions, twice per semester, when college students all come to the University for teaching by the University tutors.

*You are then in control...reasserting the purpose of the module...this is what it's about and that...may or may not be in conflict with what they've got in the colleges.*

For HE 2 the process has to be 'top-down', essentially reinforcing the college tutors' identity as 'teaching labourers'.

*I think it's a question of us getting it right; as right as possible in terms of what we give to tutors, what we give to students, the sort of things we put in place really and the amount of flexibility the colleges have.*

She recognises the tension

*...between trying to deliver something that's reasonably standardised and allowing the college tutors to have some ownership.*

She worries that some colleges will 'produce a richer product, but some won't', and expresses concerns for the students who don't get that product.

Structural divisions in the University, reflecting and reinforcing differentiated professional identities, forms of pedagogic practice (Trowler and Cooper: 2002) and power differences are clear within the University tutors. However, the prevailing collective emphasis is on knowledge transfer and hegemonic conceptions of expertise within the partnership are rooted, for the University tutors, within propositional knowledge that is classified by and distributed within programme modules.

### ***Summary***

The subjects' conceptualisations of the rationale for the Foundation Degree demonstrates divergence of perspective across and indeed within the constituencies. The employers broadly have a human resource, corporate perspective, looking at how the qualification can support their needs for transition through 'modernisation' to newer forms of governance. The employers are purchasers of a service, with value being the criterion by which it will be judged. This contradicts the role envisaged by Government, whereby employers shape development. The college interviewees ranged from traditional service perspectives (responding to market demand and funding priorities) to dilemmas between responding to what employers want, but also meeting the needs of their 'non-traditional' learners, wanting to fulfil professional drives to develop learning opportunities that go beyond corporate needs, and possibly contradict them. Indeed FE 5 sees it as a responsibility to take a critical line in the interests of the learner.

The HE responses are equally divergent, with HE 1, the Programme Leader at ease with the corporate, human resource perspective, and with HE 2 and HE 3 sharing to a degree the dilemmas espoused by FE 3 and FE 5. HE 3 in particular is a champion of the learner in this ‘third way’ struggle between corporate (economic) and learner (democratic) priorities. The HE tutors are of one mind, however, in terms of pedagogy and knowledge transfer.

### **Curriculum Priorities for the partners**

The educational perspectives of the partner constituencies are summarised in Table 5.2. This needs further analysis to determine issues to be addressed at Workshop 1 (for the sequence see Fig 4.1, page 87). Of interest was the determination of key action points to be taken to this Workshop. Therefore the final questions in the first interviews asked all interviewees to reflect on what they considered to be the ‘primary learning goal’ of the programme, and, having gone through the first semester for the first intake of students, this was followed up by asking them to state what changes needed to be implemented for the next intake to ensure that their primary learning goal was more effectively addressed. I will provide an analysis of the results by partner constituency, looking at collective commitments and other strongly expressed individual views (variation), drilling down to the point where ‘critical sites’, the foci of motives for development, are identified as the basis for initial discussions in the first workshop.

<b>College Tutors</b>	<b>University Tutors</b>	<b>Employers</b>
Knowing constructivist -	Knowledge - cognitive	Capability: practice
Learning - processual	Teaching propositional -	Capability: application
Diagnosis – focus on individual needs	Transfer – didactic, collective	Training needs analysis: corporate targets
Skills – individual development	Knowledge – learning outcomes	Performance: standards and application
Personal Development Planning and reflective practice	Modules, assessment criteria and quality audits	Corporate human resource benchmarks
Programme – holistic learner development and autonomy	Modules/semesters – fragmentation, Module Leader autonomy and perspective	Pragmatic: learners able to deal with and adapt to corporate priorities
Formative assessment	Summative Assessment	Cost-benefit: evaluation based on impact in workplace

**Table 5.2 Educational perspectives of partner constituencies**

### ***Employer priorities***

Learning priorities for the programme and key changes needed for the second intake for the employers are summarised in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 below. Collectively there was a shared view of the need for students to understand their role and position vis a vis Central Government, processes of change, partnership working and impacts on ‘customers’ of services. The four items identified in Table 5.3 are mutually reinforcing, and are difficult to disaggregate. E 1, for example, makes reference to ‘mindsets’ (becoming customer focused rather than ‘this sort of autocratic-bureaucratic type of organisation’) and ‘platforms for development within the modernisation agenda’. She looks to managers

*...to validate the utility of experience and learning, now they (the students on the Programme) are looking at Performance Management, and they are looking at systems we have in place.*

E 2 stressed employee role change in terms of becoming 'more active participants in self and organisational development, and 'CPD''. She acknowledged the fact that structural factors, in terms of the organisation's development, were not yet at the stage to maximise the potential of the programme. In this respect, compared to E 1 (who constantly equates the Programme with her Investment In People (IIP) training), she was not in a position to negotiate the same degree of synergy and symmetry in articulating the 'textual' impact of the formal learning in the workplace, and in re-contextualising and re-focusing potential negotiated collective outcomes from the subsequent Workshops. However, she acknowledged the students' enhanced understanding of the changes and re-organisation taking place in her local authority, quoting a student's comment:

*'Had I not known, read about the issues of governance, why the Scrutiny Committee needs to exist, why the 'Best Value' agenda is really important, I would not have had a clue why this makes sense'.*

E 3 similarly presents the priorities as a bundle:

*To equip the students with a greater understanding of the organisation. What I mean by the organisation is the public sector they work in, and also for themselves to develop skills; competence in transferable skills.*

E 4, with a Departmental perspective, expects the programme to give her employees 'the bigger picture...in terms of the organization of the local authority', to contextualise and rationalise 'drivers' in 'Performance Management'.

Primary Learning Goals	Change priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the changing nature of local government</li> <li>• Pro-actively engaging with 'modernisation' priorities (the 'big picture')</li> <li>• Meeting the needs of short term operational priorities of 'performance management'</li> <li>• Multi-skills capability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the work-based emphasis in the programme</li> <li>• Applying knowledge more effectively and thinking strategically</li> </ul>

**Table 5.3 Collective Employer primary learning goals and priorities for programme change**

The priority at an individual level for E 1 is clearly to align the programme with her conceptualisation of corporate human resource priorities. Her position within the organisation, and her focusing of the programme to align with these priorities make her role as a boundary spanner (Wenger, 1998) in the collective sessions important. E 2 is rather less focused because of the process of change taking place in her organisation, and expresses opinions in rather generalised terms. She mentions the importance of 'IT' training for staff, but also the issue of formal learning 'keeping up to speed' with what is happening in local government

... other than the students feeding in via the course and module leaders how would you know what is going on the authority, and how might you want to reflect that in the content of the curriculum?

E 3 also stresses the importance of IT skills – ‘e-government’. While E 1 is initially sceptical of the autonomous learner approach of the Colleges and HE 3 (the Independent Learning module), E 4 sees its significance in terms of

*...managing yourself...we don't have massive resources, so we haven't got people who can be continually directing you.*

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Primary Learning Goals</b>	<b>Change Priorities</b>
E1	Align programme more coherently with corporate HR strategy (IIP)	Reverse 'academic drift', and ensure employer satisfaction
E2	Reach a balance between employee development and more emancipatory life enhancement	Greater emphasis on use of IT skills
E3	Enhance employee understanding of the organisation  New IT skills	Achieve greater consistency in learning outcomes across the colleges, and revisit primary learning goal as part of this process
E4	Independent learning and self-management	Enhance the academic and theoretical frameworks within which work-place learning is framed

**Table 5.4 Individual Employer primary learning goals and priorities for change**

## ***College tutor priorities***

There is a strong collective commitment from the college tutors to the issues identified in Table 5.5, expressed in the interviews. Learning through work is emphasised by all tutors. FE 1 stresses

*...the individual moving on to a greater knowledge and awareness through very practical, work-based activities.*

FE 1 has the most successful and active employer link (with E 1), to the extent that it seems essentially dyadic. His position is echoed by FE 2, who emphasizes the need for

*...a method of learning, of analysis, of reflecting, that builds on personal experience and the workplace, and helps them to develop as individuals and as employees.*

In this respect FE 2 believes the University's position to be wrong, asserting

*...you need to start this as a work-based degree. We are not looking at packets of learning,*

by which he means modular structures. This is the key issue for FE 2; structural issues which are preventing the pedagogic practices he sees as essential. He puts this down to management:

*It's easier to manage something that fits into your traditional patterns.*

Such learning is not conceptualised in an instrumental way. FE 5 explains the need to

*...come at it from a different angle (from the employers)...it does come back to...let's not be narrowing peoples' choices...let's extend it...let's take them further.*

The commitment to Independent Learning (ILM) and enabling skills of reflective practice are seen as essentially emancipatory, and a key issue in making the programme different – particularly for these students. FE 4 is particularly enthusiastic:

*They have been very aware of the development that they have been through and have actually continued to reflect on their experience...I had faith and confidence in that module, so it's turned out how I expected.*

This has continued, in spite of modular structures, and it is this issue that frustrates the tutors. They are committed to the curriculum model outlined in Fig 2.1 (page 37), and see the Independent Learning Module as the start of an ongoing process that needs to initiate and give momentum to processes of personal development planning (PDP). It is such instruments that are essential to their view of holistic personal development throughout the programme, in contrast to a perceived HE tutor end of module tendency to 'shelve it' (FE 3) and move on:

*Semester 1 sets the scene...we can see how the model of the programme as a whole makes sense...it has to be looked at so that self-development and reflection is encouraged to proceed through the whole programme.*

This approach is equally central for the colleges for ongoing student skills development and improvement, and is rooted in the professional perspectives, expertise and experiences the tutors bring to this development. It is in the context of transferable skills that FE 4 effectively pleads for a degree of respect for what the college tutors are bringing to the partnership:

*You (the University) need somebody on board who knows what it is like in these places, how the teaching is done and what the constraints are.*

The change priorities emerge from the issues above, and are summarised in Table 5.5. Academic 'drift' is a reality for all even at this early stage, to the extent that FE 1 is disillusioned, a 'passive' teacher labourer, who is given what to teach by the Module Leaders:

*...we actually felt it was very much our course. Now I feel slightly different...because it has now become a University course, and we are just delivering it.*

Reversal of such drift requires the assertion of the centrality of the Applications modules (Fig 2.1, page 37), and the formalisation of skills development and personal development planning. In effect this means the recognition by the University tutors of the different, albeit complementary, pedagogical expertise that the colleges are bringing to the developing programme. It also means for FE 2, to avoid the 'missed opportunities', a root and branch review of the curriculum and particularly the assessment.

Primary Learning Goals	Change priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through work</li> <li>• Self-managed reflective learning</li> <li>• Skills monitoring and development</li> <li>• Whole programme thematic perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reverse academic drift</li> <li>• Re-assert centrality of the Applications Modules</li> <li>• Establish personal development support systems</li> <li>• Enhance skills monitoring and development</li> <li>• Raise the standing of the FE tutor and their areas of expertise</li> <li>• Review assessment</li> </ul>

**Table 5.5 Collective College Tutor primary learning goals and priorities for change**

Additional individual issues prioritised are summarised in Table 5.6. FE1, articulating a view that also was implicit in the other FE interviews, proclaimed that FE ‘starts’ where the students are at, not with the syllabus

*...they didn't even know how their local authority worked...we had to start by going back to real basics...there was an assumption that they know all about it. They actually know their departments and nothing else.*

The point is echoed slightly differently by FE 2, speaking about a lack of guidance from the University concerning the tutorial function

*...the policy has to be where we are at now, and where we would like them to be.*

For the college tutors the change priorities are extensions of the collective voices above, and relate to methods and instruments rather than focus. Of particular interest is the criticism of management, and implicitly power and control, voiced by FE 2. References to management being 'traditionally based' reflect the distribution and exercise of power through hegemonic discursive structures and practices, but also there is a questioning of the desire of the programme management to the object of the programme as he sees it. There is a need to

*...look at whether the management of the programme is allowing that goal to be met, rather than nudging it away from it.*

FE 5 acknowledges the inevitability of a variation in motivation within the subjects in constituting the learning:

*The differences are important and have to be taken on board...all we've to do is say that there are these differences, accept them, acknowledge them and try to work within that limitation. And there are limitations.*

There are appeals here for an 'idealised speech situation' (after Habermas), and a Liberal Humanist premise to the collaboration. She asserts change must happen; a process of review is needed 'to include all three parties' and 'be realistic'.

*...they (the University) are not realistic to some of our students...because of where they are coming from...they are swamped.*

<b>College Tutor</b>	<b>Primary Learning Goals</b>	<b>Change Priorities</b>
FE 1	Start with the learner, not the syllabus	Re-engage with processes of collaboration, rather than a gradual transition to a 'franchise' type of relationship
FE 2	Learner support through a process of transition	Refocus collectively on learning priorities
FE 3	Personal development	Challenge the fragmentation of modularity through a single assessment and support strategy. Review management processes
FE 4	As in Table 5.4	Reassert reflective practice as underpinning the programme, and formalise a single personal development plan process
FE 5	As in Table 5.4	Employer participation (to her, the cause of academic drift), and their engagement with work-based assessment. Acknowledgement of equivalence of 'two types of knowledge' and professional expertise. Take account of needs of this type of learners

**Table 5.6 Individual College Tutor primary learning goals and change priorities**

***University tutor priorities***

There are several levels of complementarity, but also 'dissonance' (HE 2) within the University tutor perspectives on learning priorities. These reflect the structural issues

discussed in the previous section of this chapter, but they are also attitudinal, perspectival, and are reinforced by prevailing discursive practices.

The common ground for all three is control, standardisation and the focus on materials. This is the case for HE 1 even for the issue of skills development. His previous experience teaching BTEC HNDs is used as an assumed template for the new curriculum by him, which results in an innate resistance to conceptualise it as others see it. His position organisationally, and in the partnership raises questions of interpretation, attitude, will and relative power, embodied and structural, within the activity system, and the impact these factors are likely to have on development trajectories. This dimension is important in the subsequent Workshops, and provides a basis for the 'double binds' on which expansive progress across the partnership rests.

Structural issues in the programme and its organisation at the University reinforce fragmentation, but HE 1 makes assumptions about others in the partnership that perhaps reinforce this further. His previous experience with employers on the HND is negative, and he expects employers in the current activity to be preoccupied by costs. He effectively dismisses the significance of the colleges:

*I think they're happy to go along, because basically they're having the work done for them. You don't object when someone else is doing the work unless there is something that is undeliverable.*

He also categorises the EDU contributions as 'unworkable in practice', assuming a lack of experience and expertise:

*I don't think they understand issues of delivery and practicality.*

His conceptualisation of expertise is very narrowly focused around module content. The three tutors share an anxiety over processes of control of transfer. HE 3 refers to college tutors 'not understanding what we were thinking', or 'they might operate at a different level'. There is a shared assumption in the college delivery of deficit, and assessment is seen by HE 3 as an instrument of control:

*...make sure your content of your assessment takes people back to that all the time, constantly reinforcing.*

HE 2 wants to go further towards distance learning to ensure

*...less tutor involvement, and a greater emphasis on developing materials into on-line learning. You feel that way there are less potential falls, mistakes and disasters.*

Both HE 2 and HE 3 are acutely aware of the tension in the nature of the curriculum the students are experiencing, the students having studied modules delivered by themselves in semester 1, and in semester 2 doing modules which are based in HE1's area. Their concern is that the identity of the programme will change, that it will become another course in the host school, until they become involved again at the start of the subsequent semester. Reflecting the structural limitations of his power and influence, HE 3 laments

*I'm not sure the effort is going into the course that we put in...we wanted to make it work, and felt committed to making it work. With other people it's just another thing they are having to do.*

Primary Learning Goals	Change priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective production and delivery of module materials to timescales and 'standards', and student reproduction in forms of assessment</li> <li>• Control of content, and consistency in transfer and assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce standardisation</li> <li>• Accelerate 'stand alone' materials production and consider transfer to distance learning</li> <li>• Review college role as facilitators</li> <li>• Address perceived 'deficit' in college delivery and expertise</li> </ul>

**Table 5.7 Collective University Tutor primary learning goals and change priorities**

Table 5.8 provides a summary of the variation, essentially the 'dissonance' within the University tutors' voice.

University Tutor	Primary Learning Goals	Change Priorities
HE 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills development using a traditional HND approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Front-load' skills modules – didactic teaching of skills</li> <li>• Revise ideas that are 'unworkable in practice'</li> </ul>
HE 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of change processes in local government and of their role in enacting policy: 'what, why and how'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address issues of 'dissonance' in subject identities, reinforcing Social Science perspective over the Business Studies</li> </ul>
HE 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of a cognitive, analytical framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of an Open University type approach</li> </ul>
HE 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To become critical reflective practitioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce the affective dimension of learning</li> <li>• Ensure assessment reinforces primary learning goal</li> </ul>

**Table 5.8 Individual University Tutor primary learning goals and change priorities**

**Summary: Critical sites for development**

College Tutors	University Tutors	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work-based – academic balance</li> <li>• Skills diagnosis and development</li> <li>• Study skills</li> <li>• Personal development planning</li> <li>• Student support and learner progression</li> <li>• Independent learning-reflective practice</li> <li>• Whole programme development and perspective</li> <li>• Programme structures</li> <li>• Identity, voice and recognition of expertise</li> <li>• Assessment – formative and summative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content-materials production and delivery</li> <li>• Timetables</li> <li>• Semesters</li> <li>• Modules</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Understanding – cognitive frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value: cost/benefit</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Currency/topicality and impact in workplace</li> <li>• Modernisation agenda</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Skills</li> </ul>

**Table 5.9 Identified critical sites for development for Workshop 1**

The 'critical sites' identified in Table 5.9 above represent the positions of the subject constituencies collectively and individually at the threshold of Workshop 1, and it is an attempt to differentiate, and uncouple motive from object within the activity system

(Nardi: 2005; Kaptelinin:2005). There is a clear distinction, as explained throughout the analysis in this chapter, between the University, college and employer perspectives. These perspectives reflect degrees of value driven commitment, espoused discursively, but they also reflect the social and professional practices and identities, discursively constituted, that the 'subjects' are bringing to the process of partnering. They also are the themes of the 'voices' that will meet in Workshop 1. Such values and practices will provide the contested sites and priorities for development collectively. The issues identified actually represent a degree of complementarity, linked not only to motive, but to professional identity, roles and expertise. All three areas of expertise: pedagogical priorities for dealing with these students, expertise in the subject matter and in the practices of the University and expertise in prioritising and situating learning in professional contexts are within the individual partners coming to the process of 'knotworking'.

