EXPLORING THE POSSIBLE: EMPOWERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN PROVINCIAL URUGUAY THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

This action research study explores the role of blended learning as a tool for the professional empowerment of teachers of English as a foreign language in provincial and rural areas of Uruguay. Specifically, a three-year blended teacher development programme designed to facilitate professional empowerment by integrating face-to-face and online learning opportunities is examined through Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) Community of Inquiry framework as well as through Kumaravadivelu's (2001, 2006b) Postmethod parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. Findings suggest that blended learning can facilitate the professional empowerment of teachers in geographically-removed areas by fostering their movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking. The teaching, social and cognitive activity in a blended setting is distributed over the face-to-face and online learning arenas, with the teaching and cognitive ‘presences’ being embedded in the social. While the highest levels of cognitive activity are rarely visible in participants’ virtual discourse, this discourse refers to other environments where cognitive activity is more clearly evidenced, such as participants’ assessed work and classroom practices. In short, the Community of Inquiry parameters offer a lens through which to visualise effective course design and pedagogy for teacher education in this context, by providing a language to articulate what is particular about the setting, what participants perceive as practical and ultimately what is possible for them to achieve in terms of empowerment and emancipation. These parameters are explored through the examination of the whole-group processes as well as the in-depth analysis of two participants’ individual journeys. This study also foregrounds the complexity and richness of action research, especially in terms of the multiplicity of roles determined by the researcher's immersion in the field, and highlights the need for extensive reflexivity. The academic, professional and situated contributions indicated above are identified, as is the potential for further research in this and other similar settings.
DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

To Sélika and Eduardo,

who taught me to believe in myself.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACDP</td>
<td>Anglo Continuous Development Programme</td>
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<td>CoI</td>
<td>Community of Inquiry</td>
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<td>CP</td>
<td>Cognitive Presence</td>
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<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>English Language Teaching</td>
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<td>EMCD</td>
<td>E-mail Cooperative Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Teaching Presence</td>
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<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment</td>
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1.1. October 21, 2008

Sitting at the cafe, I wonder where I should start. I tell myself I am not going to worry about appropriacy, register and collocations this time, but will simply write from my heart. In my mind, I have a very vivid picture of these teachers I have come to learn so much about – their contexts, their beliefs, their worries and interests...

Uruguay is my home and I have never been away for longer than one month. But this is one Uruguay I am talking about, the ‘developed’ Uruguay where everything happens, the capital city of Montevideo. The teachers I will tell you about live in a different country, one where educational standards are undeniably poor, where many young people finishing secondary school have to leave their homes if they want to pursue their studies. It is also a country where disadvantaged people often want to escape poverty by emigrating to the capital – only to find themselves living in ‘cantegriles’ or shanty towns because there is no place for them in the competitive capital. This is provincial Uruguay. It is a land of contrasts, where
wealthy landowners work side by side with their humble farm workers, where poor children ride a horse for miles to get to rural schools while privileged children are driven to school by their parents. All this is very much taken for granted.

The main characters in this story work as language teachers in their provincial towns or cities. These teachers and I are in fact colleagues, given that we work for the same language school, the largest and most prestigious one in the country. The vast majority of them have not got any formal teaching qualifications, but having learned English for a long time, have followed a career in TESOL. They have learned by watching other teachers, drawing on their experience as learners, and mostly by using their common sense. Unfortunately, their self-made status is not their choice. Paradoxically, in a country where the largest language school has over 35 branches all over the country, it is still difficult to train as a language teacher without moving to the capital city. Consequently, as valuable as common sense and ‘the apprenticeship of observation’ might be (Lortie 1975), educational standards are markedly different from those of the capital, where opportunities and resources actually exist.

In contrast to theirs, my professional reality is very different. While I simply plan, mark and teach, many of these teachers do other jobs like cleaning the classroom and selling the textbooks, as well as financial and administrative tasks. This is
because it is quite common for provincial branches of the school to work as a ‘Centre’, in a decentralised manner. In this arrangement, teachers have their classrooms inside their homes, and are responsible for all the steps in the language learning transaction, from enrolling the students to cleaning and decorating the place for the end-of-year celebrations. Their relationship with students is also somewhat unusual. Students start attending classes with them when they are 6 or 7, and continue for eight to ten years until they sit for Cambridge ESOL exams or their local equivalents. This means they are not simply teachers to these students, but they build very close relationships with them and their families, often being invited to family occasions such as birthdays or weddings. Yet endearing as this may sound, it also has its downside. There is endless competition going on between these teachers working as a ‘Centre’, especially since their salary depends on the number of students they have, which is in turn linked to their ‘popularity’. Were a student to change teachers, that would probably mean a falling out between the two teachers involved.

The Centre is one of the two possible types of language school in provincial Uruguay. Depending on the area, however, the arrangement might be that of an ‘Institute’, in which all teachers work at the same venue and their salary depends on the number of hours they teach, rather than on the number of students they teach. I have worked closely with teachers in one town who work all together in their ‘Institute’ – a cosy, old fashioned building with five or six tiny classrooms. From what I have seen in these past two years, this institute arrangement seems to work better in terms of relationships. Although it would be naive to say the Institute type of school eradicates competition, the fact that teachers share a staff room does lead to more collegial behaviours such as sharing materials and discussing experiences.

My connection with these provincial institutes and centres began when my husband changed jobs and moved to one of these small cities, which I will refer to as Town C. We decided I would travel back and forth so I could spend half of my week in the capital and the other half in the province. Soon after I arrived, I was warmly welcomed by the local director, who asked whether I would be willing to design an in-service development programme for the teachers. When I first met
the participants I was to see once a week for the whole of 2007, they seemed a bit wary of the ‘Montevidean expert’, although we then built a close relationship. I am only telling this part of the story because it very clearly marks the moment when I came to realise the unfairness these people deal with as a normal part of their professional lives. Despite the fact that the director in province C seems to be an honest and extremely fair person, it is the system itself that promotes inequity between the capital and the city. While I, as a teacher in the capital city, can talk to my employers simply by knocking on their door, provincial teachers have to express their thoughts and worries to their director, who will then contact the academic coordinator in the capital. This inequity can in turn be fuelled if the local directors have authoritarian attitudes and make decisions without considering the teachers’ opinions. In short, with or without the influence of the directors’ personalities, teachers in the provinces do not have a voice of their own.

Being from the capital city myself, it was only then that I began to realise how different my context was from that of these teachers. We had the same job, but I was regarded as having a very different status, not only because of my studies (I had recently completed my Masters in ELT) but also because I came from the capital city, Montevideo. I realised how lost they were in many aspects, how little information they received about what was going on in ‘the real world’ of the capital, and sadly, I came to understand that nothing was going to change unless they could be empowered to become autonomous. As months went by, I have to say I was shocked by my realisations. For example, being a test designer (for B1 level in Uruguay), I learned they were sometimes unhappy with my tests because very often, the tasks were not appropriate for their students. For example, I might have designed a task which involved talking about the entertainment facilities in their town, when in fact many of these towns do not even have a cinema. Soon after I learned this was happening, I also confirmed the fact that the teachers were not able to voice their opinions about tests directly to those in charge. The system worked by asking the director to comment on the tests, not the teachers themselves.