The initial perspectives on the object ( $O_n$ ) of the various subjects ( $S_n$ ) are represented in Fig. 5.2. This is an attempt to begin the remodelling of the process incorporating dimensions of time and locality. The model will be built up throughout the thesis, as I deal with the data. The next chapter connects this detailed analysis of subject-object within the collaborating activity systems to this area of role taking and positioning (motive, perspective and identity driven), division of labour, rules and discursive practices within the interacting activity systems.

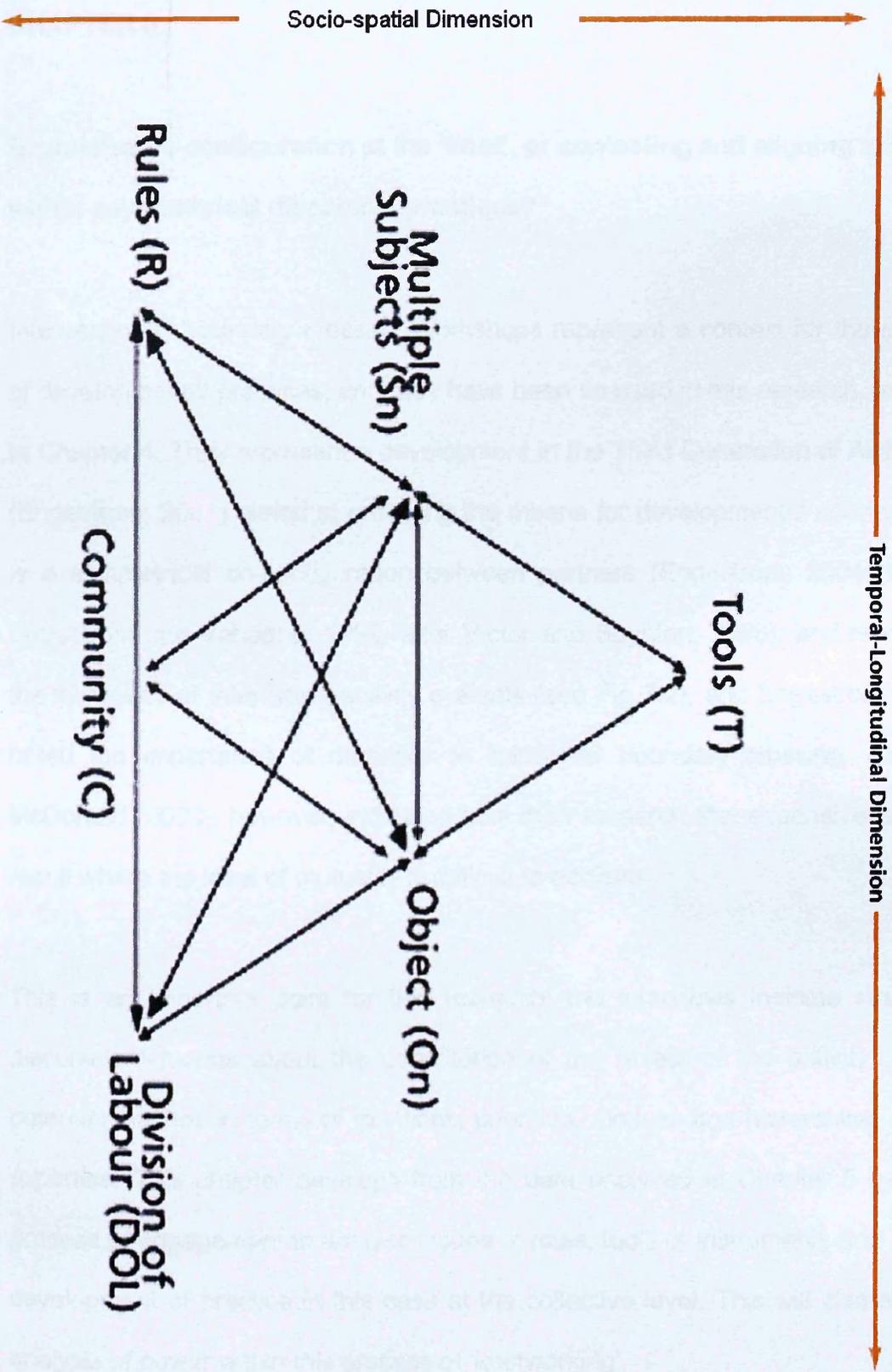


Fig 5.2 Initial Subject Perspectives (Sn) on the Object (On)

## CHAPTER 6

### **Expansive co-configuration at the 'knot', or contesting and aligning subjectivities within asymmetrical discursive practices?**

Interventionist boundary crossing Workshops represent a context for the instantiation of developmental practices, and they have been so used in this research, as explained in Chapter 4. They represent a development in the Third Generation of Activity Theory (Engestrom: 2001) aimed at providing the means for developmental activity. The ideal is a symmetrical co-configuration between partners (Engestrom: 2004; Engestrom, Engestrom and Vahaaho: 1999, after Victor and Boynton: 1998), and represented in the symmetry of interfacing activity systems (see Fig 3.2), and Engestrom (2003) has noted the importance of mutuality to horizontal boundary crossing. Blackler and McDonald (2000), however, indicated from their research that expansiveness can still result where the ideal of mutuality is difficult to achieve.

This is an important point for this research: the interviews indicate structural and discursive tensions about the constitution of the object of the activity, as well as potential clashes in terms of identities, priorities, motives and hierarchical domains of expertise. This chapter develops from the data analysed in Chapter 5 by using the process of engagement to analyse issues of roles, tools or instruments and rules in the development of practice in this case at the collective level. This will also embrace an analysis of power within this process of 'knotworking'.

The chapter treats the boundary crossing sessions (the Workshops), sequentially for a reason. They are set up to be developmental, and so at this stage the outcomes from one lead to developments in sequence. This does not preclude cyclical or reflexive development channelled and evaluated within the sequential workshops. Of course generic issues will be dealt with also, and reflections on the process at the end of the chapter will analyse the premises for the structuring of the data collection and analysis. The Workshops are supplementary to other more formal meetings over the period, such as moderation panels and exam boards.

Therefore, the chapter is structured as follows: the first section analyses the process of development and the dynamics of decision making using Engestrom's expansive learning cycle as a framework for structuring the discussion. The second part of the chapter continues the expansive cycle to evaluate development, question practice and model further development. Extracts from 'episodes' from Workshop 1 and 2 are provided in Appendices 2 and 3 to illustrate the exchanges and the tensions around contradictory pedagogic practices and issues within the division of labour. This sequence of 'specific epistemic or learning actions' (Engestrom: 1999a: 383) will be critically analysed throughout the developmental process. Building on Fig. 5.2, the process being addressed in this chapter is illustrated in Fig. 6.1, with the data analysis relating to the situated/collective level of analysis in boundary crossing/Workshop sessions over the period of the research, with S1-S3 representing phases of development and transformation for the subjects. Similarly, O1-O3 represents the emergence of the expanding horizon of the object. The individual triangles at the situated-collective Level 2 represent the process of phased 'knotworking'. Level 1,

introduced in the model in Fig. 7.1, represents the process of recontextualisation discussed in Chapter 7.

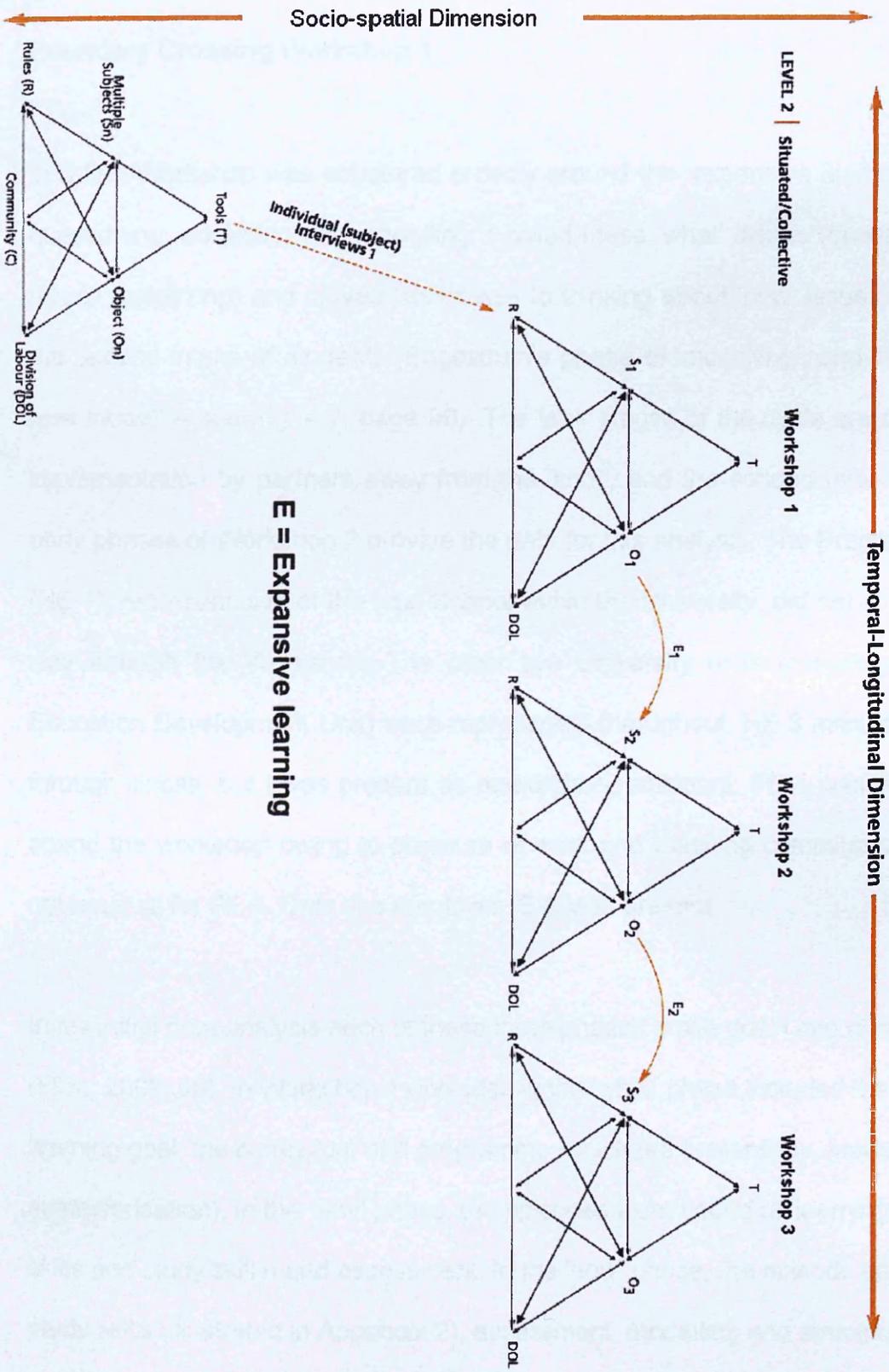


Fig 6. 1 Situated-Collective Discursive Development of the Object

## Boundary Crossing Workshop 1

The first Workshop was structured broadly around the 'expansive learning' phases of questioning, analyzing and modelling. I called these 'what' issues (questioning), 'why' issues (analyzing) and moved from these to thinking about 'how' issues, planning for the second intake of students (Engestrom's phase of 'modelling', and 'examining the new model' – see Fig. 4.2, page 90). The later stages of the cycle are dependent on implementation by partners away from the 'knot', and the second interviews and the early phases of Workshop 2 provide the data for this analysis. The Programme Leader (HE 1), representative of the host School within the University, did not arrive until mid-way through the Workshop. The other two University units (servicing School and Education Development Unit) were represented throughout. HE 3 missed this session through illness, but I was present as researcher-participant. FE 4 was not allowed to attend the workshop owing to pressure of work and teaching commitments. This was not unusual for FE 4. Only one employer, E 1, was present.

In my initial data analysis each of these three phases broke down into distinct 'episodes' (Flick, 2002: 96). In Workshop 1 episodes in the 'what' phase included the primary learning goal, the curriculum and programme structures (essentially, modularity and semesterisation). In the 'why' phase, the episodes were coded as learning (including skills and study skills) and assessment. In the 'how' phase, the episode codes were: study skills (illustrated in Appendix 2), assessment, modelling and structures. Dialogue on these issues was not neatly parcelled into the 'episodes' – in fact there was a cyclical 'to-and fro' on key issues such as assessment and study skills throughout the 'what',

'why' and 'how', a layering of dialogue, contested voices and negotiated positioning as the workshop unfolded. This became a characteristic of the whole collective process, with issues raised in Workshop 1 featuring as cyclical, ongoing 'double binds' through Workshop 2.

At the start I set the agenda for discussion on the 'what' issues by providing a summarized and anonymized analysis of the final first interview questions – 'what for you is the primary learning goal of the programme', and 'what changes need to be made for the next intake of students to ensure more effective delivery of that learning goal'.

Under 'what' issues, discussion ranged from the intended work-based nature of the learning to a tendency towards 'academic drift', and to the problems college deliverers of the curriculum were facing operating within University practices and quality systems within different institutional settings. In early discussions on the meanings of work-based learning University staff, particularly HE 2, were vocal, even initiating discussion and offering working definitions. In fact HE 2, after my introduction, initiated the dialogue around 'getting the big picture', her learning priority from the interview, and this prompted an immediate response from HE 5 on her priority of skills and the work-related emphasis of the learning. An open discussion developed on this theme ranging from its importance to E 1 in her objective of establishing her workplace as a 'learning organisation' to FE 3's expression of difficulties faced by her students with work-place mentors, who are also line managers with a 'training' mentality, expecting an immediate impact on practice in the workplace from the investment in study leave.

In later stages of this phase, particularly when college tutors were expressing frustration that the modular structures of higher education were imposing limitations on attempts to develop whole course perspectives on their particular espoused priorities of personal development and formative assessment (prevailing college pedagogic practices), the University voices were silent. FE 2 put these difficulties down to 'academic drift', caused by the introduction of Module Leaders in the second semester who had had no involvement in the early development of the programme. The essence of this issue he summarized as:

*Too much content, and too much assessment.*

The hegemonic and regulative influence of University rules and instruments, such as assessment practices and rigid structural issues such as modularity were raised by FE 2 as factors inhibiting the development of his priority for the primary learning goal:

*...the question I would have is, is that structure that we've got going to lead to ...the kind of thing you'd identify as a primary learning goal?...my concern is we get into a situation...'I've done twelve weeks on that, tick it off, put it over there that's finished'.*

This comment provoked a supporting response from FE 5 who questioned the limitations of modularity based on the first semester experience:

*...there is so much scope for integration of those two units (FE terminology, meaning the semester 1 modules), and it would have made more sense to the students who are applying it (for them to be integrated), and I think that was lost.*

FE 5 talked about the need to define a 'common thread' through modular segments, and FE 2 linked this notion to his idea of a primary learning goal. FE 3 made reference to the curriculum model (Fig.2.1, page 37):

*...the first thing I saw (in the curriculum model) before anything starts is the possibility of looking at learning contracts and establishing personal progress files. Well, personal progress files certainly hasn't materialized yet.*

This phase was effectively a 'tabling' of priorities reflecting professional experiences and identities in a way that questioned the prevailing practices to date. FE 3 had a particular commitment to portfolio building, and has subsequently become the University's APL Co-ordinator. The idea for cross-modular teaching and assessment subsequently developed through phases of modelling and debate throughout the Workshop as a challenge, a double bind to be addressed collectively and it subsequently resulted in a compromised proposal for change for the second intake.

While this episode developed there were no contributions from the HE staff. FE 2 made the point that regardless of the work-related ideas behind Foundation Degrees, what they were experiencing was the need to 'try to fit the programme into a Faculty structure and a Faculty QA procedure'. This comment produced a defensive response from HE 2, who noted from her marginal position outside the host Faculty, that existing modules were being used to service this programme – 'off the shelf'.

The rigidity and perceived regulatory nature of the rules, pedagogic instruments and discourses operational within the activity system were clearly reinforcing role differentiation within the partnership in a way that is reflective structurally of the relative power positions of the partners, particularly at this collective level. The rigid discursive practices of the University at the 'knot' and in curriculum structures (semesters, modules, assessment structures and deadlines, exam boards and so on) restrict the more integrated and flexible instructional practices that the FE partners want to develop. The HE staff find themselves operating within structures and discursive practices which represent 'normality' – but this is relative, with two positioned outside the host Faculty, resulting in a marginalization of power and influence even within this group.

Discussion within the 'why' episodes was more open and in the second of these, on assessment, college staff and the employer representative returned to the issues of modular practices and initiated processes of modelling rooted in their own situated practices, involving propositions to integrate assessment across modules, reduce the numbers of assignments and embed through the programme the notion of skills development and reflective practice, through the systematic use of personal development planning (PDP). These issues were all consistent with the collective and individual college motives and practices identified in the previous chapter in the analysis of the interview data.

Such attempts by college tutors to 'stabilize' debate (Engestrom, 2004), and anchor propositions in order to 'normalize' practice at this stage represented attempts to change the practice in their terms, but these did not involve attempts at boundary

crossing – rather they represented assertions of challenge to dominant discursive practices by those constrained by prevailing regulative discourse. The multivocality stressed by Engestrom (2001) was evident in this phase of externalizing FE perspectives.

The Programme Leader (HE 1) arrived during these discussions on the ‘why’ phase. Debate on the possibility of integrating assignments across modules in semester 1 continued. However in this episode HE 1 made eleven contributions (98 text units), other HE staff four, FE 5 four, FE 2 three, the Employer 1 and there were silences from the other two college representatives present (60 text units combined). These figures are used to demonstrate simply how the dynamic within the group changed, and the expression of ‘voices’ became restricted or inhibited. Throughout the subsequent episodes discussion became more open, but the dominant discursive structures and practices within which the activity was being constituted were reflected in the responses (prevailing discursive ‘messages’) of HE 1 to suggestions for change, characterised by piecemeal accommodation where necessary.

This implies no criticism. Rather it reflects the power of discursive and embodied positioning, and mirrors Engestrom’s (2003) statement cited earlier about the filters that ‘cultural resources’ provide, and how they impact in and on dialogue across activity systems. The positions articulated by the other members can also be traced to their own prevailing professional and institutional identities and practices, particularly revealed in the interviews. HE 1’s template for the development of practice was based on his own situated experience. On his arrival I provided a summary of both the ‘what’ and ‘why’ phases of the discussion. This function is appropriate for ‘researcher

interventionists' in such developmental contexts, making '...themselves contestable and fallible participants of the discourse, which means that their actions also become objects of data collection and critical analysis' (Engestrom, Engestrom and Kerosuo: 2003: 286). HE 2 introduced an agenda for this phase:

*HE 2: We've been talking about assessments and how they might change. It could be that we could redraw the assessments in order to link the modules more directly...drawing on their previous learning.*

*HE 1: The way to do it is through integrated assessment*

This assertion contrasts with the uncertainty of HE 2 (and me as Facilitator), and the issues of channelling and the boundary delineating effects of hegemonic discourses discussed earlier:

*HE 2: We've discussed this and didn't know whether it was possible*

*Facilitator: Within the modular framework.*

*HE 1: Well we do it on the HND. We have the core, and in that Economic Theory, Marketing and Theories of the Firm, and you have assignments where students integrate the whole of that knowledge.*

The categorical assertion is constructively supportive of the suggestion, but within prevailing practices and instruments situated within local (HE) organisational histories

and cultures. The challenges at this stage are limited and voiced by HE staff and FE 5. The hierarchical structural roles are prevalent, with silences equally significant.

The next 'why' episode, 'study skills' was identified as a gap by HE 2. The data extract for this episode is in Appendix 2. It coincided with the first significant challenge to HE 1, by FE 5:

*HE 2: I don't know what people think about study skills.*

*All: Yes, yes.*

*HE 1: Doesn't Independent Learning (A Core module in semester 1) cover that?*

*FE 5: It covers learning – the two are separate things*

*HE 1: We've always done it as part of induction.*

A difference in emphasis, and an assertion of expertise by FE 5: the HE modular mind with a focus on contained propositional knowledge contrasts with the emphasis in the college tutor's practices on student focus and development across the programme. The emphasis in this module is on developing skills as a reflective practitioner, and as an Applications Module (see Fig. 2.1) for some team members, particularly FE, it is central to the ongoing learning process, as evidenced by the discussion before HE 1's arrival. This is a difference that emerges throughout the whole Workshop, and is consistent with the data from the interviews discussed in the previous chapter.

HE 1 goes on to propose a study skills exercise which he uses with traditional 18 year old students in induction, and this is challenged by FE 5, whose experience is with mature non-traditional students; the type of learners on this programme. This challenge produces supportive and reinforcing responses from the other college representatives, culminating in a linkage to earlier discussions initiated in the 'what' phase before the arrival of HE 1 - the questioning of HE modular structures, and the proposal to increase teaching beyond twelve weeks in a semester to support the skills and personal development needs of the students:

*FE 2: ...we spend 24 weeks delivering the teaching. Is there any reason why we couldn't make this longer, you know so the students come in for 14 weeks, say, and the extra two weeks each semester are study skills...*

*FE 3: I don't know about other colleges, but we're given...this is something I wanted raising at the Steering Group, we're given 30 hours to deliver and assess a module which is not a great deal of time (all college representatives agree).*

*FE 5: We're supposed to do 12 weeks input and 3 weeks...we've never stopped at 12 weeks and always gone right through.*

The colleges are clearly limited by the modular structures and practices, but the difference in level of autonomy between the colleges, reflected in size and experience of dealing with universities, results in varying degrees of adaptation to local practices. For example, FE 5 adapted University regulations and instruments as much as

possible to local practices, and exercised a degree of control in interpreting University requirements in the best interests of the learners and local pedagogic practices. She was experienced in delivering franchised programmes for universities. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in the first part of the next chapter when I consider issues of affordance in the implementation of espoused collective outcomes within the different partner localities.

HE 2 acknowledged the colleges' complaint that there was too much content in the modules, and that some could be taken out to make room for skills teaching. HE 1 responded to this by saying there was too much in the modules in order to 'impress the Programme Approval Sub-committee more than anybody', and surprised the partners by revealing the extent of his autonomy, as a Module Leader, in deciding what he covered and to what depth:

*I've a topic in there – I can spend fifteen minutes talking about it and I've covered it.*

Such apparent autonomy for some while the FE tutors felt so confined is reminiscent of Fairclough's (1992: 72) notion of 'members' resources', and is illustrative of the asymmetrical power-knowledge dimension attached to rules and tools-instruments within this activity system. The result from the FE tutors was a collective, staring silence, broken by FE 3's conciliatory offer of an alternative:

*Or you can say (to the students) 'go away and read about it'.*

The increasing tension did reach a point where HE 1 and 2 recognised the need to offer a compromise – this came about by going back to the discussion on integrated assignments, with HE 1, supported by HE 2, not suggesting fully integrated assignments, but a compromise of linked or themed assessment across modules within semesters. At this stage I pushed the two HE tutors to clarify, suggesting ‘give us your view of a basic assignment scenario’. This position seemed to be welcomed by the colleges as a way forward, but HE 1 illustrated the problems posed to integrating or linking modules through themed assignments (during a discussion on overlapping content between modules) by returning to the autonomy of Module Leaders, and clearly giving his position on that:

*The Module Leaders have been left to write their own modules and...perform their own negotiations, and create their part of the programme, which is what you would expect*

HE 1 goes on to describe the Module Leaders as ‘the experts’, and this is symptomatic of the one-dimensional but hegemonically significant conceptualization of expertise held by the University representatives within the collective activity. HE 1 in particular was unaware of, or did not value, the complementary expertise in aspects of pedagogy and learner support relevant to this course and these students available through the college tutors.

In this context the issue of voice re-emerged, and the limited agency within the division of labour for the colleges:

FE 5 :...out in the colleges we seem to have no ownership at all. We just seem to be told 'this is it'. You know, 'you're aware of the chalk face – you deliver it and assess it, but you have no other input other than the routine and highlighting of issues and problems'. But we seem to have no ownership at all.

This reflects FE 4's experience, recounted in his interview, of feeling like 'a bag of bricks' and being 'shunted in and out' of the Module Leader's office having been given the module materials.

When it is explained by HE 1 that the decision had been made at the outset that Module Leaders would all be full time University staff, the response from FE 5 is:

*I'm not talking about becoming Module Leaders, but in-putting into what's actually going on in the modules.*

This is a plea for the recognition of a different type of expertise in their roles within the activity system, and a recognition of different perspectives, priorities and motives. Subsequent challenges through the discussions, for example on issues to do with time to deliver the modules, resulted in proposals for change and adaptation of teaching and assessment for the second cohort, but on terms that did not necessarily involve 'hybridity' or 'co-configuration' (Engestrom, 2004). As previously discussed, such concepts connote mutual and symmetrical engagement.

The 'double bind', on integrating modular teaching and assessment, continued with FE 5 challenging HE 1 that

*...if the issues aren't addressed they will come back time and again, and we'll be sat here next year going over the same issues.*

This led to the final phase of the workshop, the 'how' phase, pulling together aspects of the discussions in the form of action points resulting from the processes of modelling. I moved the discussion to this point at this time as an attempt to identify movement through the double bind. I started by summarizing the issues from the discussions so far: cross-modular, semester based assignments, extended level 1 induction, staff development, learning contracts, personal progress files and personal advisors. HE 1 reassured the group that the University's minor change process would accommodate the necessary changes to the assessment strategy. However, there was still uncertainty about interpretations of the assessment strategy, and the role of Module Leaders. HE 1 appeared defensive, asserting the need for endorsement by the Annual Programme Review (APR).

Indeed toward the end of the discussion HE 1, while recognising the value of the Workshop, questioned its status and the standing of the proposals relative to the formal APR. This resulted from questioning from the group about the need to ensure planned changes were in place for September (the Workshop was in May). Existing hegemonic practices were being challenged, as were the prevailing rules, roles and pedagogic instruments. The response from HE 1 was:

*I wouldn't want this meeting to actually take over the functions of the annual review, because it's the annual review that looks at these types of issues...I mean this is very useful...but this forum if you like is actually ultra vires.*

I intervened to reassure HE 1 that the session was not seeking to replace the APR, but given that this would not take place until late June, that its function could be to make proposals for development and improvement to the APR. HE 1 accepted this, and E1 commented that such processes of development would be critical to recruitment to the programme. FE 5's comment to HE 1 on how useful the session had been in identifying issues to be taken forward was accepted by him as an endorsement for an agenda from the Workshop to be presented to the APR.

The movement on the double bind at this stage appeared as a pragmatic compromise. To an extent there were attempts throughout the Workshop to stabilise the debate and reach consensus on meanings and proposed practices. Were boundaries crossed? They were certainly exposed, and to an extent expressed. It is arguable that such a process of externalization is, in Vygotskian terms, essential to making the tacit explicit, and therefore essential in creating the contexts for 'double binds' to emerge, providing the catalysts for development. One cannot cross or confront boundaries until they are at least exposed and made explicit. Certain 'double binds' by the end of the session were clear. HE 1 recognised the rationale for linking assessment between modules within semesters, and if possible across semesters. However, this posed no threat to the autonomy of either the modular structures or the role of Module Leader.

This change has subsequently happened, at least at a discursive level. However, this was also an early stage in the development process. Nevertheless the distributed nature of knowledge and expertise did have an impact in that assessment patterns were changed for the second cohort of students. University staff were responsive, at this level at least formally and in an espoused way, to the problems of curriculum delivery articulated by those with the experience in the colleges. The division of labour (and status and power) was clear, as were the discursive instruments of modules and forms of assessment, and the operational rules underpinning everything at this collective, discursive, level.

The four espoused outcomes of the first workshop were as follows: firstly, the development of a thematic approach to assessment within semesters with skills embedded in the modules. Secondly, cross-modular themes to teaching and assessment that are clear to students. There would be a more formative and extended induction to the programme, with a focus on the learning agreement, and personal development planning. Finally, professional development needs would be addressed, with Module Leaders and college tutors developing team approaches. These issues would be presented in the Annual Programme Review.

In the following section of the chapter I analyse the development process in the second boundary crossing Workshop. It occurred approximately a year later, after the second cohort of students had been through its first semester. The proposals agreed in Workshop 1 were accepted by the APR. Prior to the Workshop I had interviewed all subjects for a second time in their own localities.

## **Analysis of the second boundary crossing Workshop**

The collaborative practice, a further year on, was still characterised by hierarchies in terms of roles, rules and tools, as well as culture clashes of FE teachers used to operating within clearly managed practices having to relate to relatively autonomous Module Leaders at the University. However, there was a greater self-confidence and recognition by the FE teachers of their own identity and expertise with the kind of students on this Foundation Degree – employed, part-time adult-returners. There was a relative openness of discussion and a sense of recognition, especially by the colleges, of the complementary areas of expertise essential to the success of the activity, despite the structural, regulatory differences.

A key issue throughout had been the HE tutors' emphasis on knowledge transfer, particularly the volume, and the practicalities for the 'teacher-labourers' in the colleges of meeting the needs of learner diversity in three hours per week. Different perspectives and priorities for the four identified targets from Workshop 1 were still evident, and rooted in hierarchical divisions of expertise and professional interest. For example, while there had been developments in cross modular themes and assessment, comparatively little had taken place in personal development planning, and the colleges had either developed their own systems, or had adapted existing college practices. This was also the case for professional development. Different perspectives and motivation by the subjects in conceptualising the object provided boundaries for the Workshop.

It had three distinct phases: firstly, evaluation of the practices decided at the previous Workshop, reflecting on processes of implementation and involving contested dialogue

equivalent to a phase of questioning (see the expansive cycle in Fig 4.2); secondly, forward modelling (a form of planning and modelling based on consolidating practice from Workshop 1) and finally a degree of reflective dialogue on the experience. These can be mapped onto the expansive learning cycle, but the experience of this research suggests that the process is not as sequential as the model indicates. In this section I will focus on the first two, and in particular will analyse two episodes, one from the questioning phase, and the second from the forward modelling phase, which provided the focus for confrontation on the 'double bind'. This was not a new issue, and had roots in the first interviews and Workshop 1. It suggests a cyclical nature of expansive learning in this case – or even a helical process involving regularly returning to deeply rooted issues with learning and change taking place, in this particular case, incrementally. Perhaps this is a characteristic of double binds in asymmetrical boundary relationships, and ongoing contested hegemonies.

The opening period of the Workshop focused on progress on the four outcomes from the previous Workshop. The push to integrate the semester one and two modules demonstrated an interpretation from the colleges and employer, and the EDU that can be categorised as active engagement to generate a coherent cross-modular learning experience for the students. In contrast HE 1 made reference to 'amendments to the 'overlapping' modules', and the fact that they have been through the Programme Approval Sub-committee to 'eliminate some points of contact where they duplicate'. At the formal level (the University's 'textual' interpretation of Workshop 1 outcomes) regulative structures have therefore been used to ensure differentiation of the modules, but the practice in the colleges has been, textually (Ball: 1993), to stress the complementarity and possibly the integration, of both subject matter and assessment.

However, the move to cross-modularity has met with mixed responses from the colleges and the students. This was put down to students from the previous year talking to new students, but it was assumed by the college staff that after another year it would become accepted as standard practice by students. HE 3 had stood in to cover teaching for FE 4 when he was ill (HE 3 was also a University Governor at that college). He felt the cross-modularity of the delivery formalised certain conceptual links across the modules that had been previously merely 'inferred' (his term) for the students. His experience was that students now see the links across the modules owing to the changes introduced. There were other issues that had not worked as planned, such as students not contacting fellow students working on similar assignment themes through the virtual learning environment based at different colleges. FE 5 commented:

*...it was like a dating agency. They didn't like it – nobody fancied them.*

However, the college response to the curriculum changes was pragmatic, with FE 5 accepting 'I just don't think there is much more tweaking you can do'.

This contrasted with the differing perspectives on lack of progress with personal development planning (PDP). However, an impending QAA review of the programme had accelerated the University's response, although HE 1 insisted

*I had already started to develop that professional (sic) development portfolio long before QAA...I was on a University-wide committee.*

FE 3 commented:

*Prior to that document you have produced we didn't really have anything to work with at all.*

This reflects a wide range of FE opinion from the first interviews, and FE 5 continued her role in the collective session as a voice for the colleges in contesting University discursive practices and instruments. For the PDP being developed she commented

*...things come from the University that work in the University and they work on paper, but try to put it into practice; trying to adopt it in a college situation doesn't work.*

There was relative satisfaction from a number of the colleges with the use of the learning agreement (contract) as an instrument for students developing independent learning skills, but again this was being used in an unco-ordinated way, and in some cases college portfolio-building practices were being used in the absence of University instruments.

What follows is a period of transition to an episode of contested questioning, introduced by reflective critique of current planning processes by HE 2 and HE 3. HE 2 commented on the complexity of the curriculum partnership:

*It's so complex...there are so many conflicting factors. If you just look at one college ...in the first year it could have gone swimmingly, the second year perhaps they stumble over who's going to teach...so you get different feedback from the group.*

HE 3 follows up with

*...whether the thing is well planned or well organised, it's the unpredictability, and I guess the same could apply not from the college point of view, but from the context the students are working in.*

This was a reference to students in the college where he stood in for FE 4 having to re-apply for their jobs through re-structuring. HE 1 also contributed to this by acknowledging the limitations of rationalist planning principles.

HE 2 then explained how her marginal position organisationally – outside the host Faculty/School, reinforced the complexity she was discussing. Such reflective critiques by the HE staff provided a platform for FE 5 to reintroduce a double bind from the first workshop: the division of labour between writing and delivering modules, and the embodied structure within the regulated designation of roles through rules and assumed practices:

*I always feel...it's the fact that stuff is handed down to us even though we talk about ownership of the course...the module is so determined by the Module Leader...Try teaching what you are writing and then work out how you need to change it...it's handed down, and unless you actually go in and try to teach it to the type of students that are coming into the college three hours a week ...try to deliver this module to them yourself.*

This episode is presented in Appendix 3. When HE 1 responds with a question about how the problem might be resolved, FE 5, with the enthusiastic support of E 1, responds by inviting him into her college to teach the module. HE 1 recognises the value of this but raises the 'practicalities' of resources, time and other constraints. While acknowledging these, HE 2, acknowledges to FE 5 directly that she is right. Another of the tutors, FE 3, then validates FE 5's assertions:

*I think there are some module tutors (Module Leaders) that have got really false expectations because they are not aware of the problems that you are facing with that particular type of learner.*

FE 5 develops this theme by assertively demonstrating how she adapts the material and prioritises in the learners' interests:

*...adapting to what you have been given...to suit the students. You supplement it in ways the students can understand it.*

Such an exposition of professional priorities, expertise and practice encourages FE 3 to share

*I might go in one week and decide that I will completely change the next sessions because I have noticed they have missed something.*

The dialogue represents an emerging positioning of the college 'voice' in this context, and a challenge to the dominant message. The other three college tutors lend their

support through reinforcing verbal comment and non-verbal signals, supporting the data picked up in the individual interviews prior to the Workshop.