Without wanting to fall into any kind of ‘missionary paternalism’, as illustrated by Macedo (1998) in his foreword to Freire’s Pedagogy of Freedom, when I decided to
apply for doctoral studies, I knew this was the area I wanted to explore, how to help these teachers become autonomous, confident professionals. My employers were happy to have someone design an in-service programme for the provinces, although given the economic limitations at the time, the course needed to be financially self-sufficient. There were simply no funds for the provinces at that moment as other issues had to be prioritised. In the end we decided we would charge a small fee to each participant in order for me to have a salary. The programme would consist of two 7-month blocks dealing with different topics concerning language teaching methodology. To conduct the face-to-face sessions once a month, I would travel to different provincial areas for the day.

Once the programme was designed, out of 100 or so teachers who had expressed their interest in the course, only 45 actually enrolled. This may have been due to a variety of reasons, but significant among these was the unreliability of the inter-provincial transport system in Uruguay, which prevented many of these people from joining the course. In the end, teachers from six areas decided to travel to Town A, while others from three other areas would meet in Town B. As a result, the course became available for approximately half of the provincial areas in the country. Two other provinces, D in the east and E in the northern border with Brazil were also very keen on doing the course but could not travel to the designed venues, as there were no buses connecting the areas. Given that there were only six or seven prospective participants in D and E, my employers decided I would not travel there because the small number of participants did not cover the costs of the trip.

Now that the first iteration of the Anglo Continuous Development Programme is over, I have happy memories of these sessions: the long bus trips, sometimes taking over three hours to travel only 180 km, the sleepy little towns where you could see more dogs than people, and the feeling of having learned more about my country than any lesson could ever teach me. I have fond memories of the course participants too, some of them so vulnerable and insecure about their teaching skills, and perpetually worried about their language proficiency as if this, in the end, was the only indicator of their ability to teach. I remember Miriam from province Y, who left home at 8 in the morning and hitch-hiked to get to province A
by 2 in the afternoon. She said that she was happy to do this, as she was not only avoiding the cost of buying a bus ticket, but there were in fact no buses from her town to A, which was the closest course venue for her. I was always worried about Miriam, especially in the coldest months of June and July, but she never failed to arrive, smiling broadly and eager to learn. There was also Juliana, who was going through a divorce and became so involved in her action research projects that she managed to feel good again, or so she said. Soledad, who was ecstatic by the end of the course because she had been able to buy a computer, after having saved money for months. For the most part, they wanted me to tell them what was right or wrong in terms of methodology, but I tried very hard to explain they had to be able to make those decisions themselves, which I have to admit was not what happened in the majority of the cases. They very openly said they thought I was superior in professional terms, given my studies and most importantly, the fact that I came from Montevideo.

I am still surprised at how much I have learned from this experience so far, about them and about myself. Always having defined myself as anti-politics and politicians, I now feel very strongly about the politics of this particular situation. I have come to realise I was, perhaps purposefully, ignoring a reality that had been there for many years, every time I went to the provinces as a Visiting Examiner. But now I know. I know I can do something to help these people change their professional realities. Not as some disguised form of neo-colonialism, but because I am certain that this situation is unfair and I cannot let it happen in front of my face. This is probably beyond what anybody would expect from a PhD, but I have to say if I can help these teachers become more autonomous and confident, if I see them move forward at least an inch, that will be my real contribution to knowledge. Not in the academic sense, but in the sense of developing an awareness (the participants and I) of who we are and who we want to be.

* * *

20
1.2. November, 2011

‘An ongoing temptation has been to go back and recast some of my earlier statements in the light of what I have since learned, but I have also felt the attraction of staying faithful to the chronology of the experience’ (Edge 2011:166)

At this point in time, almost three years after writing the introductory section above, I have decided to let it stand unaltered, except for few superficial infelicities of expression I have improved. As a firm advocate of transparency, I believe I owe it to my research and its participants to make communication with my reader as effective as possible.

In order to complete the introductory overview that this chapter aims to provide, I now offer a succinct description of how the educational action research intervention was designed and evolved over the three-year period.

1.3. Just imagine

The present study was conceived as an attempt to intervene, through an action research project, in the situation in provincial and rural areas of Uruguay at the time, where teachers of English had very restricted opportunities, if any, for professional development. This setting was also marked by the fact that teachers believed the most effective model for teacher learning was a transmissive one, in which the teacher educator decides what should be learned and how, and is considered the only valid source of knowledge. To describe these beliefs about teaching and learning, throughout this thesis I have often used the term ‘traditional’, to oppose this position to the one I was trying to advocate as a teacher educator, which was based on a reflective, collaborative, action research approach. It is important for me to clarify that the term ‘traditional’ is not intended to be pejorative, nor is it my intention to judge the appropriacy of the participating teachers' ideas. I have decided to use the term in the belief that it is the one which most effectively captures the situation at the time, as described above.
The Anglo Continuous Development Programme (henceforth referred to as ACDP) was conceived as an educational intervention which sought to bridge the gap between the opportunities for professional development available to teachers in the capital city and those available to their geographically-distant colleagues in the provinces. From my capital-city teacher educator perspective, yet armed with what I believed was the necessary knowledge about the provincial context, I set out to design a programme which was innovative and locally relevant. I wished to depart from the traditional approaches to teacher education which over-emphasise the Applied Science model (Wallace 1991) and result in ‘a counter-productive divide between theory and practice’ (Kostoulas 2011: 14). In the design of ACDP I decided to foreground the principles of reflection, attention to context, collaboration and action research, which at the time I termed ‘the RCCA approach’ to teacher development (De Stefani & Berasain 2008).

The first iteration of ACDP (2008) was planned so as to consist of seven face-to-face meetings on various teaching methodology topics (chosen by participants) supplemented by weekly reflective tasks and e-mail contact with me as necessary. This first iteration of the course took place from April to November 2008. There were seven face-to-face meetings, one per month, each lasting four and a half hours. During the face-to-face meetings in the two different venues (A and B), we would discuss and reflect on issues related to the chosen topic, e.g. the teaching of reading skills. The meetings were designed so that, rather than simply presenting teaching techniques, participants would be encouraged to reflect critically on these and decide on their relevance to their particular contexts. In other words, instead of only encouraging the kind of learning that results from teachers imitating their more experienced peers (Wallace 1991; Edge 2011), I attempted to provide space for the teachers to ‘grow into’ (Stevick 1980: 33) and become empowered as competent, confident professionals.

The second iteration ran from April to November in 2009, during which time I met the participants face-to-face on seven occasions, each time for four and a half hours. It was designed so that seven face-to-face meetings were integrated with tasks to be completed on a VLE. The VLE would then serve as an extension of the face-to-face meetings, providing opportunities for whole-group communication...
and continuous engagement with the methodology topic in different ways. It was also meant to broaden the participants’ horizons in terms of access to online resources. For 2009, one more venue was added (Town C). Originally, this second block was conceived as the final one, but at the participants’ request, ACDP was extended for one more year.

For the final iteration (2010), the design of ACDP was similar to that in 2009, but I decided to make certain changes based on my findings resulting from the continuous action research cycles in the experience. During the 2009 iteration, I had realised that participants were keen to use the virtual spaces for their own teaching, so the 2010 version of ACDP was conceived for the face-to-face sessions to contain a ‘workshop’ ingredient, through which participants collaborated in the design of virtual spaces for their own students. In 2010, four face-to-face meetings were held in the capital, each one lasting for a full day (8 hours). Participants from several new provinces joined ACDP in 2010, and for different reasons such as the quality of broadband connection, the face-to-face meetings were conducted in the capital city. I expand on these design issues in Chapter 6.