It culminates in FE 5's categorical assertion of the expertise in the colleges, largely unrecognised by the hierarchical roles, practices and discourses within the collective system. It manifests itself as a subordinate, but necessarily complementary motivation and expertise for the partnership, and is now asserting its voice:

*You have to go where they want to take you, because it's important to them...you might start off with something that dominates the whole of the class because they want to talk about it, they want to relate it back to their experience...you have to go with that...that's given them something to bring back to the next session: it's about flexibility, but that isn't implied within the modules.*

This episode of questioning represents a complete clash of epistemologies and pedagogies, and is consistent with the data from the first interviews in the previous chapter. It is the result of tensions within the activity system culminating in this moment. It represents an important development from the outcomes of Workshop 1. In Engestrom's (2001) terms this is a turning point where something has to give. HE 1's response effectively opens the way to a phase of analysis and modelling in attempting to move the development forward:

*In listening to that I am thinking increasingly that the sessions at the colleges shouldn't be so rigid.*

However, his subsequent contribution is to propose more delivery from the University, with lectures on the internet supplemented by module workbooks. This is supported by HE 2, and there was a degree of recognition of value in such resources from the colleges. However, the tension between student needs and module coverage discussed in the interview data and in Workshop 1 was resurrected at this point. HE 2 commented that 'some groups were worried they were so far behind other groups', and ventured 'sometimes... they are not there because they are not getting the delivery'. FE 5 again identified the issue of pacing delivery, citing an example of being 'inundated' with e-mails from students after three hours of delivery, and claiming the time allowance was not sufficient.

The phase of modelling in this case represents a process of accommodation around contested discursive practices. The critical issues for the University staff reflect epistemological and pedagogical issues of knowledge transfer, quality (HE 2 refers to a need for 'ironing out variation', a theme consistent with a more didactic approach discussed in the analysis of her interview data in the previous chapter), and assessment practices within modular structures. Recognition of the constraints in the colleges results in a restatement of a proposal by HE 1, supported by HE 2, for more of the delivery to be done at the University. This is not a recognition of the alternative expertise, pedagogies or epistemologies of the colleges, but a statement of the need for more effective and consistent modes of delivery, in their terms, to ensure transfer of knowledge. It is consistent with the interview data, where despite the differences in HE staff they still had a common outlook on pedagogy.

At this rather tense moment I asked the college tutors how they saw things developing, in recognition of their expertise with these students. It was a movement forward into the next episode of forward modelling.

FE 5's response recognises the need for an overarching academic framework, but also offers a plea for reciprocity and a recognition of expertise:

*You have to have a structure...but I think at the local level we have to take that on-board, but the University chooses what happens...at the chalk face we are delivering it, we are getting to know what works and what doesn't. If we feed that back (to the Module Leaders) they need to take that on-board, and not say 'no you can't'...*

She wants for the colleges not necessarily hybridity, but a degree of co-configuration, which requires a degree of 'mutual exchange' (Engestrom, 2004: 2) or at least an opportunity for different motives to be recognised (Nardi: 2005) and accommodated.

The dialogue in this subsequent episode reflects positions characteristic of individual practices, and is framed within the earlier discussion on moving more teaching to the University. For HE 1 this means:

*I would need a full day and an evening to deliver significant parts of Asset Building*

HE 2's response is

*We'll have to be flexible for different modules – you couldn't talk at someone for three hours.*

This acknowledges the implied criticism from the colleges of University pedagogic practices. It also represents a degree of acknowledgement and accommodation of the college voice. The needs of the learner are priority for FE 5, stressing in induction that links between assessment and themes in the first semester modules should be crystal clear for the students – 'you know, lay it down for them'. At this HE2 expresses surprise, thinking they had been made clear following the actions agreed at Workshop 1. This illustrates both the distributed nature of knowledge in collective developmental practices, and the distance between discourse and text (Ball: 1993) in processes of implementation.

The process of accommodating perspectives and priorities through modelling leads gradually to attempts to stabilize the debate and agree to normalize the practice of more delivery at the University. This meets University priorities, and is discursively presented by HE 2 in a way that accommodates the college tutors' priority of supporting the learner:

*I mean it must be difficult for them (FE tutors) to have that concrete information in their handbooks and not really have the forum to deliver it in. I don't know how you get round that.*

This is Nardi's (op.cit.) point about recognising and aligning motives, and her article illustrates how recognition of different motives within an activity system is sometimes

necessary to interweave contested, but complementary perspectives on the object. Of course this could alternatively be perceived as a manipulative use of the discourse.

HE 1 offers a conciliatory comment that an hour and a half per week for each module is inadequate. FE 5 responds by explaining that in some sessions 'we started doubling up as it was the only way you could continue it through'.

From a quality perspective, a priority for the University, this is a potentially risky revelation to the University representatives, but the moment encouraged a degree of revelation, which simultaneously implied a criticism of the practicality of the University's expectations. The circumstances of the moment made it obvious there would be no scope for criticism of this position from HE 1.

In these circumstances attempts to stabilize and move forward result in a key moment in the dialogue:

*HE 2: So that would work from your point of view – to have more formal delivery at the University?*

This is a possibly leading, and rather closed question. The pressure of the moment, and the fact that it came from HE 2, who had demonstrated a degree of empathy with the arguments of the colleges at key moments throughout the Workshop, was significant.

*FE 5: I think when they come into the University and you do keynote lectures to them, I think that would be useful.*

FE 5's position as opinion leader is endorsed by FE 3:

*I think that as a lecturer that gives you a point to aim at.*

However, FE 5 does express reservations that it 'would not sort everything', particularly across the other colleges, where she says 'I don't know whether they are all doing something different'. It is not clear whether this position is one of mutual accommodation or capitulation. In terms of what is said, it appears to be the former. Her reservations, however, indicate that perhaps in the pressure of the moment she feels she has gone too far and is attempting to retreat to a more acceptable position. This is an example of where the boundary crossing Workshop data is insufficient on its own, and needs to be recognised as 'discursive', and examined in processes of implementation away from the pressure of the moment.

The division of labour (and status and power) was clear throughout the whole process of development in both Workshops, and the frustration expressed by the colleges and to a lesser degree the employer reflected the dominant discourses, rules and tools-instruments to which they were being required to adapt at this collective level. Their frustration is reminiscent of Wenger's assertion of the need for negotiability of meaning in such collaborative activity:

*When in a community of practice the distinction between production and adoption of meaning reflects enduring patterns of engagement among members – that is, when some always produce and some always adopt – the local economy of meaning yields*

*very uneven ownership of meaning. This situation, when it persists, results in a mutually reinforcing condition of both marginality and inability to learn. (Wenger, 1998:203)*

In spite of this, positions adopted through the development Workshops do indicate a degree of gradual transition resulting from the bottom up, with the colleges' more constructivist, learner centred pedagogic approach resulting in effective challenges to the more traditional University didactic approaches of knowledge transfer. This was not a coalescence of hybridity – rather a gradual recognition of motivation and expertise which needed to be explicitly threaded into the experience of the activity system, if only pragmatically.

Experience in processes of implementation away from the 'knot', in the colleges, the workplace and even outside the host Faculty in the University was critical in this, and I will develop this perspective and its impact on the expansiveness of the collective endeavour in the first part of the next chapter, and in the remodelling of the process at the end of that chapter. However, this occurred over a full two year period, indicating that time and the formation of relationships are important factors in advancing change. It would appear to represent a gradual process of varying degrees of mutual learning and accommodation, built on challenge and contesting practices rather than boundary crossing, which implies movement and transformation, understanding and even experiencing others' worlds, in a Liberal Humanist way . Or rather, it implies a more pragmatic realization of the need for instrumental compromise in processes of partnering in order to work expansively towards a multi-faceted object - one that gives coherence to this range of perspective and motivation. Whichever the interpretation, it

still validates 'development work methodology' as an expansive instrument for collaborative practice, and expansive learning conceptually captures recognition of the need for such compromise.

The notion of the activity system (Fig. 3.1, page 47) in this case needs to accommodate diversity of subject (partner) perspective and motive in framing the object and its development over both time, and the affordances offered by different localities in processes of implementation. The outcomes of Workshop 2 represent an incremental accommodation of motives, externalized through collaborative activity, around conceptualizations of the object; developmental and expansive to varying degrees, but not affected solely by the face to face experience. Compatibility and complementarity of motivation and expertise, and their recognition, was critical in this case, ensuring development in ways that satisfied, again to varying degrees, the different subjects. For the college partners, this means that their priorities of skills diagnosis, personal development planning, and knowledge construction on a whole programme basis match the expertise they bring and roles they expect to fulfil within the partnership. For the University tutors, priorities of knowledge transfer, assessment, quality and consistency were also accommodated. Of course these were the espoused outcomes at the collective level. The employer 'voice' at this level was extremely limited, defensive of interests and tended to side with the colleges. In the first section of Chapter 7 I will examine issues of implementation outside the 'knot', and attempt to trace their impact subsequently at the 'knot', between Workshops 1 and 2, in the remodelling process.

The Workshops demonstrate that in this case issues of roles, rules and tools-instruments, and their discursive constitution, reification and enactment represented a

power differential within the activity system. The regulative nature of the discourse, differential access by subjects to and enactment of power-knowledge within the system, embodied within the division of labour, resulted in tensions and hegemonic contest that did at least provide the necessary foci for development. It could be argued that these tensions might have produced necessary changes anyway over time, without this process of intervention through the Workshops. That is a possibility. However, it is unlikely that such detailed engagement and confrontation of the issues would have taken place in more formally structured discursive settings, such as Boards of Study or the process of Annual Programme Review.

While the discursive instruments and practices are reflective of power within the partnership, structural factors were contested and developed, and experience and practice away from the knot did impact on collective practice, albeit differentially. Away from the knot it appears variation in the implementation of espoused outcomes impacts in a relational way on the potential expansiveness at the interface. The next chapter considers data that deals with this issue, and this is important in addressing my second and third research questions – in particular the issue of what elaboration and development of Activity Theory is necessary to enhance its illuminating potential in this kind of case, and how effective is such an elaboration?

## Chapter 7

### **Re-contextualising outcomes of ‘knotworking’, and re-modelling processes of expansive learning**

This chapter has two purposes. The first is to investigate examples of actual practice in processes of re-contextualisation away from the ‘knot’ involving issues of affordance and agency in local implementation of decisions made in the Workshops. The premise is that meanings, procedures and intended practices discursively constituted at the ‘knot’ are subject to priorities constituted at locales away from the ‘knot’, both by the subjects within the capacities of their relative agency, and by the affordances offered by the locality, such as degrees of cultural, organisational, pedagogical and strategic synergy. This position facilitates an ontological depth enabling analysis and comparison across different partner sites or activity systems pursuing an ‘object’. It extends the analysis of power from the previous chapter beyond the interfacing contested discourses at the collective levels to a consideration of the relative impact of the partners in implementing collective decisions within their own activity systems. It also provides a conceptualization of expansiveness that can be de-centred and differentiated; local and relational as well as systemic. To illustrate: there are situations of transition and development at local levels within the partnership which are essentially dyadic (for example between a college and an employer), which may have a differential impact subsequently on what happens in the collective Workshops.

This strand of data analysis is interrelated with those in the previous chapters, and contributes directly to the remodelling of Activity Theory relevant to all three research

questions. For example the 'textual' (Ball: 1993) data from the localities might have impact on the dynamic and direction of what happens at the collective, discursive level of the Workshops and vice versa, and also has roots in the data on subjects' conceptualisations of and motivations on the object. This illustrates the theoretical and ontological position outlined in Chapter 3: the individual and collective levels of analysis are not distinct, but dualistic, and framed by time and space (locality). Issues of scale (Hodkinson et al: 2008), in the relationship between the local and the systemic, are also significant in this regard, and I will discuss this in the final part of this chapter.

It builds on the analysis of subjectivity developed throughout Chapters 3, 5 and 6, and uses recent theoretical developments in socio-cultural perspectives on work-based learning (Billett: 2006, on the relational interdependence of individual and social perspectives; Lee et. al. (2004) and Fuller and Unwin (2004), on 'expansive/restrictive' affordances of workplaces and 'learning territories' and Hodkinson's et al's (2008) use of Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field), linked to phenomenological theory on processes of implementation (Ball: op cit), to analyse the relative impact and expansiveness of the collective discourse from the Workshops at local levels.

The second purpose of the chapter is to identify issues from the data that need to be incorporated in an elaborated and redeveloped Activity Theory. These issues will also be used to provide a remodelled conceptualization of Activity Theory that spans dimensions of time and locality in a way that helps to explain the expansive experience researched, but also is consistent with emerging theoretical perspectives in socio-cultural theory. Activity Theory is a work in progress, and in this case I am adapting its

function as a 'clarifying and descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive theory' (Nardi, 1996: 7), as previously stated.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: I will first deal with the theoretical dimension of the duality of the individual and collective dimensions of the partnership to explain the differential impact of the collective discourse across the partnership, and a de-centred notion of expansiveness. I will then analyse the data from the second interviews using this perspective to see what evidence is provided to model a typology of the partners which incorporates differential strategic and operational synergies and degrees of expansiveness. The data analysis, as explained in Chapters 1 and 4, has itself been an emerging process with iterative engagement between theory and literature in efforts to expand interpretive repertoires. The final part of the chapter will focus on a reflective reformulation of Activity Theory based on the research.

### **Re-contextualisation – issues of cultural and organisational synergy and embodied, positional agency**

The term 're-contextualisation' is used to avoid the dualism of 'context' and 'de-contextualisation' (Lave, 1993:22) based on the premise of context as a container. Rather, the context is processual and what happens in partner localities in processes of implementation impacts to varying degrees on the activity and learning at the 'knot', and vice versa. Re-contextualisation is therefore an extension of an ongoing relational process between different localities by the same actors. Throughout the thesis I have made use of Ball's (1993) distinction between 'discourse' and 'text', and this is particularly relevant to the way the Foundation Degree discourse has been framed

within hegemonic discursive practices of the University in this partnership. However, my emphasis in using these terms is not dichotomous, but rather relational (after Henry: 1993, Ozga: 2000) and 'intertextual' (Fairclough: 1992). Away from the collective discourse, dominated by the University, the outcomes of the Workshops have had to go through a process of 'textual' re-entry, to varying degrees, into the prevailing discursive practices of the partners' activity systems. Ball makes his distinction to accommodate 'localised complexity' in his phenomenological position on policy implementation. Foundation Degrees are policy driven, and the localised implementation of collective curriculum discourse is equally problematic. Thus:

*...the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, co-operation, and (importantly) intertextual compatibility.*

(Ball, op. cit: 13)

The intertextuality of implementation at the local level, away from the 'knot', also involves engagement between the colleges and employers to varying degrees; a process of local 'knotworking'. Such enactment therefore also depends on degrees of situational affordance, and on the positional 'capital' and degree of agency afforded to, and exercised by, the individual partner representative in the process of re-entry. I will briefly develop these themes and metaphors as instruments to analyse the processes of re-contextualisation.

The analysis borrows concepts from recent literature on learning through work. In looking at 'Learning as Work Research', Lee et al (2004) questioned how workplaces may shape individual learning and opportunities for learning, how learners are active

participants within learning processes at work and links between organisational structures and individual engagement in learning at work. Such issues are of relevance to this research in looking at the relative expansiveness of the experience for partners in processes of re-contextualisation. Their study, also citing Ashton (2004), Billett (2001, 2002b), and Fuller and Unwin (2003; 2004), showed that decisions to participate within learning environments in the workplace are not simply grounded in free-will, but are constrained or enabled through the positions individuals occupy across the multiple contexts and sets of relationships they experience. Billett (2001) notes opportunities are not evenly afforded; that there is differential positioning. However, this does not determine who takes up what is afforded in terms of opportunities, and a degree of agency is involved. Also, regarding localised 'knotworking', a partner might have a significant degree of agency within the college, but horizontal links with the local employer might be 'restricted', limiting affordances for development.

Fuller and Unwin (2004) developed the notion of an 'expansive-restrictive' continuum of affordances for learning and development for individuals. 'Restrictive' means opportunities for development and learning are limited, while 'expansive' means a variety of opportunities are facilitated. They are not advocating a structural determinism; rather they develop the notion of 'learning territories' (consisting of the range of opportunities for learning and development). They state:

*The character and scope of the individual's learning territory (as well as how they respond to it) influences how he or she engages with opportunities and barriers to learning at work. (Fuller and Unwin: 2004: 133)*

They state this involves the structure-agency dynamic in ways that avoids both voluntarism and determinism. My interpretation of 'learning' incorporates formal and informal experiences, and expansive processes of development.

Billett (2006) argues that the workplace affords particular kinds of experience, but these experiences are not available uniformly. Despite his more agential and individualistic perspective, Billett acknowledges that while individuals are 'reflective' and 'evaluative', they are differentially positioned and that agency is relational. An interesting notion in terms of accessing the subject is Billett's notion of 'relational interdependence', which he summarises as 'individualising the social, and socialising the individual' (op. cit: 54); a neat way of viewing the duality between the individual and the collective in this research in both the 'embodied' links between activity systems, and the individual partner engaging with his/her activity system.

Hodkinson et al (2008) take these issues further through linking 'participative' (after Sfard: 1998) theories of learning with a Deweyan notion of 'embodied construction', and using Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' and 'field' to understand the relative impact and agency of individuals within the cultures and organisations in which they operate.

Relevant to processes of re-contextualisation by partners for this research, they state

*Cultures are (re)produced by individuals, just as much as individuals are (re)produced by cultures, though individuals are differentially positioned with regard to shaping and changing a culture – in other words differences in positioning and power are always an issue too (Hodkinson et al: 2008: 34)*

In terms of affordances they go on to assert, after Bourdieu (1986):

*The impact of an individual on a learning culture depends upon a combination of their position within that culture, their dispositions towards that culture and the various types of capital (social, cultural and economic) that they possess. (op. cit: 37).*

They use Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' to demonstrate 'structures operating within and through individuals' (op.cit: 38), and explain dispositions, which 'amount to more than attitudes, motivations and interests, and include a sense of reality, of what is possible' (op. cit: 39). Such a sense of what is possible is important in understanding the sense-making and understanding of their own agency that the partners in this research have in the process of re-entry. Early in my coding of the data I was conscious of an affective dimension, which I called 'will' or desire. The college tutors and E 1 had this, particularly early in the development, more than the HE tutors. Hodkinson et al (op cit: 39) seem to capture this difference:

*Sometimes existing dispositions were reinforced. Sometimes new dispositions could be formed or existing dispositions changed. One way of understanding learning is as a process through which the dispositions that make up a person's habitus are confirmed, developed, challenged or changed.*

Dispositions and the various forms of capital used by Hodkinson et al. may not be enough, however, unless they accommodate something which is essentially outside the person, but perceived in and recognised by others in the person – a form of relational and 'positional' or 'professional' capital which enables, endorses and legitimises, but

which is not sufficiently articulated by these other forms of capital. Hodkinson et al go on to embrace the term 'horizons' for learning, 'established through the ongoing and sometimes changing interrelationship between their dispositions and the learning cultures in which they participate' (op. cit: 40). The point is made that such horizons are 'relational'. This is important in both understanding the subjects' conceptualisations of the object, the relational positioning of their horizons in terms of power and role taking, their motivation and the issues of re-contextualisation within the refractive processes of re-entry within their activity systems. It also influences the potential for subsequent processes of localised 'knotworking' between colleges and employers.

There is no intention to engage in detail with the intricacies of Hodkinson et al's theoretical position, particularly on Bourdieu. However, it provides, heuristically, along with Fuller and Unwin's notions of differential agency within 'expansive-restrictive' affordances, conceptual and analytical tools to facilitate access to processes of re-contextualisation, and the variation in degrees of expansive learning through these processes. Such degrees facilitate questioning of the extent to which processes of expansive learning are systemic at the collective level, and differentiated and de-centred locally, and what the consequences of this are in subsequent iterations for the collective expansive cycle.

## Case studies of re-contextualisation

The key responsibilities for actions to be implemented from Workshop 1 (cross-modular themes to teaching and assessment, skills embedding in the modules, extended induction and the implementation of personal development planning and professional development) were located equally between the colleges and the University, but the fact that the courses were being delivered in the colleges means the data from the college interviews is particularly important. The second interviews took place approximately a year after the first, and ten months after Workshop 1. In analysing the case studies, I have categorised them in three ways, as designated in Table 7.1.

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
<p><b>Strategic and operational synergy</b></p>	<p><b>Strategic and operational synergy</b></p>	<p><b>Strategic and operational synergy</b></p>
<p><b>Examples:</b> E 1 and FE 1</p>	<p><b>Examples:</b> FE 3 and 5 E 4</p>	<p><b>Examples:</b> FE 2 and FE 4 E 2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High employer-college 'localised knotworking'</li> <li>• High Employer commitment</li> <li>• High College commitment</li> <li>• Medium University commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low employer-college 'localised knotworking'</li> <li>• Low employer commitment</li> <li>• High College commitment</li> <li>• Medium University commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low employer-college 'localised knotworking'</li> <li>• Low employer commitment</li> <li>• Low college commitment</li> <li>• Low University commitment</li> </ul>

**Table 7.1 Degrees of partner strategic and operational synergy in processes of re-contextualisation**

The categories represent relative degrees of strategic and operational synergy.

Category 1 involves a high degree of synergy by the partners (college and employer) within their own organisations and in engaging with processes of 'localised knotworking' between the college and the employer, but medium degrees of synergy between the college and the University in engaging with the collective outcomes from Workshop 1.

Category 2 involves a high degree of strategic and operational synergy in processes of re-contextualisation within the colleges, but little 'localised knotworking', and medium degrees of synergy between the colleges and the University in implementing the collective outcomes. Category 3 involves partners in the colleges with minimal 'positional capital', little 'localised knotworking' with employers, and low degrees of synergy between the colleges and the University in engaging in collective outcomes.

The categorisation is to facilitate a more detailed analysis which incorporates issues of disposition, positioning, and degrees of affordance in processes of re-contextualisation. I will also consider issues of expansive learning in each of the categories. The focus for the analysis of the categories will be the colleges, but issues of implementation with the employers (including affordances for 'localised knotworking') and the University will also be considered when appropriate.

***Category 1 High employer and college, medium university strategic and operational synergy***

As a manager within his college, and with responsibility for college links with Higher Education ('I write the HE strategy') FE 1 is in a strong position within his organisation to push forward the collective decisions from the workshop. He is highly experienced, and

respected, by both management and staff. He has a direct link to the College's Director of Curriculum (the Vice Principal), and strategic and management support for engagement with the Foundation Degree. This has resulted in the college developing a specific building in the college, the 'Management Unit' as 'a more professional base' for 'prestigious courses'. Also the college, based in North East Lancashire, an area with no local facility for higher education at that time, saw this as a strategic investment linked to its expansion of higher level work. The course therefore also had wider management and strategic support. This was helped by the fact that the chief executive of the local authority, providing the students for the course, was also a college governor. This formal support had recently resulted in the college investing in a computer suite for the programme. The strategic significance to the organisation was reinforced by the fact that this was the only curriculum link with a university:

*...there is that perpetual link (with the University)...we are not franchising with 300 other universities, doing all sorts of things.*

FE 1 was therefore in a strong position in terms of his social, cultural and 'positional' capital within the organisation to support the re-contextualisation of the Workshop outcomes, within the capacities he had. In terms of his disposition to utilise his position he was also keen to ensure progress, to the extent that he appointed an extra member of staff for the programme, and gave half that lecturer's time in the first year of appointment to be based with the employer and the workplace mentors, enabling 'localised knotworking' in a highly practical sense. In terms of a 'restrictive-expansive continuum of affordance' (Fuller and Unwin: 2004) he was positioned to learn, on behalf of his organisation, and clearly was acting to use the experience as expansively as

possible for the strategic development of his organisation. His experience with the University after the Workshop was limiting, however. He referred to the 'academic drift' of the programme, of Module Leaders simply 'handing down' materials in module packs and of the University not fulfilling its side of the bargain from the Workshop – hence he had to use the college's own PDP processes and skills packs, thereby situating Workshop outcomes within the college's own practices. This occurred for all of the colleges.

The link with the employer, through E 1, was extremely strong, to the extent that it was effectively dyadic within the larger partnership activity system. I will refer to this in discussions of 'scale' (Hodkinson et al: 2008), later in the chapter. It was reminiscent of Engestrom's ideal notions of boundary crossing, and the third generation of Activity Theory as expounded in his 2001 paper (see Fig 3.2: page 73), and in subsequent papers on 'co-configuration' (for example: Engestrom: 2004). Again, this was influenced by the experience, reputation and degree of agency afforded to E 1 within her organisation. It also resulted from the strategic synergy of the activity with the organisational priorities at that time (see Chapter 5), and the fact that E 1 contributed to the shaping of the collective outcomes, and indeed subsequently decoded them, in ways that clearly aligned with her objectives. In this she enjoyed the direct interest taken by her chief executive, and was supported by his social and positional capital.

She was able to utilise the increase in staffing provided by the college. However, she also actively embedded the appropriate outcomes of the Workshops within the organisation's own professional development strategies and actual work practices in the

departments. For example, in supporting the curriculum development and assessment strategies for the cross-modular assignments she stated:

*We have a role to play in providing them with the most effective type of piece of research that they need to do – not being dreamt up for them, but real live issues.*

E 1 involved the 'service managers' in 'shaping the learning', and even used the PDPs developed locally with the college as part of the appraisal and 'CPD' process:

*We ask the line manager and the individual to consider the impact of any learning and development that they have participated in over the previous year.*

E1 clearly sought to maximise the potential afforded by her position in the process of re-contextualisation, and align it to developments within the organisation. The local authority had identified and appointed forty 'Change Agents' as it continued its process of continuous evaluation and development. All Foundation Degree students were invited to be members of this group.

The affordances and positional capital of these two partners, boundary spanners in processes of co-configuration between their organisations, simultaneously supported by and enacting strategic and organisational priorities through the partnership, a 'force field' of synergy (Hodkinson, op. cit: 35, after Bourdieu: 1985), led to a relatively expansive local experience of re-contextualisation. The 'textual' (Ball 1993) interpretation and implementation was situated to maximise local benefit to these two partners. The designation of 'medium synergy' with the University is based on the

commitment both showed throughout to attendance and participation not just at the Workshops, but in other more formal meetings, such as moderation and exam boards, and at the University days for the students.

***Category 2 - Low employer, high college, and medium university strategic and operational synergy***

Both FE 3 and FE 5 shared high levels of affordance within their colleges for processes of re-contextualisation, but were offered very little encouragement by the employer partners for 'local knotworking'. They were also offered similar levels of support and engagement with the University Programme and Module Leaders as FE 1, but I have categorised this as 'moderate' again owing more to the strategic commitment at the college, rather than the University, to the partnership. Despite only being in a full time job at the college for six months before the programme started, FE 3 seemed to have a higher profile in her college than FE 5, a highly experienced manager with five teaching staff, but operating in a large mixed economy college. FE 3's profile possibly had something to do with her mother's presence, who had been until recently a highly respected Head of the Faculty in which FE 3 was now based, but had retired and was doing some work for the college part-time.

The short-cuts to social and 'positional' capital in the organisation this provided for her were reinforced by the fact that she was quickly recognised as 'the expert' in the college on Foundation Degrees, the 'first port of call', as she called it, for the college management on Foundation Degrees, and links with the University (the college is based in the same city as the University), an area of strategic expansion for the college. She

was also recognised as the 'boundary spanner' with Higher Education owing to this experience:

*I am the go-between between the University and staff at the college.*

Her capital - social, cultural and 'positional' was seen as essential by the college management:

*The managers are very nervous because they don't understand the workings of the University.*

She cited an example of the management asking her to participate in staff recruitment for higher level work, but she refused, seeing this as a management responsibility. She was also asked by the Director responsible for contractual matters between the college and the University to advise on funding:

*The Director will talk to me before she will move on to other people – why I don't know, but now I am supposed to be this font of all knowledge.*

An extract from this interview is provided in Appendix 4. Her degree of agency and the affordances offered to her were made more 'expansive' (Fuller and Unwin:2004) by the fact that a competing local sixth form college, also an Associate College of the University, had been involved in discussions about delivering the programme, and an agreement had been reached that FE 3's college would deliver the programme for the first two intakes. The issue of delivery would then be reviewed. FE 3 benefited from, and

possibly exploited these circumstances to expose areas in the college that needed to be improved. For example, she worked with her Director of Curriculum to standardise practices from the Foundation Degree as college practices for all courses at all levels, including policies and procedures on assessment and the return of marked work, late submission of work and recognition of 'personal mitigating circumstances' (PMC).

*...the PMC form is now part of corporate policy.*

She had also initiated other practices as standard:

*...the exam board and the moderation panels are a fantastic experience.*

It can be argued that this is an example of expansiveness through a collective zone of proximal development (the partnership) that is experienced locally, and in a decentred way within the larger activity system of the partnership, and is an example of the issue of 'scale' (Hodkinson et al: 2008) and differentiated expansiveness. These changes would not have happened in this way at this time without the learning from the collective experience with the University and perhaps the other partners. The affordances offered by the 'expansive' rather than the 'restrictive' circumstances in processes of re-contextualisation also were a factor, and it contrasts with the experience of other partners. Hence the expansiveness is differentiated, but also at this scale in the larger activity system of the partnership it is significant, perhaps in contrast to the larger activity system as a whole.

Her disposition to the role has been positive and embraced by a cycle of reinforcing expansiveness within her organisation – to the extent that the college insisted on practices established through this experience being used in developing Foundation Degrees with another university. FE 3's 'professional' and 'positional' capital was recognised within her college and increasingly by the University:

*If I am certain something is going to go wrong (a University policy or intervention) I have found that at times it's better to sit back and listen to what's being said, try to put your point of view over, but just agree to go with it anyway until you actually watch it go wrong, and you can say,*

and has facilitated opportunities for expansive 'textualisation' within the college. However, the frustration in dealing with the dominant discursive practices of the University in the locality still prevail, and in particular the practices around PDPs, induction, and also the absence of collaboration with the employer. For this she blames the University, as the dominant partner (she has an unproblematised conception of 'management', from her FE experience).

FE 5 has less of a profile within her college, the largest in the UK, but has a significant presence within her Faculty. However, she has considerable experience of delivering university programmes and reports directly to her Head of Faculty, who is also responsible for all higher level work in the college. Throughout the interview she used the word 'judgement' regularly, exercising her professional autonomy in situating and re-contextualising her prioritised outcomes from the Workshop in ways that met, in her judgement, the needs of the students and the approaches and practices to which she

and her colleagues work, as much as possible, and on their terms. In her judgement Module Leaders 'writing in isolation' (the first 'double bind' in Workshop 2), and 'not looking at the bigger picture' meant she and colleagues 'sorted it between them'.

Her confidence, experience and position facilitated considerable discretion in her using her 'judgement', supported by her Head of Faculty. For example, where other colleges expressed concerns over the induction, as suggested by the University, she developed her own practices, and brought in second year students to 'buddy' first years. She used discretion to develop her own PDP and study skills arrangements. She is particularly critical of the volume of 'content' in the modules, and the Module Leaders, who

*Assume...the students are already independent learners, and that is a big mistake.*

She enjoys discretion in her ability to prioritise issues and manage her time in processes of implementation, and as a manager she has the flexibility to attend meetings at the University:

*I can wangle my teaching schedule*

- to the extent that her Head of Faculty had joked 'they (the University) need to put you a desk up there'.

Like FE 3, the manager responsible for Higher Education in her college, also her line manager, uses this programme as a benchmark for others, and she is looked upon as the expert:

*It's been held up as a role model for Foundation Degrees within the college by the Principal and the Director of Curriculum*

Her exercise of 'judgement' in re-contextualising the programme extended to an insistence that it would be taught for the full fifteen weeks of the semester and not twelve, in contrast to standard University practices:

*...that's something I forced onto the staff...you can't cover three hours by twelve weeks...otherwise you are just focusing on assignments, and then you miss the big picture.*

There are similar constraints in dealings with the University to those cited by FE 3, including lack of direction and module and assessment deadlines. However, FE 5 has a sufficient profile and presence within the Faculty and the wider college, to put her refracted and prioritised stamp on the collective outcomes of Workshop 1. The disappointment for her has been the absence of any 'localised knotworking' with the employer, for whom the programme is merely a traditional day-release scheme.

While the expansive potential for links with the employers was absent for FE 3 and 5, the experience within their organisations was expansive. This should not be interpreted as all positive. The negatives from the experiences, such as the feasibility of module delivery, and other issues of learning and assessment, all caused practical difficulties which provided the bases for the 'double bind' encounters in the Workshops. Where possible FE 3 and FE 5 adapted to local practices or used professional judgement to

make their own decisions. In this process both enjoyed significant elements of 'capital', both in their own identities, and in the professional and positional capital afforded by others. This was also supported by organisational and managerial strategic priorities.

### **Category 3 - Low employer, college and university strategic and operational synergy**

FE 2 and 4 were effectively marginal or marginalised during the process of implementation within their organisations, both personally and strategically. They had little opportunity to compensate for this by engaging in 'localised knotworking' with the employers, who showed little interest in engaging actively with the programme.

However, in spite of this re-contextualisation was expansive to a degree in that it demonstrated to them the limitations and boundaries, the localised double binds in their own activity systems that they did not have the power to influence or advance. Their learning was essentially situated within the classroom practices they experienced and developed, and through the links established externally through the partnership. In terms of professional dispositions there was a significant commitment to the programme, and indeed to the outcomes of Workshop 1, but their limited capital, particularly professional and positional within their organisations, meant the affordances available to them were limited, even negative, and they were operating in relatively 'restrictive' rather than 'expansive' circumstances (Fuller and Unwin: 2004).

FE 2 and FE 4's positioning is a result of tensions between 'managerial' cultures in the colleges and 'professional' cultures in the University (Pritchard 2000), changes in strategic priorities (particularly for FE 2, both with his college and in dealings with the

employer) and the pedagogical tensions between the University and the colleges discussed throughout the thesis. I will use these three strands to analyse both of these cases.

FE 4 's long absence through illness and the college's response to this illustrated the hegemonic managerialism in which he was operating. In discussing the tension between the college and the University on the suitability of the part-time member of staff appointed to cover his absence he stated:

*...they (the students) almost took a walk. They were the wrong decisions. People became entrenched in their power...'I am the manager, therefore this is the person I'm going to put in' ...if you're a manager in a college like this it's just a matter of resources and availability...there was no fit there and it was very difficult for the students.*

His perception of management's attitudes to the programme was negative ('We probably came onboard kicking and screaming'). He said at the time nobody knew what Foundation Degrees were, and

*...there still is confusion, and I constantly get from line managers mixed messages – 'we're not making any money out of it...there may not be a course next year'. I mean, this is the kind of environment which I'm working under.*

He says he is constantly questioned by managers in ways that make him feel undermined and marginal. In particular the processes of collaboration, requiring time, are questioned. He is regularly being asked

*'What're you doing this for? Why are you going to the University? You can't go – we need you here.'*

FE 4 rarely attended events at the University, and he could not attend the Workshops.

FE 2 went from a position of significant positional capital within his college to complete marginalisation with the change of college principal. Before the change the principal had been a key player with the University in initiating the partnership and the bid to be a prototype. He had the support of the chief executive of the local council, who also was a college governor, and earlier in his career had been a college principal. However, the principal retired and the chief executive changed jobs. The focus of the new principal was on recruitment of his core student base – sixteen year olds doing traditional full time courses. FE 2 was quickly isolated, with courses delivered off the main campus, and the principal constantly asking about student numbers and questioning 'what's in it for the college'. These circumstances led FE 2 to state:

*If I got run over by a bus tomorrow I have no idea what would happen (to the programme).*

He sits outside the main college reporting, resourcing and quality assurance systems.

For these issues:

*Channels are via the University. These are the channels I feel this programme is responsible to. In many ways this is just an environment. I am employed by the college,*

*and that is the only involvement they have. We follow the University's guidance, and everything in terms of quality assurance and systems.*

FE 2 however, had the personal resources of professional experience to fall back on. He had previously been a head of department in a college, and in interpreting the requirements of the University and the Module Leaders his experience equipped him with the professional capital to make judgements, like FE 5, about the priorities in the classroom and in assessment, based on the needs of his students. In contrast the limited professional experience of FE 4 reinforced his feelings of professional isolation, and this led to confusion and disagreement with the University on issues of assessment and standards. This was reinforced by his own manager questioning the quality of the teaching materials provided by the University. Of course this might have been motivated by issues other than pedagogy.