The above is a simplified overview of the three different ACDP iterations, which I believe the reader needs to learn about at this stage to be able to follow the events in the narrative of this thesis. Throughout the thesis, however, I will be expanding on the accounts above and linking them to the relevant theoretical frameworks that have informed the present study. To be clear: I have not simply told the story of this research retrospectively on the basis of all that I had learned by the time I had completed it. I have attempted to take the reader with me on my learning journey.

1.4. How this thesis is organised

As this is a piece of research, I set out with research questions and these questions require responses. Because it is a piece of qualitative research, and therefore subject to the law of unintended consequences, other findings have emerged which deserve to be reported. Because my research is action research, it moves through time cyclically; this dimension of the research is not best expressed in terms only
of its outcomes, but requires a narrative telling. As the research has an explicitly reflexive dimension, an account of personal discovery must also find expression.

I respond to the above demands in the following way. In Chapter 2, I present the relevant literature on the field of teacher development and blended learning that serves as the co-text of this study. In Chapter 3, I articulate the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions I have taken in this study, and explain in detail how the data were collected and analysed, providing concrete examples. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 comprise the telling, in that they follow the chronology both of how my teacher education programme evolved and of how my ability to analyse what was happening developed over the years 2008-2010. In Chapter 7, I am then in a position to use my more sophisticated form of analysis in order to track in depth the trajectory of two participants across this three-year period. In Chapter 8, I step back and make space explicitly to articulate the reflexive dimension of my research. In Chapter 9, I present my overall conclusions as they relate to my research questions and to other issues arising throughout the process.

In the next chapter I will outline the co-text for this study, including the conceptual frameworks that informed my decisions and analysis, as well as the research questions which I set out to answer.
CHAPTER 2: CO-TEXT

2.1. Introduction

Having presented the characteristics of the research context, I now turn to the relevant co-text, that is, my explorations and understanding of the literature that is relevant to this study. The discussion is aimed at positioning this study in the field by providing the reader with an overview of the fields of teacher development and blended learning. As part of the literature which provides the co-text for this study, I also focus on the two theoretical frameworks which have informed my research design and data analysis: Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) postmethod conditions and Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry framework.

My review of the literature began with the initial stages of my research and has been ongoing since then. In a field as dynamic as that of educational technology, it has been a challenge to keep up with developments, not only in terms of available literature but also of the technologies themselves, in what Donnelly (2010:350) accurately describes as ‘an age where information and communication technologies (ICTs) are constantly reshaping and redefining our accepted notions of what it means to teach and learn.’

In Uruguay and in the whole of South America, research in the fields of teacher development and blended learning has been less prolific than in European or North American settings, with only a limited number of studies available to date (e.g. Litto 2002; Armellini 2002; Caraballo 2004; Monguet et al. 2006; Vaillant 2001, 2009). This can be regarded both as an advantage and a hindrance, as on the one hand, the under-researched status of South America and the River Plate area in particular provides a visible gap for my study. However, this scarcity of research makes both the research and literature reviewing processes more challenging, in that I have had to find affordances in the work of other researchers whose settings are often quite different from the present one.
This chapter is divided into six sections. In section 2.2 below, I discuss the reasons for my choice of action research as an approach for this intervention. In section 2.3, I define the conceptual frameworks that have informed my study. In sections 2.4 and 2.5 I discuss the literature on the areas of teacher development as well as online and blended learning that I have found relevant to this study, and explore what constitutes effective course design in blended teacher development. These areas are explored in the light of my research design, my understanding of the research setting and my experience as a teacher and teacher educator in TESOL. Finally, I conclude by showing, in section 2.6, how my understanding of the co-text of this study was realised in action.

2.2. What is action research and why was it relevant in this setting?

Action research is a form of disciplined inquiry that aims to understand, improve and reform practice (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:216). The origins of action research can be traced back to John Dewey's (1916) ideas on the steps included in the thinking process, and how these necessarily relate to thought and action (Edge 1993). Yet it was only in the 1940s that Kurt Lewin coined the term ‘action research’, defining it as ‘research which will help the practitioner’ (Lewin 1946:34), and emphasising the fact that ‘Research which produces nothing but books will not suffice’ (1946:35). Although the approach was widely applied in organisations in Britain and the US after Lewin, the processes undergone were not without their drawbacks and misunderstandings (Adelman 1993). It was later in the 1970s that Lawrence Stenhouse began his Humanities Curriculum Project in Britain, focusing on the importance of regarding the teacher as a researcher. Stenhouse’s ideas were further explored by John Elliott and Clem Adelman through the Ford Teaching Project as from 1971, which highlighted the importance of teachers engaging in ‘persistent reflexive thought about their own and others’ practices’ (Adelman 1993) as a way of overcoming the existing difficulty in moving forward during the initial stages of the research process. Since then, many authors such as Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), Zuber-Skerrit (1991a,b), Edge (1993, 2001) and Somekh (1993, 2006) have offered further understanding of action research in education as a way of working towards
sustainable change and the empowerment of individuals through systematic participation and collaboration with colleagues.

In terms of processes and outcomes, Zuber-Skerrit (1991a:2) maintains that action research involves the quest for four fundamental processes: the empowerment of participants, collaboration and participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change. To achieve all this, those involved in the action research process must undergo cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, as was proposed by Lewin in the 1940s and later reinterpreted by many authors such as McNiff & Whitehead (2002:46), who reconstruct the action research process as a ‘self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning’. It is through these consecutive spirals that the researcher will not only improve his/her practice but also generate knowledge through the theorisation of such practice.

Given the contextual factors described in Chapter 1, I decided to approach this study from an action research perspective, understanding the action research process as ‘...a form of collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out’ (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988:5). In choosing action research as a methodology for this study, I sought to achieve three main aims, which can be broadly described as: 1) facilitating the professional empowerment of individuals, 2) contributing to social justice by working against the capital city-provinces divide in Uruguay, and 3) contributing original knowledge to the fields of TESOL and teacher education.

As regards the empowerment of individuals, it was my intention to facilitate this by intervening and working with them on the design and implementation of a Professional Development programme. That is to say, I decided to work with participants in order to help them improve their professional realities, rather than conducting research ‘on’ them as an outsider. From this action research perspective, it was my role to facilitate the development of the participants’ sense of agency, their teaching and learning skills as well as their ability to solve
problems, for them to have more influence on their own work and work environments (Boog 2003). During the study, participants were not only encouraged to conduct action research to improve their day-to-day practice, but they also played an active role in the wider action research study, being active agents in the exploration of what successful blended learning entails. I believe both these experiences aided the participants' transition from a 'technical rationality' to a 'reflective rationality' view of their practice (Schön 1983; Zuber-Skerrit 1991b).