FE 4 felt power lay with the University and with his management, and he was somewhere in the middle. However, commitment to the programme and the students meant he had a degree of power in the classroom to influence students. He mentioned this in the context of relations with the University and the materials and schedules handed down by the University:

*'You've got to do this, this and this' (quoting the University)...but, this is the way we'll handle it alright. It comes down to ...trust.*

Effectively this was a plea for the University to recognise the expertise and professionalism of the college tutors, and for the University to recognise the conditions under which the teaching was being delivered:

*You need somebody on board who knows what it's like in these places, how the teaching is done, and what the constraints are. The University doesn't understand the constraints.*

Both FE 2 and FE 4 had problems in dealing with employers, in that for FE 2 the loss of the chief executive meant the key driver at the local authority left, and the initiative no longer had priority. FE 4 never had any opportunity to link with E 2, who although aware of and interested in the development, it was peripheral for her in her strategic position at a time of corporate reorganisation.

The tensions and difficulties experienced by FE 2 and 4 came about as a result of attempted re-contextualisation within their own activity systems. The experience exposed to them the limited affordances of their positions and what they would be likely to achieve. To a limited extent the process can therefore be argued to have been expansive – both at their level, and at the level of the principal for FE 2, who made a decision to withdraw from higher level work based on recruitment to this programme. Of course these decisions and outcomes might have been reached eventually, but these experiences contributed to the emerging acquisition of knowledge on which decisions were made. This relates to Blackler and McDonald's (2000: 847) experience, cited in Chapter 3, that it is '...not possible to shake free and walk away from the knot

unchanged'. The process itself is developmental, even if for the range of partners involved it is highly differentiated, and even negative.

The categorised data in processes of 'textualisation' within affordances of 'base' activity systems illustrates the complexity and diversity of the journeys the espoused outcomes of the collective decision making at the 'knot' have to undergo. It also demonstrates that in spite of the discursive hegemony of prevailing practices at collective levels, power within the 'partnership' is essentially distributed through processes of implementation which will also impact differentially on subsequent collective practices. It is through practices of engagement with 'base' activity systems that processes of expansive learning are distributed differentially throughout the wider partnership.

### **Differentiated and decentred expansiveness and a remodelling of the Activity System**

In this section I want to summarise issues from the theory and the data so far in the chapter around the differentiated and decentred nature of the expansiveness across the activity system, and link this to Hodkinson et al's (2008) use of the concept of scale, before concluding the chapter with a re-modelled notion of the Activity System based on the experiences provided through this research.

Expansive learning through this activity has been enabled to a degree through constructing and addressing the double binds of collective experience at the 'knot', as considered in the previous chapter. The data demonstrates that experience away from the 'knot' is equally important in terms of expansiveness – indeed it is dualistic, in that

there are degrees of mutual interdependence. However, this expansiveness is differentiated in terms of the degree of learning and impact, and decentred in the sense that it is situated in the localities of the partners, as well as at the collective level in a relational rather than fragmented way.

Differentiated expansiveness for the partners is affected by the issues influencing re-contextualisation discussed throughout this chapter. For example, issues of disposition and the various forms of capital of the individual partners, including 'positional' capital, and the affordances provided by the colleges and the employers (in particular to the individuals) are all significant in processes of re-contextualisation. There are also issues of serendipity in this case: for example, the effects for FE 3 of having her mother, the former Faculty Head, working with her, and the chief executive of E 1's local authority acting as a governor at FE 1's college.

Processes of re-contextualisation, of engagement and re-entry with partner activity systems, also resulted in expansiveness that was also de-centred in terms of the whole activity system, as illustrated in this chapter. For example, I have used the term 'dyadic' to categorise the developments between FE 1 and E 1, a parallel with Engestrom's (2004) notion of 'co-configuration', in contrast to the experiences of marginality of FE 2 and FE 4. Even here, however, the experience had impact for the partners and the management of their institutions.

This differentiated and decentred expansiveness impacts subsequently at the collective level in Workshops – it contributes to, or even shapes the process. In Workshop 2 for example the experiences of implementing previous collective outcomes from Workshop

1 within the varying affordances offered by the colleges exposed the absolute and relative feasibility of those outcomes, and therefore provided the foci for the double binds and critical sites for development. It therefore provides the links between the individual and collective experiences. Hence the issue of scale is significant in modelling links between the individual partners' activity systems and the collective, systemic experience.

Hodkinson et al (op cit: 36-37) use the metaphor of 'scale' from map-making, and link it to Bourdieu's notion of 'fields' and 'forces' operating at all levels:

*Seeing fields as primarily concerned with forces, as having imprecise and overlapping boundaries, and as existing at all scales, overcomes several of the weaknesses in existing participatory views of learning. It ...can operationalize the links between learning cultures and wider social structures, whilst retaining the possibility of a large scale focus on localised learning sites.*

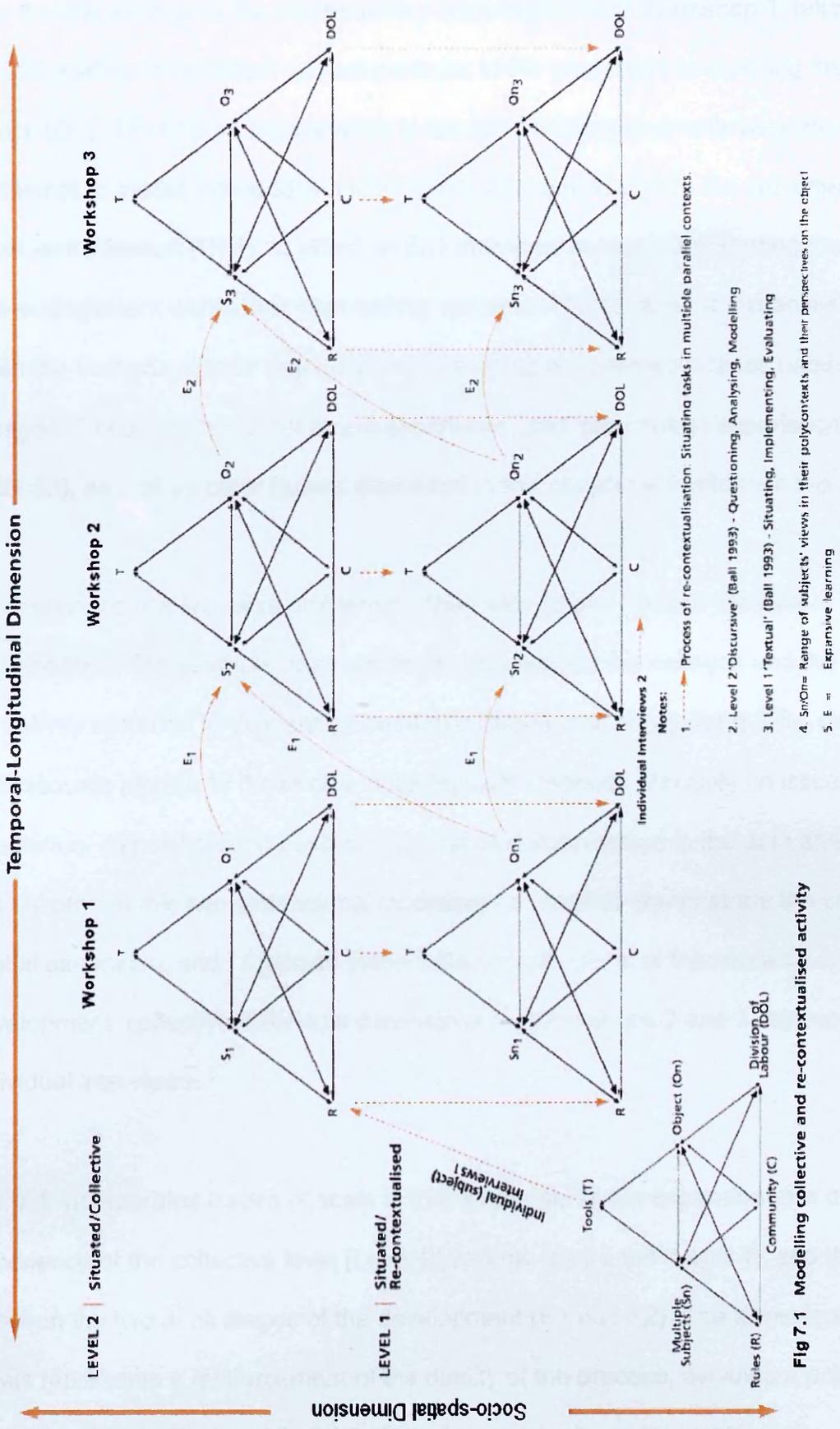
Therefore 'large scale' analysis within the activity of the whole partnership enables access to localised variations of expansiveness through examination of re-contextualisation, as illustrated in this chapter. A 'small scale' analysis would be more characteristic of the one dimensional systemic analysis of 'knotworking' of activity systems outlined in Engestrom's (2001: 136) characterisation of the third generation of Activity Theory (see Fig. 3.2 page 73), which focuses on the collective, situated practice of interfacing activity systems in 'boundary crossing laboratories'. Therefore I want to conceptualise a model of the process of this research which captures both levels of scale (local-individual and the collective), and incorporates notions of time and locality,

as well as differentiated and de-centred expansiveness. It also therefore includes the relational development between collective (small scale) and individual or local (large scale) levels of activity, reinforcing their interdependence as a duality.

The model is effectively two dimensional: temporal-longitudinal, and socio-spatial. The research and development process and sequence is encapsulated within Fig. 7.1 (page 228). I take Engestrom's (1987) triangular representation of the activity system and adapt it to the developmental phases of my research design (temporal-longitudinal). I also map in processes of re-contextualisation by individual participants (socio-spatial) in processes of situating the collective 'object' within their own activity systems. Of course, a function of models is to represent, heuristically, and in so doing they can oversimplify. Re-contextualisation does not necessarily take place at the points in the model as illustrated, nor to the same degree with different partners, as this chapter illustrates – in that sense it is symbolic. The same applies to expansiveness – learning is not necessarily linear, and can be retrospective and reflexive, cyclical or even helical (for example the revisiting of unresolved issues in the Workshops), and feeding into subsequent learning.

Re-contextualisation is therefore the 'textual' process of interpreting and situating the task within the affordances of multiple parallel contexts by partners with varying degrees of 'capital' after the immediate face to face boundary encounter. In explaining Fig. 7.1 the narrative starts on the left and moves right, but the critical socio-spatial dimensions are around the Workshops and processes of re-entry (re-contextualisation). The triangle on the left, below level 1, represents the different partner activity systems before the first interviews, and  $S_n$  relates to the number of subjects in their base activity systems, with

On relating to the range of perspectives on the 'object' at this early stage (see Chapter 5).



**Fig 7.1 Modelling collective and re-contextualised activity**

After the first interviews the first boundary crossing session, Workshop 1, takes place, with S1 relating to individual subject positions in the process in formulating the emerging 'object' (O1). The broken lines leading to the parallel triangle directly beneath represent an attempt to model individual subjects' (Sn1) attempts to situate the outcomes, through re-contextualisation (On1). In effect, at Sn1 individual subjects are starting the process of re-engagement within their own activity systems. This means the expansive cycle within the contexts of their organisation's prevailing discursive practices needs to be engaged. Of course this is not a new experience, and 'premediate experiences' (Billett, 2006: 53), as well as other factors discussed in this chapter will influence this process.

In some cases this was less problematic than with others – hence the idea of differentiation. For example, the relative priority given by the colleges and the employers (as activity systems) to delivering Foundation Degrees and aligning quality, teaching and resource models to those of another 'system' depends precisely on issues of affordance, disposition and positional capital as demonstrated in the data analysis in this chapter. In this two dimensional modelling I attempt to demonstrate the socio-spatial dimension, and I replicate these initial visualisations of the research-development, collective-individual dimensions for Workshops 2 and 3, interspersed with individual interviews.

Fig. 7.1 incorporates issues of scale in that it represents the expansiveness of the experience at the collective level (Level 2) and the local level (Level 1), and the interplay between the two at all stages of the development (E1 and E2). The arrow crossing the levels represents a reinforcement of the duality of the process, avoiding a polarised ontology of 'collective' and 'individual', and 'contextual' and 'de-contextual'.

Workshop 3, the 'Process Evaluation' session (Fig. 4.1, page 87), took place approximately six months after the planned research. This was not part of the original research design, but initiated retrospectively to get some feedback from those who had been through the experience of 'knotworking'. My purpose in hosting the session was to share with the group Engestrom's Activity Theory, notions of boundary crossing and expansive learning, and to get feedback on the extent to which they felt it explained their experiences over nearly three years of working together on this Foundation Degree. I structured the session around a series of questions that I gave in advance, attached to a briefing paper on Activity Theory that I had drafted for them. It was a very informal session, attended by E1, FE1, FE 2, FE 3 and FE 5, and HE 2. The others presented apologies, and although invited to submit written thoughts if they could not attend, they did not do so.

The group responded positively to the theoretical framing of their experience as an activity system, relating in particular to all components of the triangle. The concept of collective knowledge production in the zone of proximal development struck a chord with the group, as did the concept of expansive learning through processes of development, but it was HE 2 who pointed out the first critical comment, about the danger to 'the collective' of the University as the biggest partner, resulting in the experience not being essentially 'dialectical' (her phrase).

The FE partners recognised their experience in this, using phrases such as the developing practice being 'pushed down'. FE 2 commented that the experience of the group was that initial ideas on the curriculum design, a process of real 'multivocality'

where voices had been listened to, had subsequently been 'shoe-horned' into University validation procedures and structures, resulting in the 'stifling' of creativity and partnership approaches by 'formal structures'. He claimed because of these structural issues the development (collectively) had been limited. Clearly the regulative discourse had inhibited the FE tutors in particular.

FE 5 stated Engestrom's model was idealistic, and possibly rationalist, and did not accommodate the power imbalances ('one partner skewing the development') that had been her experience in this partnership.

The lack of equality in the partnership was also a criticism directed at the employers, with complaints, from HE 2, that the employers 'can opt out...they don't have the same stake in it'.

However, in spite of these difficulties, there were positive responses to the theoretical underpinnings, and they were keen to cite examples of benefiting from the ZPD and constructing professional and learner identities that depended on degrees of boundary crossing. FE 3 for example spoke positively about the benefits to the practices in her college, outlined earlier in this chapter and resulting from exposure to practices by other partners, as well as her commitment to the collective identity of the group that stretched to her covering some of the teaching at FE 4's college when he was off ill.

The session was an exercise in closure for both the partners and me, and revealed nothing new in terms of developing the theoretical perspective for this thesis. However,

it did confirm the perspectives of the partners picked up by me in the sequence of interviews and Workshops, and to this extent it was a useful exercise.

To summarise, the model presented in Fig. 7.1 has emerged from the critique of Activity Theory developed in Chapter 3 and from the data produced by this particular case study, presented and analysed in Chapters 5-7. In particular it helps to conceptualise in this case study the relational nature of collaborating contexts (characterised by complexity and essentially 'connectionist' (Knight, 2002: 151)), the tensions in processes of implementation and in re-contextualising discursive collective intentions, and it offers a conceptualisation of expansive learning that is decentred and differential depending on a range of affordances. The analysis and critique of the 'third generation', represented in the model, also offers an accommodation of power within both large and small scale analyses of the activity system through the relational interdependence of 'discourse' and 'text' in processes of development at the collective level, and implementation through re-contextualisation. In my concluding chapter I would like to critically reflect on the research, and revisit my research questions.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions and reflections

This final chapter draws together some of the key issues from this research. It revisits the research questions explained in Chapter 1 and throughout the chapter reflects on the extent to which the research has addressed these issues. Secondly, claims to original knowledge made by the thesis are summarised and analysed. The chapter concludes by identifying certain limitations in the research, and links these to suggested avenues for further investigation.

Working in partnership offers a spectrum of experience ranging from the creative and hugely productive to depths of frustrating negativity – even within the same partnership. Standard remedies to the latter in the literatures vary predominantly between instrumental and rationalist approaches advocated by ‘management’ literature to more normative, or Habermassian approaches associated with Liberal Humanist literature. Activity Theory was chosen as a theoretical and methodological means of driving and investigating development in this particular partnership by this participant-researcher because of its recognition of tension in partnership-working as ‘normal’, and as a means of theorising and catalysing development through the concept and experience of the ‘double bind’. However, it was not done so instrumentally, and Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate that the theoretical and methodological coherence of this approach is clear.

Through this thesis I have used Activity Theory, but also problematised it in response to Research Question 1; that is, to analyse what it offered in illuminating a case in which different activity systems come together to collaborate on a policy driven issue of curriculum development. In choosing Activity Theory I was also conscious of potential limitations, particularly in terms of its applicability to this research. Therefore, I wanted to use its application in this case to address Research Question 2. That is, to identify its limitations and develop a critique, using the data from this research, to determine what elaboration and development it needed to enable a more detailed illumination of the emerging processes of this study of curriculum development across boundaries. As part of this process of problematising, I also wanted to consider the effectiveness of the version of Activity Theory so redeveloped in illuminating this case (Research Question 3).

Therefore, for Research Question 1 Activity Theory in its 'third generation' formulation, with notions of interacting activity systems, boundary crossing and expansive learning, has facilitated an analytical framework to theorise emergent partnership-working through a creative use of tension. Also the use of an interventionist research - development methodology has extended the normal instruments (such as course boards and moderation panels) for course development in this case. It has utilised such processes through 'development work methodology' to use such tension and 'contradiction', as identified in Chapters 5 and 6, to enable and catalyse 'learning what is not yet there' (Engestrom, 2004: 4). The notion of the activity system and its constituent elements has provided clear analytical tools giving access to the partners (subjects) and their object, the roles, forms of mediation and rules of operation, and the way activity is researched, and conceptualised systemically.

The use of tension in the Workshops through the exposure of the 'double binds' is consistent with a process of externalisation, in Vygotsky's (1978) terms, prior to subsequent internalisation through development and implementation of emerging practices. The exposure of boundaries was necessary in this case for issues to be made explicit and dealt with.

In using Activity Theory, however, and in response to Research Question 2, a number of theoretical problems have had to be addressed. The notion of the irreducibility of the 'unit of analysis' was particularly problematic. For example, the issue of multi-vocality necessitates a distinction between the discursive power of prevalent 'messages' about the object and ways of working within the collective unit of analysis with other 'voices' within the unit. Therefore for this research Activity Theory needed to be elaborated to accommodate asymmetrical power relations between partners, and within processes of activity (including competing discursive hegemonies in terms of practices, tools-instruments, rules and the division of labour, as data analysis of the Workshops in Chapter 6 illustrates).

It also needed to deconstruct the unit of analysis to enable an understanding of the subjects (partners) and their motivation within the collective practice, and to understand how this related to and impacted on their roles and positions, as well as the affordances and various forms of capital they have within their own institutions (Chapters 5 and 7). Therefore it also necessitated expansion to incorporate dimensions of both time and locality in ways that recognise the differential affordances across the partnership, and the consequences of this for expansiveness. It needed to do so in ways that enable a

conceptual enrichment of the process, using theories of implementation; particularly the duality of 'discourse' and 'text' (Ball, 1993), and how such processes impact on, in a relational way, subsequent processes of collective development (Chapter 7). My critique of Activity Theory, therefore, has been informed by policy implementation theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. I will consider my concluding comments for Research Question 3 in the final section of this chapter, after I present what I consider are the claims to originality of the thesis.

The research has used the data to generalise to theory, as emphasised and explained in Chapter 4. In doing so it makes five claims to originality. The first concerns the notion of re-contextualisation, of the movement by boundary spanners between levels involving oscillating processes of re-entry between sequences of collective 'knotworking' and operationalising outcomes within 'base' activity systems. Therefore the role of boundary spanners and the concept of re-contextualisation are essential in conceptualising processes of implementation, of textualising the discourse of the espoused collective outcomes from the Workshops. Processes of re-contextualisation involve re-entry with another activity system, of individuals with different degrees of social, cultural and positional capital engaging with the relative affordances of their own organisations, as illustrated in Chapter 7.

Re-contextualisation, and the way the process is modelled in Fig. 7.1, facilitates the expansion of the Activity System to accommodate dimensions of time and space or locality, and this process linked to Hodkinson et al's (2008) work on 'scale', enables a second claim to originality: the differentiation and decentring of the notions of expansive learning, illustrated in Chapter 7, facilitating small-scale systemic analysis but

also large scale and therefore highly localised analysis of components (or members of the partnership) of the larger system simultaneously. In doing so I have been keen to ensure the interdependence of the two dimensions of scale in Fig. 7.1, both vertical (space/locality) and horizontal (time), represented by a 'relational interdependence' (Billett: 2006) that reinforces the notion of duality rather than dualism.

This remodelling of the activity system facilitates a third claim involving subjectivity and the position and the positioning of the subject within the activity system. It represents a small contribution to a growing theoretical momentum which is problematising the 'irreducible' unit of analysis. The work of Nardi (2005), Kaptelinin (2005), Daniels (2005) and Stetsenko and Arieviditch (2004), building on the earlier work of Valsiner (1991, 1998) are examples of Billett's (op. cit.) recognition of the need to 'individualise the social, and socialise the individual', and to engage with issues of subjectivity and the self. Perhaps we are seeing the emergence in this literature of the early stages of a 'fourth generation'. Such a development of this important theoretical and methodological framework is necessary and important to extend the analytical, theoretical and developmental potential of Activity Theory and 'development work methodology'.

A fourth claim within the theoretical remodelling relates to the issue of power, which is significantly undertheorised in Activity Theory. Differentiation between subjects within the unit of analysis and the use of a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective has facilitated analysis of hegemonic and subordinate discursive practices particularly at the collective levels. This has enabled questioning of key components of the activity system, including tools-instruments and processes of reification, roles, and dominant operational, regulative practices, or rules, within the unit of analysis. It has also enabled

a degree of analysis based on subjects' access to 'power-knowledge', linked to discursive practices, and several examples are highlighted in the data to illustrate this – such as college tutors' lack of familiarity with modularity and assessment requirements.

Such an approach has also facilitated the distinction in this case, after Daniels and Warmington (2007), between 'message' and 'voice' at the collective level. However, the use of notions of re-contextualisation also offers an extension of this power dimension in a way that is reminiscent of Giddens (1984) notion of the 'dialectic of control', or Fiske's (1993) distinction of 'stations' from 'locales' – both are conceptually consistent with 'discourse' and 'text'. By this I mean regardless of what is espoused through collective 'knotworking', the dominant messages have to be repositioned and textualised by the partners. There is even potential in this for a degree of 'street-level bureaucracy' (Lipskey, 1980) even for the least 'powerful' of the college tutors; FE 4, for example in his determination to interpret teaching and assessment schedules in what he decided was in his students' interests. Power, therefore, can be seen to be distributed to a degree, and dependent on issues of affordance and capital, as well as other local power-knowledge relationships in processes of re-contextualisation.

A fifth contribution to knowledge I suggest is related to the third above. This is CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) itself as an emerging activity system, and the need to engage with other theoretical perspectives to extend its conceptual and analytical potential. It needs to actively 'co-configure' with other theoretical paradigms to extend its reach. This thesis has been informed, in developing its critique of Activity Theory, by an 'interpretive repertoire' using the conceptual tools of policy implementation and Critical Discourse Analysis. This approach has enabled a degree of 'distancing' and 'breaking

out' (referring to the discussion in Chapter 4 on the insider researcher dealing with 'closeness' and 'closure'). Recently, Wheelahan (2007) has used critical realism with Activity Theory to theorise the relationship between the individual and society. I am not suggesting that a 'fourth generation' needs to be characterised by conceptual 'hybridity', to borrow a concept from Engeström (2004). However, Activity Theory can be enriched by dialogue with other conceptual paradigms to overcome conceptual difficulties that limit the analytical 'reach' of the 'third generation', as illustrated in this thesis.

Equally, CHAT as part of this process of engaging with other theoretical perspectives needs to explicitly articulate what it has to offer, and how it can extend other theoretical perspectives. For example, use of Critical Discourse Analysis, linked to analysis of the 'subject', has facilitated access in this research to complementary developmental areas of expertise within the partnership. This would have stayed at the level of analysis, however, without being enriched by Activity Theory and the use of 'development work methodology'. The Workshops facilitated access to double binds based on competing (actually complementary) but asymmetrical discursive practices. Such contexts enabled those constrained within what was perceived by them as regulative discursive practice, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, and particularly Chapter 6, to make explicit and aware to others the iniquity and impracticality of certain ways of working, as well as making explicit their important forms of expertise. In doing this it enabled the coming to know by others, in a Vygotskian way, of the significance of the distributed nature of complementary areas of professional expertise essential to the effective working of the activity system (similar to 'collaborative advantage' in the management literature on partnership), demonstrated in Chapter 6.

These claims to originality of course have to be tempered with the fact that this generalising to theory is focused on a single, albeit very detailed case, but one I have subjected to a thorough and 'objective' (after Phillips, 1989) analysis, and in ways that I have justified in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, in this final section of the chapter I would like to consider the effectiveness of the remodelling of Activity Theory in illuminating this case, my Research Question 3. This is done in the context of consideration of the limitations of the research and outlining areas for further investigation. In remodelling Activity Theory I have been motivated by the need to use and problematise the theory to understand partnership working in this context, and to learn lessons from it. The remodelling has resulted from the theoretical critique of Activity Theory developed throughout the thesis, particularly for Research Question 1, looking at what insights Activity Theory provides in this case of collaboration on curriculum development, and especially Research Question 2, the elaboration and development of the theory needed in this case to enhance its illuminating potential.

The remodelling conceptualises the duality of the two levels incorporating processes of re-contextualisation. It also recognises a differentiated and decentred reformulation of expansive learning, at the 'knot', but also away from it. Yet in analysing its effectiveness (Research Question 3) the remodelling still operates at a level of generality to a degree in considering processes of re-contextualisation, and in fact the model might need a third tier below Level 1 in Fig. 7.1 to incorporate micro-level activity systems within the same college, employer or University School. For example, there will be multiple activity systems even within a single college - based on size, range of mission and number or range of 'vocational and academic tribes'. In fact large FE Colleges, although associated with a strong managerialism, may be as equally complex as universities in

some ways owing to the proximity of academic and vocational culture clashes, and the experiences of FE 3 and FE 5 in their own organisations, discussed in Chapter 7, illustrate this. To an extent I have been restricted to this level of analysis in this research.

However, the conceptual and analytical foundations built into re-contextualisation, as used in Chapter 7 and built around notions of, for example, affordance, positional capital, and 'text', to an extent compensate for this, and I would argue could be used as research instruments in analysing a 'third tier' of activity systems. However, more detailed work needs to be done on the process of re-contextualisation through detailed comparative case analysis of different organisations working on the same project. This is a possible area of research to come out of this thesis, and one that is likely to result in further extensions to, or reworking of, the remodelling presented in Chapter 7.

Also, while I have attempted to look at the power dimension in this case it is likely to need a more systematic investigation. The remodelling of the activity system, and the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7, deal with issues of power, particularly using conceptual tools from Critical Discourse Analysis. However, the relational nature of the espoused outcomes at the collective level, and the situating of these within different discursive practices render this a complex issue. 'Discourse' and 'text' have been useful if rather generic heuristic tools that this thesis has used. Much more detailed and critical analysis of the interrelationships between these processes and concepts is required, and the theoretical association of the remodelling with these processes in this thesis will mean it would need to be reviewed.

It is suggested that this will need to be linked to developing and emerging critiques of Activity Theory associated with debate on the unit of analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis is a possible starting point in this, particularly in analysing reified practices, roles, tools-instruments and rules in processes of boundary spanning-crossing, and the analysis of collaboration across social practices. Such analysis will be beneficial in partnership formation more generally, where the processual 'how's' of partnership working will need to be given as much priority as the instrumental and normative 'what's' and 'why's'. Such an approach might do much to further more idealistic perspectives of partnership; for example, those held by Liberal Humanists.

Activity Theory is an emerging theory. Its associated methodological instruments, such as 'development work methodology', are also developing. The historicity of social practices in partnership working, and therefore attempts at 'boundary crossing', have to be fully acknowledged, and the process and analysis cannot depend on situated interactionism between partners. What they bring to the process, their perceptions, perspectives and understandings of the object, their ways of working and subsequent processes of re-contextualisation, or re-entry, are critical. Boundary crossing involves oscillating, and carrying 'pre-mediate' (Billett, 2006) baggage between systems, and research linked to processes of re-entry or re-contextualisation within 'base' activity systems is important. The effects for the partners of the varying intensities of the pull (or push) of affordances and differential agency on re-entry have to be negotiated in practice, and this needs to be the subject of further research and conceptual development.

Activity Theory is an increasingly popular analytical instrument, subject to its own conceptual development as well as its extension through engagement with other theoretical perspectives. For me this thesis represents a starting point in what I expect to be an increasingly stimulating journey.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### FE 4 Interview 1 Extract

**Interviewer:** Right I think that we are ready ok, in the interview there are a number of questions, the general questions that I want to start off with. I would like to take you back to when you first got involved with Foundation Degree, 12 months ago now, yes and before I ask you about the specific Foundation Degree which we have developed I want to ask you a broader question about Foundation Degrees generally. My opening question is what do you think is the rationale behind the development of the Foundation Degree?

**FE 4:** That is a very hard question. The way that I see it, is if you are talking about the rationale, why are we doing it? and what are we doing it for? We are plugging a gap in the market from your perspective, there maybe a gap in the market and from our perspective it's a useful add on for what is definitely a market gap and I guess that we are doing it because there are sectors of the population out there who we can market a specific degree to, so I think that we are doing it because we know that there is a market out there and maybe from your perspective it is a good way, it is a good way to put bums on seats.

**Interviewer:** Yes ok. What about at a more strategic policy level? Why do you think that the Foundation Degree has emerged from the when Blunkett set it up? What do you think that the DfES agenda is in getting it started?

**FE 4:** Well I think that the Government certainly wants to involve more and more people in education, if that's the strategic view that you are talking about?

**Interviewer:** Yes

**FE 4:** And I think that it is probably a good way of doing it although it is difficult isn't it to keep tailoring courses from one to the other, but it seems.. obviously if you are going to do 5 or 6 of them you are going to have all sorts of overlaps and things like that but as a general, if I was running a programme that, which thank God I'm not, I would be very concerned about a how many times I could fragment or segment the market. So I will talk with my marketing hat on, how many little segments are you going to find? Maybe you will find lots them, to begin with you will find lots of them but after a while you are going to find that the segments are less and less meaningful.

**Interviewer:** By that do you mean that what you think the motivation is that there is only so many coming through traditional routes and that given this target of the expansion of higher education is that really what the motive is in terms of this niche market thing?  
Right

**FE 4:** So what question are you asking me there because I missed it?

**Interviewer:** I was reflecting back I think on some of the things that you might have been saying there and I was trying to identify what you think the main motive in terms of developing this as a qualification, as a route to higher education ?

**FE 4:** Well I think that coming back to motivation because we really talked about the strategy and the Governments strategy and maybe the University's strategy from the other side. The main motivation has to be to involve more and more people in higher education. Not just for the sake of the targets that the Government sets but that there are plenty of people out there whose motivation would be improved by some access to some kind of higher education. Ok, who perhaps they don't have access to higher education, so its not just a matter of targets and or a matter of university marketing, it's a matter of a real need that you might want to tap into.

**Interviewer:** Do you see the Foundation Degree as being different, when you talk about higher education, that implies that you are talking about some kind of single entity, relating back to what you were talking about before about niche marketing, do you see any significance in that?

**FE 4:** Significance in the fact that there is niche marketing going on. Well again it depends upon the significance for what. I see the significance in an educational setting. I see significance there and I hopefully see some ability from the people who participate to improve themselves on an economic level. Ok, so it's educational and it's economic but its also self-actualization to a great extent. So I see three little themes going in there, as far as niche markets are concerned it is probably good to have a niche market for self-actualization, if you want to say that's an area where niche markets can go, lets give people courses that they can relate to.

**Interviewer:** Interesting that you mentioned self-actualization. I will come back to that if I may? Erm, if I can move on, how do you see Foundation Degree developing and what sort of role do you see for yourself in that?

**FE 4:** Well that is a very good question, my role probably depends upon the way in which the college sees it and the way the college relates to the second year of the course, the third your of the course, continuing participation getting more people in, so I will deal with the second part of the question first. My role is not a self determined role, I mean it would be great if it was but it isn't, it is very much for us how much we can get out of it, how many more students we are going to get in, what revenue it brings in which is again very normal, which is again very ordinary. How do I see the thing developing in the future? Well hopefully as a marketing man it could develop very well. Its as simply a matter of rolling out a different degree with a different slant to a different market, so in theory as I said early on to your first question you can bring it out quite a few times and you can hit various levels. Let me give you an example. Today I was asked, and it is already permeating, its all really coming through in the colleges, levels 3 and level 4 administration students who are doing NVQ in administration, well already the tutors are thinking, maybe followed by the administration, well can these people get on the Foundation Degree, what progression is there going to be for them? So it's not just self-actualization, its not just marketing that may determine the future growth of it, it might simply be progression.

**Interviewer:** Sure, OK. What worries, if any do you have about the Foundation Degree, because your reaction so far has been fairly positive?

**FE 4:** I like them, I think that, look; I am all for education, for students. There isn't enough opportunity for a lot of students to express themselves or to develop and the folks that we have had on the course have been a good example of well chosen and, people who are right for the experience, ok, so I am all for that I am all for giving people the opportunity. Traditionally there has always been a place for me where there are limited opportunities in education, limited only in the sense that unless you were a round peg fitting in a round hole you were acceptable, whereas if you were a square peg fitting into a round hole you were never acceptable, and so its good and I smile when I think about it, its good that we see that there are different routes and APL's coming along and stuff like that which gets people to get to achieve some of their goals.

**Interviewer:** OK. Are there any worries?

**FE 4:** Yes there are worries, you have probably asked me this in many different guises but the course is itty-bitty. I know that you have spent a great deal of personal time and invested a great deal of personal effort into an overall... what's coming out of it is an overall cohesion between one module and another and an overall viewpoint that it is a learning experience which is based on a learning model which I think is what you tried to put across and that we should try to continue to learning this learning model and that we should get people to reflect on what done for the benefit of their own learning and for the benefit of the employers in a sense. But it is itty-bitty.

**Interviewer:** Tell us what you mean by that?

**FE 4:** By itty-bitty? It doesn't always hang together, there's overlap and there is duplication and there is very little time in which to meld it all together, in the head of the students because I am only seeing a little picture, the instructor of one aspect of it , you see the bigger picture.

**Interviewer:** What causes that itty bittyness, do you think?

**FE 4:** The itty bittyness, I think is the amount of different topic areas which are supposed to be covered in a module.

**Interviewer:** So we are talking about within the module?

**FE 4:** Within the module; we are talking both sides. Togetherness of all the modules which may be more integrated than individual modules. Now having said that the first module perhaps was not itty bitty it was quite cohesive, it gave them a taste of the process of learning, of learning in a setting, of learning in a traditional university setting, but the second module which is one that I taught, not performance management the one on flexible workforce is very itty bitty and it doesn't give us enough time if we do one lecture on motivation and one on another leadership and another session on team building and another session on change and another session on various things, it is very itty bitty, its very, its just not fitting in easily enough, maybe we ought to spend more time on less number of topics.

**Interviewer:** That's within the module, what about across the modules this itty bittyness? Was there an increase in itty bittyness between semester one and semester two?

**FE 4:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Give me a ...

**FE 4:** It's a feeling, it's a feeling of fraying at the seams, it's a feeling of trying to do too much, that's coming across. It's a feeling that you get from the perspective of the deliverer, you ring up the university and they say 'oh, we haven't written that module yet'. OK or the feeling that you get when your co-lecturer is 'I wish they would've give me the carte blanche to put in what I need to put in. OK. It's a feeling that it is fraying at the seams to some extent, it's the feeling of chasing for the materials to some extent, it's the feeling that comes about.. and I know that it is early days.. don't get me wrong this is not criticism, this is just comment on how it feels when you haven't quite got it right with the assignments and you haven't quite got it right with the extent to which the assignments are graded in sections, ok. So it all culminates in the feeling that ok it is going ok so far right now and we are speeding up and hopefully it will kind of all get itself fixed eventually.