From the perspective of equity and social justice, McNiff and Whitehead (2002:5) believe that action research is a valuable tool in order to ‘encourage people to develop confidence in their own independence of mind and spirit...and to resist all efforts by others in their social contexts to bring their thinking to closure.’ In this way, action research is not only in aid of knowledge and change, but also of social justice. Despite this general concern with social welfare, action research has been categorised according to its aims and outcomes in different ways by different authors, such as Grundy (1988), who presents three variations of action research which he terms technical, practical, and emancipatory, or McKernan (1991) who divides the views very similarly into scientific-technical, practical-deliberative and critical-emancipatory. Although these are relevant categorisations, I believe there is a certain degree of overlap. Nevertheless, the present study can be conceptualised as emancipatory.

As explained by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Zuber-Skerrit (1993), emancipatory action research is different from other forms of action research in that, apart from focusing on improving professional practices and efficiency, it involves an ‘emancipation from the dictates of tradition, self-deception, coercion; and their critique and transformation of bureaucratic systems in organisations’ (Zuber-Skerrit 1993:47). As explained by Grundy (1987:154) emancipatory action research ‘promotes emancipatory praxis in the participating practitioners; that is, it promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change.’ In my context, emancipation involved helping participants to become aware of and transform the unfairness of the educational and geographical divides between the capital city and the provinces, which did not allow them to have a voice of their own.
However, it should be noted that authors such as Boog (2003), Berg (2004), Reason and Bradbury (2006) and Kinsler (2010) maintain that all action research is based on the ideas of empowerment, emancipation and participatory democracy. Reason (2006:189) maintains that ‘...action research is a participative and democratic process that seeks to do research with, for, and by people; to redress the balance of power in knowledge creation; and to do this in an educative manner that increases participants’ capacity to engage in inquiring lives.’ More specifically, action research defined as ‘participatory’ has two main aims. One is to generate knowledge and action which are beneficial to certain groups of people, and the other is to promote individual empowerment by facilitating the construction of knowledge (Reason 1998:71). In this sense, the present study can be defined as both emancipatory and participatory.

In terms of the knowledge that can be generated through action research, as explained by Edge (2008b), there is a fundamental difference between research whose main aim is to discover what is true, and action research, which aims at ‘making things better’ (Edge 2008a:242). In that sense, the difference is between educational research which attempts to understand the way things are as the prior basis for possible improvement, and educational research that attempts to improve certain situations and document what can be learned from that experience (Edge 2008b). As has been explained above, this study belongs to the latter. In this sense, from an academic perspective, my decision to approach the study as action research determined a methodological need to theorise my experience as a course designer and teacher educator, thus generating the kind of knowledge that is otherwise not accessible. Unlike other forms of research which only rely on the knowledge generated in fairly stable research settings, action research, which ‘incorporates an intention to integrate change and development within the research process’ (Somekh 1993:29), seemed the most viable methodology for conducting research in this setting.

Notwithstanding the social orientation of action research, the status of the knowledge generated through it should be no different from that of knowledge generated by other approaches to research (Somekh 1993:32). According to
Reason (2006:190), quality in action research is determined internally by the action researcher's awareness of the ongoing choices they have made and their consequences, and externally by the transparency of articulation of these choices to the wider public. In his foreword to Stringer's *Action Research Second Edition* (Stringer 1999), Guba argues for the importance of focusing on local contexts rather than discovering general truths. In doing so, he suggests a move away from the traditional concerns with validity, reliability, objectivity and generalisability, as these are only appropriate where the paradigm of inquiry is based on the existence of a tangible reality. If action research is concerned with human inquiry, which depends on interpretation, it is virtually impossible to presume the existence of one reality. Expanding on the same idea, McNiff and Whitehead (2002:108) maintain that 'the process of validating claims to knowledge is moving beyond autocratic activities such as checking whether traditional elements of report writing are accurately executed, towards new dialogical forms of engaging with the report as an authentic interpretation of a life lived in an educational way.' I have tried to respect this principle in my research, and hope that in so doing I have succeeded in presenting a report that is trustworthy in action research terms.

Edge (2001:1) illustrates the concept of the action researcher in his quest for reflective change, by referring to the idea of wanting 'not to go out the same way we came in.' This impulse, he maintains, comes with the responsibility not to focus only on abstractions, but also to collaborate with those around us and then communicate our experiences to the rest of the world. Like Guba (1999), he emphasises the importance of 'local understandings' so that 'actual educational practice can be theorized (the contribution to theory) and improved (the contribution to practice)' (Edge 2001:4). By approaching this study from such an action research perspective, I have tried to bear these principles in mind, highlighting the importance of local knowledge and understandings, including shedding light on the action researcher's journey (as will be explained in Chapter 8), while simultaneously deriving a conceptual contribution appropriate to doctoral study.
2.3. Conceptual frameworks

Based on the principles of social constructivism (Vygotsky 1981; Lave & Wenger 1991) this study saw the kind of teacher learning that a course may bring about as a process of active knowledge construction that occurs through the effective combination of reflection, peer collaboration, authentic activities and individual experiences. In this process of knowledge construction, the tutor must have a facilitative rather than an authoritarian role (McPherson & Baptista 2004:52), allowing teacher-learners the necessary space and support for them to become ‘active constructors of knowledge who bring their own needs, strategies and styles to learning’ (Felix 2002:3).

The study’s central analytical lens is based on Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry model which introduces teaching, cognitive and social presence as key elements in a successful educational experience. The rationale of the study also relates to Schön’s (1983) work on reflective practice and is framed by Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) Postmethod framework. More precisely, the study explores the notions of teaching, social and cognitive presences in the process of developing a blended approach to teacher development which is based on an exploration of the Postmethod parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu 2006b).

I now expand on the Community of Inquiry and Postmethod frameworks, before going on to show how I have brought them together.

2.3.1. The Community of Inquiry Framework

The Community of Inquiry framework as defined by Garrison and Anderson (2001:12) is based on a ‘collaborative constructivist’ view of teaching and learning, associated with the work of John Dewey (1938) and his identification of the principles of interaction and continuity. Garrison and Anderson (2001) state that it is through such interaction that ideas are communicated and knowledge is constructed, whilst it is through continuity that the foundations for future learning are laid. In fact, the Community of Inquiry framework is rooted in a critical
thinking tradition that lies outside online learning, and has sought to shed light on
cognitive activity as well as on the relationship between interaction and learning
(Dewey 1938; Bloom et al. 1956; Lipman 1991). Drawing on Lipman’s (1991) idea
of a Community of Inquiry, Garrison and Anderson maintain that a successful
educational experience is one in which learners reach the highest levels of
cognitive learning and ‘a community of learners is an essential, core element of an
educational experience when higher-order learning is the desired learning
outcome’ (Garrison & Anderson 2001:22). They understand higher-order learning
to involve higher-order thinking that is ‘conceptually rich, coherently organized
This presupposes a move through different levels of cognitive processing:
remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating
(Krathwohl 2002:216). These understandings of higher-order thinking are traced
back by Garrison and his colleagues (e.g. Rourke & Kanuka 2009:33; Aykol &
Garrison 2010:237) to Bloom’s taxonomy of learning domains, the upper
categories in the cognitive domain originally termed by Bloom as application,
synthesis and evaluation (Bloom et al. 1956).

As far as the constitutive elements of a Community of Inquiry are concerned,
Garrison and Anderson identify teaching, social and cognitive presence, elements
which they see as interacting within a successful e-learning educational
experience. They regard cognitive presence as ‘the extent to which learners are
able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse
in a critical community of inquiry’ (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2001:11). In other
words, they understand cognitive presence as the manifestation of the learners’
movement towards higher-order thinking, as explained above. On the other hand,
social presence is defined as ‘the ability of participants in a community of inquiry
to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people (i.e., their full
personality), through the medium of communication being used’ (Garrison et al.
2000:94). Social presence, they believe, contributes to enhancing and sustaining
cognitive presence. Finally, the third element in a Community of Inquiry is teaching
presence, defined as ‘the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social
processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally
worthwhile outcomes’ (Anderson et al. 2001). This not only involves the
structuring and direction of activities but also the modelling of critical discourse and reflection.

With higher-order thinking as the ultimate educational aim, Garrison and Anderson (2001:23) believe a critical community of learners is composed by teachers and students interacting with the aim of ‘facilitating, constructing and validating understanding, and of developing capabilities that will lead to further learning.’ A Community of Inquiry will encourage at the same time cognitive independence and social interdependence. In short, the Community of Inquiry model for successful online learning presupposes the existence of teaching, social and cognitive presence as interacting elements within the educational experience, whose ultimate aim is for the learner to reach the highest levels of cognitive thinking. Although this movement towards higher-order thinking will manifest itself in the cognitive presence domain, the social and teaching presences are essential to support and promote such cognitive processing. I expand on the teaching, social and cognitive presence dimensions in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.1.) where I present the levels and indicators for each one together with examples of how the authors applied the framework.

Although this model was originally developed for a purely online computer-conferencing context, more recently Garrison and his colleagues have taken the model into the blended learning domain (Garrison & Kanuka 2004; Vaughan & Garrison 2005; Garrison & Vaughan 2008) in order to understand further what effective blended design consists of, as well as how blended learning facilitates the process of inquiry. Given the existence of research on both the online and blended domains, the Community of Inquiry framework seemed relevant to my own blended setting in which I intended to facilitate the teachers’ movement from a concern with the purely technical aspects of their teaching towards a more reflective approach through which they could theorise their experiences. To achieve this change in the participants’ learning experiences, like the authors cited above, I was also concerned with facilitating movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking. It was thus that I decided to employ the Community of Inquiry framework as a tool to analyse discourse in this blended teacher development intervention. To be clear, I made this decision not because I knew that the
Community of Inquiry framework would be fully explanatory, but because I wanted to discover how explanatory, how useful, it would be.

I now turn to Kumaravadivelu's (2001) Postmethod framework, to explain its meaning and scope within the present study.

### 2.3.2. The Postmethod Parameters

The other model I used throughout my research and integrated with the Community of Inquiry one described above was Kumaravadivelu's (2001, 2006b) Postmethod Pedagogy, which arose as a result of dissatisfaction with the transmission model of teacher education prevalent in TESOL at the time (Kumaravadivelu 2001:537). Kumaravadivelu (2001) advocated the new Postmethod framework as a means towards context-sensitive education, as a tool for breaking down the traditional barriers between theory and practice, and ultimately for raising awareness of the socio-political responsibilities of those involved in TESOL. Kumaravadivelu (2001:538) conceptualised the Postmethod pedagogy as 'a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility.'

*Particularity* refers to the contextual affordances that must not only be acknowledged but also understood in order to construct a situated view of the participants' reality. *Practicality* refers to the creation of a 'theory of practice' (Kumaravadivelu 2006b:173), which results from teachers theorising about their own practice rather than applying the theories of external experts (Edge & Richards 1998b:572). Finally, the parameter of *possibility* involves the reconstruction of teachers' identities based on an awareness of the inequalities inherent in the professional environments we inhabit, which are shaped by social, economic and political factors.

This model resonated with my idea of what successful professional development could be based on in the present context, where I perceived a need to appreciate and value local expertise as well as a need to raise the participants' socio-political awareness. My idea of its feasibility was based on my experience as a teacher.
educator and my knowledge of the historical and socio-political aspects of the setting. I therefore intended to use this model, combined with the Community of Inquiry one, as a basis for a professional development, action research intervention. It was hence that I combined the two models, as described below.

2.3.3. Combining the two frameworks

I integrated the two conceptual frameworks to provide a visual summary of my use of the three presences to analyse teacher development, thus creating a new model which views locally-effective blended teacher development as a cycle of empowerment.

![Diagram of blended teacher development as a cycle of empowerment](image)

**Figure 2.1. Blended teacher development as a cycle of empowerment.**

The diagram shows blended teacher development in this context as the interaction of the three presences of a Community of Inquiry framed within the parameters of *particularity, practicality* and *possibility*. Given that this is a situated study with particular participants, the parameter of *particularity* provides a starting point for
the bottom-up process. Moreover, the *particular* provides the necessary grounding for the *practical* to come into play. This grounded *practicality* implies for the participants a process of empowerment which will facilitate an exploration of what is *possible*. This awareness then feeds into the participants’ perception of the *particular* and transforms it, therefore enabling the *practical* and *possible* to continue to evolve in a cyclical fashion. Thus, in line with the underlying principle of action research, it is action that will lead to increased awareness.

To summarise, as an action researcher in teacher education, working within Kumaravidvelu’s (2006b) conceptual framework of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*, I have investigated the effectiveness of a blended-learning approach to professional development. Inside this framework, as a discourse analyst, I have investigated the usefulness of the three ‘presences’ of a Community of Inquiry conceptual approach in helping me to track and understand such professional development as it takes place. In both cases, my approach set out to be exploratory.

Based on the combined conceptual frameworks above, therefore, and with a sense of genuine exploration, I formulated the following research questions:

- Can blended learning become a tool for professional development within a framework of particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b)?

- What roles do face-to-face and online cognitive, social and teaching ‘presences’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) play in the process of such development?

In order to explore my research questions, I analysed the relevant literature as part of my action research, using my situated understanding of the context to find connections between my research and that of other authors. In the rest of this chapter, I refer to the literature on teacher development and blended learning to show how it influenced my ongoing thinking as a tutor, course designer and researcher. In section 2.4, I first refer to some teacher development principles that
have been discussed in the TESOL and general education fields which I consider relevant to my study.

2.4. Teacher development principles

The nature of teachers’ belief systems with regard to their own professional development is undoubtedly complex, as expressed by Richards and Lockhart (1994:30), who suggest that ‘Teachers’ belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it’. My action research setting, in which most teachers have limited opportunities to access any kind of pre- or in-service teacher development programmes, is in my experience, marked by a culture of traditional views. Similarly to what is described by Hargreaves (1994:3), over the years I have observed how teachers in provincial Uruguay are both shaped and constrained by the structures and traditions that define their professional environment, where too much emphasis has been placed on resorting to outside experts who propose one-size-fits-all standardised solutions, a situation also described by Burbank and Kauchak (2003:500) and Hofman and Dijkstra (2010:1038) in other contexts. Not surprisingly, these ready-made solutions fail to take into account the particularities and practicalities of the setting (Kumaravadivelu 2006b). Despite these limitations, I have seen teachers approve of these somewhat ineffective opportunities for development uncritically and rely unduly on the outside experts who offer them.