**Interviewer:** How would those feelings and experiences compare with a more conventional course? Which you have been responsible for in your own environment?

**FE 4:** Well, it's a good question, because there is more ownership on the part of the individual instructor when he has his own course here, if we say teach a module at HNC level, we look at the outcomes and we look at the requirements and we look at the time and we make some very specific judgements about what we can put in to get the outputs on time, so we feel that there is more control over it. I am not a control freak, I am happy to go along with whatever you say but I just feel that we are striving to fulfil the plan and sometimes we don't do it justice because of time constraints.

**Interviewer:** And that is because you feel that the control is not your's it is the University's?

**FE 4:** That could be part of it, it is more the part that the University is in control, ok, so coming at it as a relationship between providers and franchisers ok there has to be a little bit more give and take there, ok.

## Appendix 2

### Workshop1 'Study Skills' Episode

**HE 2:** I don't know what people think about study skills

**ALL:** Yes, yes

**HE 1:** Doesn't Independent Learning cover that ?

**FE 5:** it covers learning – the two are separate things

**Researcher:** It covers the key skill of managing your own learning, but it doesn't necessarily give people the skills of how to write a report or...

**HE 1:** We've always done it as part of induction

**All :** Yes, yes

**HE 2:** I just mentioned it so it's not forgotten

**Researcher:** Well, are we talking about a different approach to induction?

**HE 1:** Wasn't there some argument that the Independent Learning module should be front ended?

**FE 5:** I think that's something my students are very keen on; they get a lot more... the Independent Learning was quite difficult to start off with because it introduced them to something totally new which they weren't really prepared for, and they could have done with more of it right up front to get involved...before they move on to anything else. They had trouble with it initially, and I think they would have liked a little more time on it.

**HE2:** I think...students need more study skills up front

**HE 1:** Oh yeah. Within the time frame that we've got how do you provide that?

**HE2:** Er...I don't know. A week's induction, a couple of days...my HND...

**HE 1:** Can they do another couple of days or a week?

**FE 3:** How long have they got for induction?

**FE 2:** Usually two days

**HE 2:** But what do we do on induction – it's mainly housekeeping stuff last year wasn't it. Maybe we can cut that down and actually do more. Also it's not always the best thing to have it right at the front, because they don't engage with it – they're too busy thinking about other issues right at the beginning. It's when they have their first assignment they

really start thinking about what they've got to do. Then they find the study skills stuff really relevant, and remember it.

**HE 1:** I think what you could do within the two days is to give them a little group assignment, and you know you work on this and at the end of the, 'cause it hypes them up, it gets them focused. On the first day maybe a bit of housekeeping, but then 'here are some study skills for you, and now here is this little assignment... and tomorrow between the hours of...you're going to do your presentations', and we use that on the HND. It starts them off.

**FE 5:** I would actually worry about that because working with mature students on HNC the thing they feel most threatened about is doing presentations, especially with people they won't know, and it scares the pants off them, so we tend to...

**HE 1:** Leave out the feedback

**FE 3:** We do a game... they're on a ship and it's sinking...

**HE 1:** We've got a game...what's it called...I went on it ..the full day (Castlefield)

**FE 3:** that would be a good game, but when they've done the activity we then get them to reflect on the various skills everybody used within the group

**FE 5:** I think it would be important to do the skills audit before we start skills because students can then see what skills they're going to need, and once they start achieving it they can revisit and start identifying 'yes, I've achieved this', from the word go. But I think the colleges have a part to play in skills as well, and it's something that comes in our induction. We do it (FE 3 'we do too') and we reinforce skills within that

**HE 1:** We actually found the learning skills packages on Blackboard a bit daunting.

**FE 5:** I visited them myself, as skills is something I do for HND students, and it is very vague – they're well written but...

**HE 1:** I just wonder if a more shorter...might be more useful...all our students went into that early on because I was conscious of the fact that they didn't know how to write a report or make a presentation or manage their time ...'how do I fit all this in?'

**HE 2:** The other thing is you can make some of these things electives – we could get EDU to put on study skills workshops which are more effective for the students – Saturday mornings, which we already do actually.

**HE 1:** It's a question of resources usually – that's the problem

**HE 2:** But I'm sure EDU would do that

**FE 5:** I don't see any reason why in induction here and in the colleges in the first week why we don't put together a programme and say which skills are being covered and say tie it into the Independent Learning as well.

**HE 1:** I'm not sure of the economics of it but, you know you said your students stayed on an extra week and...

**FE 5:** We spend 24 weeks delivering the teaching, is there any reason why we couldn't make this longer, you know so the students come in for 14 weeks, say, and the extra two weeks each semester are study skills, tutorials and getting them to reflect on what they've done in that semester?

**FE 3:** I don't know about other colleges but, we're given...this is something I wanted raising at the Steering Group, we're given 30 hours to deliver and assess a module which is not a great deal of time (FE 2 and FE 5 agreeing)

**FE 5:** We're supposed to do 12 weeks input and three weeks...we've never stopped at 12 weeks and always gone right through, that's what they want and whoever is teaching it...

**FE 2:** There is a resources implication. I'm just wondering why should we be tied down by the delivering of the modules?

**FE 3:** You know we've been given a decent time allowance for delivering...

**FE 2:** (interrupts) Yes, we would be...

**FE 5:** We've got 15 weeks. There's no reason why that first week couldn't be skills, one in the middle, linked into skills and one at the end. That three week assignment time...we don't use it

**FE 3:** I think it would be useful to join... I think the personal development time – they sent a letter out about time allowance. It would be useful to do that for module delivery as well

**HE 1:** Did that help incidentally?

**FE 5:** No one said anything, but I just timetabled it in

**HE 1:** Right

**FE 2:** My boss said universities always say this, always send you things like this, 'ignore it'.

**HE 2:** The other point is it's not really a problem to deliver study skills as part of the semester because we've already addressed the problem, or at least acknowledged that we might be going overboard on content – we could cut down on content in every module

### Appendix 3 Workshop 2 Questioning Phase Transcript Extract

**Researcher:** In terms of just looking at this in a bit more detail then limitations to the proposals erm I think the next point links into looking at that in a little bit more detail what have been the constraints that have impacted on the proposals in terms of you know the possibly of taking them further or implementing them, the limitations on how far we take them

**HE 1:** Communication is the biggest one

**HE 2:** I think communication/organisation issues you know. I have said in this year I am still very marginal in the arena apart from the development thing that we do which is useful. It makes you think about the other modules, there isn't really an arena in which I can reach out from the modules that I do...

**Researcher:** Talk to people in other modules?

**HE 2:** Yes, the systems aren't there really and someone whose main job is other things its, if I was doing this all the time I might make them myself but you know I am not you know it is a tiny part of my job

**HE 1:** There's not really on any programme I don't think, because no matter how many annual reviews you have or meetings after the meeting the module leaders go away and they just do their own thing anyway

**HE 2:** In many ways you..

**HE 1:** It's even worse now

**HE 2:** It's the interaction with other people on the programme

**HE 1:** Oh yes

**HE 2:** You are on the same corridor you see them you talk to them the students see them we don't have those, the proximity

**Researcher:** So it's the physical location that's an issue

**HE 2:** It could be

**HE 1:** It's not just the fact that a lot of the tutors are out in the colleges is the other thing is it's delivered by more than one school in the University as well

**HE 2:** Absolutely, I mean, I don't have contact with any of the other tutors you know, I am completely physically removed apart from anything else but some of the others might see each other, might work with each other, I certainly don't

**Researcher:** How does your experience you know feeling trapped within your module, effect how does that compare with someone in the college delivering it? Because you are working with a small team of people aren't you in the colleges?

**FE 5:** I think that one of the things that I always feel again it's the fact that stuff is handed down to us even though we talk about ownership of the course, as far as I am concerned whilst in that college you have ownership of it but we are very restricted and no matter what you talk about or what you want to put into a particular module , if the modules is so determined by the module leader ... try teaching what you are writing and then work out how you need to change it because you can say oh yes we will put this in and we will put that in and I deliver, and I know if I deliver a couple of modules and no matter how much you have changed it there are still problem because its still handed down and I think unless you actually go in and try and teach it to the type of students that are coming in to the college 3 hours a week and trying to deliver this module to them yourself you are not going to know how its going to be developed.

**HE 1:** How do you solve that problem?

**FE 5:** Come to the college and teach

**E 1:** I think that's a really wonderful idea

**HE 1:** Which college? All the colleges?

**FE 3:** Or just try one out

**FE 5:** Just try one out

**FE 3:** Trying to organise for the work-based...

**HE 1:** I mean you could have a module tutor going round the college but I am just coming back to practicalities now, you are talking about expense, you know they would want paying for it and there's time and there are all sorts of pressures and resources

**HE 2:** It does make a difference I know how you feel

**Researcher:** Would you agree (FE 3)?

**FE 3:** I think that there are some module tutors that have got really false expectations because they are not aware of the problems that you are facing with that particular type of learner I mean until they have physically gone into the room and say and talked and experienced...

**Researcher:** How do the colleges delivering that curriculum, how do you feel given the fact that you know the modules are written...

**FE 5:** I would be honest I adapt modules as I go along to the students, I have to be flexible, there may be parts I try and cut out and I do that and realistically looking at what the students needs are particularly coming up to looking at assignment time, and there are parts that maybe they are not going to do and I'll say well we can just accept that I won't teach that and we will keep that as the notes but we will focus on other

areas so its really going and adapting to what you have been given and adapting that to suit the students. A lot of the work that's given you supplement in ways that the students can understand it

**Researcher:** You are agreeing there FE 3, I mean has that been your practice and is it something that has developed over the 2 years, I mean is your approach different now than it was 2 years ago?

**FE 3:** You had had a year's experience so you had faced your first set of problems and I mean every session you do you walk away and reflect on it, what am I going to do so its not rigid this is what we have got to do its useful to have the material and its useful to have the structure but as FE 5, I mean you might go in you might have your plans for the whole 12 weeks and I might go in one week and decide that I will completely change the next session because I have noticed that they have missed something or they have not understood something

**FE 5:** Or there's an issue that you need to develop and before you it your times finished and you have not covered, and again you have to go where they want to take you because its important to them and I think if you underestimate the amount of time that it takes the students, if you want to go in maybe looking at a certain issue or area or topic that particular week you might start of with something and that dominates the whole of the class because they want to talk about it they want to relate it back to their experience they want to know where they are coming from and you haven't covered the rest of it but then you are sort of having to...What you do is you have to go with that and say ok that's taken them that little bit further that's given them thing to bring back to the next session, its about flexibility but that isn't implied within the modules, its this is what you will deliver because that's what we are going to assess and that is quite disciplined

**Researcher:** I mean have we got a comment on any of that?

**HE 1:** In listening to that I am thinking increasingly that the sessions at the colleges shouldn't be so rigid

**FE 5:** Yes

**HE 1:** And the only way that you can make them not be rigid is to deliver more from the centre and we can't really do that within the space of 3 days but one possible alternative which might be being developed is that we could have our workbook on the Net but with voice links to them, then students could click on the voice links and could hear the lecture from the module leader

**Researcher:** Can I just ask why do they seem rigid at the colleges do you think?

**FE 5:** I don't think that they are rigid at the colleges

**HE 1:** No they're not. I didn't say that what I was saying is we can't be that prescriptive I mean what we are saying to the colleges is I mean I can talk about Asset Building which is my, this is what I expect you to do week by week, I expect you to be at that point by then I expect they will have done these activities by then and that as FE 5 is saying isn't always feasible for all sorts of reasons

**HE 2:** But we introduced that not least because students requested, at some college what you are saying is this ideal I think, the college students will take it on, tutors adapt it be flexible you know reflecting response of all those things that

**HE 1:** It can be too flexible

**FE 5:** Well they have to get through the module by achieving the outcomes and they have to and I think that you have to be flexible in the way that they do that and also you have to supplement these I just say to them use the module handbook for their benefit and then I use other things to supplement that to take it that little bit further or to put them in a new direction depending on the feedback I get from that. I usually ask them to read the area we are going to look at for the following week in between and sometimes they manage it and sometimes they don't because of their workload, that gives them the basis...

**FE 3:** I think that those workbooks and that structure is useful to the students as well

**FE 5:** They have that

**HE 2:** That's what they told us and some group were so worried that they were so far behind other groups they thought we are nowhere need that point so at the development group we said that we do the weekly structure thing and the tasks associated we try to make it flexible by saying you don't have to these tasks shoes the ones that make sense to the students and all of that, they give the students an idea of where they should be or what they should be doing but I think that within that if the tutor can say we are there because we are... you know, but sometimes it's a case of they are not there because they are not getting the delivery

**HE 1:** I think that what they don't have as well is the structure like you have on a programme like here at the University where you would have a lecture followed a tutorials. I mean they have a lecture/tutorial combined so there is no opportunity to go away and reflect upon what they have had at the lecture and then to come back and make sense of it again

**FE 5:** We usually get that through the emails the day after, the day after that, there usually email a question or an issue that they have thought about from that and you find that, you know whilst its 3 hours for the students it works out a damn sight more for the tutor because you are inundated with questions and other issues so delivery of 3 hours it isn't really realistic, it does goes way beyond that

**HE 1:** Do you not think that online lectures might be an aid?

## Appendix 4

### Interview 2 Extract – FE 3, Recontextualisation

**Interviewer:** Perhaps I will come back to that. How has your working environment, I suppose you are in two working environments now, how has your local working environment, including for example the practices of the organisation and their priorities, the professional relationships that you have, and the practices and resource issues influenced the implementation and interpretation of any curriculum that you have been responsible for?

**FE 3:** I suppose now within the college I am supposed to be the expert on the foundation degree so I will find people from different faculties and programmes coming along and wanting me to help them at various meetings and various proposals, again looking at the course team that we are now working with I am actually seen as the first port of call if there is any problem because I have an understanding of what should be done, if they have got any issues they will discuss it with me first and then I will say I will prefer you to take that to the University, so there has been problems with materials that have been produced and what do we do and we have had complaints from students about that material which could have been construed as personal to that tutor although its not been their fault, I suppose that I am the go between much more so now between HE 1 and the staff at the colleges

**Interviewer:** Tell us a bit more about that

**FE 3 :** Well I mean if I get a complaint about a member I tend to find that HE 1 takes certain comments out of context and then he will start making wild accusations about the members of staff and so I have just been the but for getting in between and lets find out exactly what's going on and who's said what, what is the tutors point of view and what's the students point of view before we start accusing people

**Interviewer:** so in a way you are the bridge between the two institutions

**FE 3:** That's right

**Interviewer:** That's interesting that's really a development of role from where we started off would you say?

**FE 3:** I think that it is yes

**Interviewer:** Do the management in the institution see you performing that function as well?

**FE 3:** Yes, so the programme manager are very nervous because they don't understand the workings of the university, they will ask me to take on a much more management role - even a few weeks ago they asked me to recruit a member of staff and in that situation I said 'no, excuse me this is not part of my remit to be selecting members of staff'. They will come to me, issues about funding - the Director will talk to me before

she will move onto other people, why I don't know but now I am supposed to be this font of all knowledge

**Interviewer:** That's interesting because you said before there is a lot of adapting what you do on the Foundation Degree to the college practices but in a way are the college practices changing as a result of this development

**FE 3:** Yes certainly with the teaching staff, for example looking at assessment on an FE course if you have set a deadline and the student does not meet that deadline nothing happens, it may take 6 months after that deadline and they will then walk in with that piece of work and expect you to mark it and you will do and there is no penalty and that's been a positive learning experience for the FE staff that if there these examination boards and people have got to put in a personal mitigating circumstances form and it isn't good enough to say I overslept, this is a formal procedure but I now see them adopting that.

**Interviewer:** So are the staff doing that or is that being adopted by the institution?

**FE 3:** The personal mitigating circumstances form is now part of corporate policy

**Interviewer:** Just taking you back to something you said earlier about the teaching, that nothing changes there you just do it your own way is that where you have had freedom to or you have used the freedom to interpret the curriculum, to use your own teaching and learning style. The reason I asked you that is because 12 months ago a lot of people from the colleges were saying that they were preoccupied with the volume of work that we were expected to deliver, now I don't know how you felt about that?

**FE 3:** The Independent learning was never a problem because we were involved in that from the initial stages, so it wasn't a shock and it's also not a massive document, whereas you have other modules where last year there were hundreds of newspaper articles and people... if you give somebody a piece of paper they want to read it don't they and want to read everything, and also the materials were appearing at the last minute and they felt that they were cramming that information in. I have never found that with Independent Learning I think that it was designed very well and I think that Independent learning did allow for your own individual teaching style and also it allowed you to bring in your own materials as well, looking at colleague X that does Community Governance I think that she felt overwhelmed last year but she has taught it now and so she could just pick up and run with it and you are aware of all the pitfalls, when its new you don't really know what to expect

**Interviewer:** She has learned what to emphasise and what not to but has she learned from engaging with HE 2 and other people in other colleges

**FE 3:** Yes because they are constantly querying things, she has also learned what do I absolutely need to cover and what is not necessary and I think that's been by discussion and the exam board, we have all said that same thing that the exam board the moderation panels are fantastic experience you are all sitting down and feeding back, giving opinions. I know there was one situation where I was doubting the assessment decision because I spent such a lot of time with that individual so you were able to say then I am being quite subjective about this

**Interviewer:** How different is that from FE practices?

**FE 3:** That is, we have the internal verification procedure and you will have appointed internal verifiers who will sample your work, generally you do that on your own, I would pick somebody else work up and

**Interviewer:** So it's not a communal thing?

**FE 3:** In theory it should be but it's a time, what's happened at (FE 3's College), the Director of Curriculum a couple of years ago set up an HE committee at which I am a member and we are looking at improving HE provision at the college, so a lot of practice on the Foundation Degree because I will be questioned all the time is now being implemented, so for example one of the suggestions is that we have a formal exam board