From an ecological perspective (Watson & Steele 2006), this is not surprising but rather a consequence of the aforementioned lack of educational opportunities, which results in teachers - having virtually no qualifications themselves - seeing the qualified and geographically distant capital-city experts as superiors whose ideas are not to be questioned. These ‘conceptual schemata’ that teachers hold about their professional lives (Wallace 1991) determine their thoughts and actions, and will ultimately have an effect on the outcome of this or any other professional development experience.
Through my experience as a teacher educator working with teachers in the provinces, and therefore aware of the constraints of the setting described above and their potential effect on the action research project I was planning, I began to examine the literature to find support for my idea of creating a teacher development programme based on principles which enhanced the value of local needs and expertise, fostering reflection, collaboration and action research, though I was aware of the difficulty involved in challenging the participants’ beliefs. That is, I suspected it would not be an easy task to intervene in the setting in order to promote changes, especially when these change processes would imply dealing with teachers’ deeply held views of what effective teaching and teacher development consisted of. Below I present the teacher development principles which provided a framework for designing the Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP).

2.4.1. The link between reflection and practice

‘...teacher education needs to engage teachers not merely in the mastery of rules of practice but in an exploration of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and thinking that inform such practice.’ (Richards 1998:xiv)


According to Wallace, (1991:51) there is a direct link between reflection and teacher development, in that ‘Development implies change, and fruitful change is extremely difficult without reflection’. From a pragmatic standpoint, Schön’s (1983) argument about the relationship between reflection and action appeared directly relevant to my aim in conducting this research – the exploration of the possibilities of empowerment inherent in the teacher development experience:
‘When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case...He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must convert into action.’ (Schön 1983:68)

The act of reflecting-in-action can provide a major space for teacher learning, and should be followed by the act of reflecting-on-action (Schön 1983). That is, reflection should occur during and after action for individuals to become empowered as professionals. As advocated by Garton and Richards (2007:8) (distance) teacher development programmes which effectively attend to local needs must involve ‘investigating one’s own practice and developing the reflective and analytic skills necessary to integrate this into a process of informed professional growth’. This professional growth will enhance the participants’ sense of agency and save them many frustrations such as that of ‘seeing our teaching future defined by the latest method, the latest guru, or the latest coursebook’ (Edge 2002:16). For teachers to gain this sense of agency, it is necessary to move away from mainstream transmission models towards transformational models which help them ‘develop the knowledge, skill, attitude and autonomy necessary to construct their own theory of practice’ (Kumaravadivelu 2006a:21).

Other authors such as Britt Postholm (2008) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) add to Schön’s model of reflective practice by suggesting that teachers can also be encouraged to reflect before action, although this implies seeing the process of reflecting and acting as a linear rather than a cyclical one. Informed by these principles, I decided it was necessary to design a programme at the heart of which was the link between reflection and action.

In the present context, I believe that the scarce attention usually devoted to reflection leads to teachers being unaware of its importance, which often results in an increase in the number of teachers who, as Ur (1996:317) aptly describes them, have been teaching for twenty years yet can be defined as having had ‘one year’s experience repeated twenty times’. To remedy this, it is important to offer teacher-learners the necessary tools for them to become reflective practitioners who can both apply theory successfully and theorise their own practice (Edge 2011). This
theorising skill can be developed by an increased awareness of the links between one’s reflections and actions, and implies for teachers an ‘ongoing, explicit commitment to increasing their awareness of why it is that they teach the way they do, along with a commitment to improving their ability to articulate that awareness, through which process of articulation the awareness itself is enhanced and augmented’ (Edge 2008b:653). To achieve this, it is fundamental that teachers learn to focus on the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of their practice rather than on the simpler ‘how’ (Bartlett 1990:205). This act of ‘being deliberately thoughtful and self-questioning’ (Moon & López Boullón 1997:60) will turn mere survival strategies into sustainable practice, which will result in professional growth (Richards 1998). Of course, reflection is not an easily developed habit, especially in this context where it has not traditionally been fostered, which is why I was aware of the need to provide effective models and foreground the links between reflecting and acting, in order to make the approach more directly relevant to participants.

2.4.2. The role of collaboration in professional development

‘Like their students must do, teachers also construct their own understandings by doing: by collaborating, by inquiring into problems, trying and testing ideas, evaluating and reflecting on the outcomes of their work.’ (Darling-Hammond 1995:24)

Collaboration is a fundamental ingredient for effective teacher development programmes, especially for those in isolated contexts who need the space to share ideas with their colleagues in an environment of trust (Cowie 2011). In the first place, collaboration with a tutor, rather than dependence on her/him is essential to determine the most appropriate content and pedagogy relevant to the teachers’ needs. Without it, teachers may become more insecure and dependent on the teacher educator (Freeman 1993), who needs to be sensitive to their needs in order to avoid this dependence. Ideally, all stakeholders should collaborate for any professional development experience to succeed (Eaton & Carbone 2008).

As regards peer collaboration, Burbank and Kauchak (2003) propose collaborative action research as an alternative to the traditional teacher development occurring in isolation and dependent on an outside expert. However, it may not always be easy to implement, as discussed in a study by Scribner (1999) who found that
collaboration was an idea initially favoured yet not necessarily put into practice by in-service teacher participants. This may partly be due to the influence of internal factors such as values, beliefs and interpersonal dynamics (Sicotte et al. 2002), as well as contextual and organisational factors which are said to affect the success of collaborative practices (Levine & Marcus 2010; Pawan & Ortloff 2011).

Also in terms of peer collaboration, Prestridge (2010) discusses the role of collegial dialogues. She concludes that there are inevitable tensions between collegiality and critique, a relationship which needs to be reconsidered so that critique becomes a constructive part of collegiality. In a setting in which participants mostly hold clearly traditional views on teaching and learning, reformulating the idea of critique for it to be viewed as a tool rather than a threat seemed to me challenging at best. That is, I believed that true collegiality which involves constructive critique might not be easy to promote in a setting such as the present one where participants are used to regarding the tutor figure as the only valid source of knowledge. Besides, as was explained in Chapter 1, the fact that the work arrangements themselves fuel negative competitiveness among the teachers also works against collegiality and collaboration.

The aforementioned factors may play a significant role in the sustainability of collaboration between teachers. In this light, the concept of enhancing sustainability through a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ state of need and aspiration seemed a necessary prerequisite for the success of the collaborative aspects of the ACDP programme.

2.4.3. Action research as a tool for professional development

‘Both [teachers and teacher educators] can pursue through action research the affordances that they discern in their contexts; they can strive to articulate their understandings, to theorise their experience, to develop their praxis.’ (Edge 2008b:654)

As explained in section 2.2., I designed my study according to an action research tradition, in accordance with the idea that there are two types of research outcomes and processes – that of discovering the ‘truth’ and the more socially oriented ‘good’ (Edge 2008b:654). My research purpose, as was explained in
Chapter 1, was to help TESOL teachers to become empowered, and although I might discover some situated and subjective ‘truths’ along the way, my ultimate aim was ‘to make things better’ (Edge 2008a:242). But apart from the role played by action research in the design of the study, which I refer to more extensively in Chapter 3 (p.60), it also operated at the level of participants, by providing a working framework for them to improve their professional realities.

As discussed in 2.2, I decided to design a teacher development course based on action research in order to help participants to ‘improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out’ (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988:5). My perception of the unfairness of the current educational context in which TESOL teachers away from the capital city of Montevideo have restricted possibilities to further their professional development made the words of the authors especially meaningful to me. I was interested in helping participants to develop an understanding and increased sense of agency in their own professions, raising their awareness of the value of their status as 'local experts', in accordance with the Postmethod parameters proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2006b).

As regards the role of action research as a tool for professional development, Rathgen (2006: 580-581) highlights the paradoxical nature of teacher learning, explaining that in a profession dedicated to life-long education, teachers themselves rarely change their long-held ‘non-critical’ and ‘non-reflective’ views and practices, which are often based on their own experience as learners. However, her report on Nuthall’s (2005) study on the experience of involving teacher learners in researching their own practice lends support to the idea that action research is indeed a potential tool for teacher learning, and may eventually lead teachers to change their practice. According to Rathgen (2006:590), their learning from the research experience ‘became embedded in their ongoing practice, because it was context specific and because they had made a contribution...’
Ponte et al. (2004) describe a case-study of teachers in different schools embarking on a programme aimed at gaining professional knowledge through action research, based on the idea of praxis as a means of professional development. They concluded that with the sometimes directive facilitation of a teacher educator, the action research experience can allow teachers to learn and grow as professionals. Ermeling (2010) concluded that systematic teacher inquiry can have a tangible effect on classroom practice, especially if carried out in collaboration with peers over shared problematic areas. Similarly, Crandall (2000) highlights the increasingly important role that classroom research has begun to play in the teacher development experience as of late, facilitating teachers' reconsideration of their own practice and enhancing their professionalism. In the already cited study by Scribner (1999), the act of conducting individual inquiry was a powerful learning activity for teachers. Through individual efforts, participants solved their professional problems by reading and conducting research.

Despite the extensive literature dedicated to highlighting the benefits of action research in professional development, its implementation is not always without problems, especially when participants are expected to collaborate. However individual the inquiry may be, action researchers have the responsibility to share their theorisations with their peers if a sustainable sense of community is to be established. As explained by Richards and Farrell (2005), the act of sharing one’s findings is embedded in the philosophy of action research. Frankham and Howes (2006) refer to the disturbances inherent in establishing a collaborative action research project, and claim that these conflicts are essential for change to take place. In a similar fashion, Cook (2009) highlights the value of ‘mess’ in action research, which she sees as an essential prerequisite for the process of acquiring new knowledge and turning this into action. I expand on this aspect of the action research experience in Chapters 8 and 9. Similarly, Wenger (1998:97) states that ‘Learning involves a close interaction of order and chaos’. Thus the idea of encouraging participants to engage in action research in order to improve their practice seemed both challenging and motivating, despite the potential difficulties relating to collaborative work and systematic reflection among teachers who were not in principle used to these.
2.4.4. The need for a situated understanding of teacher learning

‘Teacher learning is subject to many influences. It is best seen as complex and resistant to standardisation. This complexity reflects the interplay between the professional and the personal, the individual and the social, the objective and the subjective, the formal and the informal, the situated and the generalised.’ (Fisher et al. 2006:2)

It is both challenging and somewhat depressing to learn that ‘Most professional development experiences for teachers fail to make an impact’ (Fullan 2007:285), which is why a situated understanding of teacher learning is essential. That is, I believe it is necessary to go deeper into how professional development experiences, in this case of teachers in provincial areas, can be made more relevant and empowering so that they can really have an impact on teachers’ professional lives; hence the reason for this study.

As expressed by Hagger (2002) and Hagger et al. (2007), I agree that it is important to acknowledge the fact that teacher-learners who embark on professional development programmes may hold differing views on teaching and learning. Far from disregarding these ideas if different from our own, teacher educators need to take them seriously and avoid dismissing them as ‘naïve, misleading or unhelpful’ (Hagger 2002: 3-4). In their 2007 paper, Hagger et al. suggest a set of dimensions to analyse teacher learning, two of which are attitude to context and aspiration. As an action researcher, it was especially important for me to learn about these during the study; as such knowledge would not only aid me in terms of the evolving course design but would also determine their reactions to the learning opportunities I was planning to offer. In other words, I needed to construct this situated understanding of effective teaching and learning through my action research, not as a pre-action stage of information-gathering. Given the action research nature of this study, I knew I needed to deepen my understanding of these teachers’ ideas about their contexts and their profession in order to offer them locally-relevant opportunities for empowerment.

Another aspect of teacher learning which seemed particularly relevant to this context was Freeman’s (1993) idea of the act of renaming professional practice, given the fact that lack of formal training was a common feature of the
participants’ professional profiles. In this setting, such renaming involved giving participants the professional language to describe their practices more accurately. Therefore, I intended the programme to provide the necessary conceptual grounding that would not only allow teachers to ‘assign meanings to their actions’ (Freeman 1993:485) but also to theorise their practice and thus be able to act as a result of this theorisation in a more informed manner. As explained by Freeman (1993:495), this process is not simply a matter of adding new vocabulary but rather a dialectical process of creating new understandings of their practice, a process which I believe both requires and fosters a heightened sense of agency and identity.

Also in terms of identity, the influence of social participation on its formation as discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) seemed very relevant to this teacher development context. According to the author’s social theory, learning is a form of social participation and will define and transform the identities of those involved. He maintains that significant learning affects practice by changing our ability to engage in it (1998:95) and involves the formation of our professional identities. The emotions involved in this process of identity formation cannot be denied, as evoked by different authors such as Nias (2002), Zembylas (2003) and Shulman (2000:131), who maintains that ‘When you begin to wrestle with people’s deeply held, private, intuitive theories, you are engaging them in a process that is as deeply emotional as it is cognitive.’ I was also aware of the likelihood that such identity reconstruction would not only occur for participants in this process, but would also transform my own identity as a teacher educator and action researcher.

2.4.5. The limitations of teacher development in the present context

‘The principal factor causing a low quality of education in Latin America is the lack of attention to the professional development of teachers.’ (Vaillant 2001:1)

Educational provision in geographically removed areas has traditionally been a source of concern, not only among South American countries, but also in more socio-economically developed countries (e.g. Sharplin 2009; Auh & Pegg 2009; Tytler et al. 2011). As regards developing countries, Avalos (2000) argues for the
need to engage teachers in policy reforms and notes the lack of reliable data on teacher certification in these countries, where the separation of theory from practice is recognised as one of the main problems of teacher education (Avalos 2000:469).

In Uruguay, Vaillant (2001) and Caraballo (2004) highlight the limited number of primary and secondary teachers with formal qualifications. According to national statistics quoted by Vaillant (2001:4), in 1995 only 20% of the teachers outside the capital city of Montevideo were formally accredited. Although the overall statistics have improved to some extent as a result of the creation of (state) Regional Teacher Training Centres in 1997, in 2011 the case is still that a very small minority of teachers of English outside the capital are formally qualified. In fact, a recent newspaper report (El Pais Digital, March 6, 2012) suggests that the lack of English teachers is one of the reasons for the government’s decision to end a successful intensive English programme for schools in disadvantaged areas.

Among teachers working privately, which is the case of the participants in this study (some of whom also work for state education), initial certification is virtually non-existent. Given this situation, discussed in Chapter 1, it seemed both feasible and appropriate to design a blended teacher development programme to remedy this situation to some extent.

Bearing in mind the teacher development principles and characteristics of the research setting as described above, I now draw on the relevant literature on online and blended learning to build a case for the creation of a teacher development programme that facilitates the exploration of what is practical and possible (Kumaravadivelu 2006b) for teachers in provincial and rural areas of Uruguay.

2.5. From traditional to blended learning: bridging the gap

‘...online learning is here to stay, and (that) we should embrace the technology for what it can be – a tool which, in the hands of creative educational designers, dedicated online moderators and enthusiastic students, has the potential to enhance our learning experience beyond and in addition to the expectations of even the best classroom environment.’ (Felix 2002:12)
Many authors have referred to the fuzziness associated with the term ‘blended learning’ (e.g. Driscoll 2002; Oliver & Trigwell 2005; Bonk & Graham 2005; Ellis et al. 2006; Donnelly 2010). In this study, I will refer to blended learning as ‘the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences’ (Garrison & Vaughan 2008:5). For these authors, its basic principle is the optimal integration of both learning modes so that the strengths of each provide a learning experience which is coherent with the context and intended educational outcomes (Garrison & Vaughan 2008:5). I very much agree with the authors in that the blended learning experience must above all be based on coherence – not only between learning modes but also between plans, actions, aims and tasks.

Blended learning can make the most of the features of both face-to-face and online media, since technology has great potential to promote active learning, and its combination with face-to-face contact is believed to promote a stronger sense of community (Rovai & Jordan 2004:11) than that resulting from fully online courses. In this context, a blended course appeared to me to be more suitable than a fully online one given the participants’ generally limited ICT skills and lack of online learning experience, in order to make the transition from traditional to virtual learning an easier one (Driscoll 2002). In addition, given the novelty of the educational experience, maintaining an instance for face-to-face contact seemed a good idea to avoid participants suffering from technology shock. This is in line with what is suggested by Delfino and Persico (2007), who advocate the gradual introduction of the online components complemented by a strong monitoring of the students’ reactions. Moreover, having the chance to meet colleagues from different areas across the country in their own environments, rather than having to travel to the capital, constituted an unprecedented opportunity for participants in this setting, which could potentially enhance the sense of community.

A great many studies on the subject of blended learning have been conducted in the past few years, as reported by Bliuc, Goodyear and Ellis (2007), who argue the need for a more holistic approach which offers different methodological perspectives on the nature of learning and teaching through blended design. In the rest of this section, I refer to some features of blended learning with educational
technologies discussed in the literature which have informed my research and framed the design of the blended programme in this study.

2.5.1. Blended learning can result in participant satisfaction

Many researchers have suggested that blended learning results in an increased level of satisfaction among participants compared to that of fully online courses. Jung’s (2001) study of online in-service teacher training in Korea found that teachers actually preferred learning through online than traditional methods, lending support to the idea that including an online component could be an effective strategy in teacher education settings such as the present one. Moreover, a study by So and Brush (2008) shows that high levels of collaborative learning seem to have a positive effect on student satisfaction with the blended learning experience. Interestingly, the authors claim their findings did not support a strong correlation between online social presence (see section 2.3.1.) and satisfaction, and suggest this can be due to the existence of face-to-face instances, which reduced the need for participants to engage in online collaboration (2008:330). Other studies by Felix (2001:14) concluded that new technologies can, if properly used, add value to classroom teaching in a large variety of ways, such as presenting students with interactive information gap resolution as well as experiential tasks (Felix 2002:8). Dziuban and Moskal (2001, in Rovai & Jordan 2004:4) also found that blended programmes in general had lower withdrawal rates.

Heterick and Twigg (2003:28) describe a study showing that a blended approach resulted in more positive attitudes towards the subject and increased satisfaction. Furthermore, research by Felix (2001, 2002) suggests that students are in general open to quality online learning, especially in combination with face-to-face learning. The author maintains that when students resent online learning it is due to their seeing it as an attempt at cost reductions which will replace good face-to-face teaching. Donnelly’s case-study research (2006:94) shows participants’ very positive attitudes towards the online component of the blend, although she maintains that ‘There is a synergy that happens in a face-to-face contact that a computer cannot replicate in any way’ (2006:97). Motteram’s (2006) study of a blended module within a Master’s programme being taken mostly by in-service
language teachers shows that most participants found the blended learning experience satisfactory, both in terms of community building and acquisition of skills. However, the author admits that this was not unexpected given that the programme focus was on issues related to educational technology, which is different from the case in the present study where the main learning focus is on language teaching methodology and participants have had no previous online learning experiences.

### 2.5.2. Blended learning can facilitate the learning process

According to Fisher et al. (2006:19), digital technologies can operate as tools for learning in that they offer potential for learner engagement. The authors categorise the affordances of technology into four ‘affordance clusters’: knowledge building, distributed cognition, community and communication, and engagement, adding that all of these can act as enablers or as barriers to teachers’ motivation to learn. Regarding these affordances as opportunities for action, each of the affordance clusters encompasses different opportunities for learning.

Knowledge building, they maintain, enables teachers to create and use different representations of the subject content, whilst the distributed cognition cluster provides wider access to information and resources. The community and communication affordance cluster fosters the sharing of experiences and ideas with colleagues, while the engagement cluster involves informal learning, often through playful activities (Fisher et al. 2006:23). They suggest that although the affordances in each cluster cannot in themselves have an effect, they can offer opportunities for empowerment if teachers engage with them effectively. In addition, they clarify the fact that these affordances are not to be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as ‘overlapping and interleaving’ (2006:21).

Oliver and Trigwell (2005:22) attribute the improvements in the quality of learning in blended contexts to the Hawthorne or novelty effect, and also to the fact that learners experience variation as a result of the blend. They base their claims on variation theory (Bowden & Marton 1998, Marton and Tsui 2004), according to which variation fosters discernment and therefore learning. Derntl
and Motschning-Pitrik (2003) suggest that blended learning is inherently different from traditional learning, given the role of the tutor as a facilitator of cooperative learning, as opposed to the transmission of information characteristic of the former. However, I would argue that this is not necessarily a quality of the blended learning approach itself but a consequence of the conceptual basis on which the course is designed. That is, the view of teaching as a process of facilitating the construction of knowledge rather than a purely transmissive process is not a feature of blended learning models, but has been acknowledged for a long time, at least in the field of TESOL.

Blended learning can also facilitate the learning process through the use of asynchronous discussions, which, according to Stacey and Gerbic (2007:169), enhance the learning process by making students articulate their thoughts. Though these discussions are also a feature of online courses, in blended courses they are enhanced by the ‘real life’ quality of face-to-face instances. Conole and Dyke (2004:118) also highlight the importance of virtual discussions, by suggesting that although asynchronous technologies have no inherent properties for fostering reflection, this can be enhanced by offering opportunities for ‘engaging in discussions over a longer time frame than is possible in face-to-face discussions.’ Similarly, Garrison and Kanuka (2004:97) emphasise that blended learning is particularly suitable for promoting a Community of Inquiry (see section 2.3.1.), due to its potential to provide stability and cohesiveness, offering opportunities for dialogue and critical debate, as well as negotiation and agreement. They add that a blended learning approach provides the necessary combination of independence and control to promote critical thinking, and also provides learners with opportunities to confront questionable ideas more reflectively than in a face-to-face context (2004:98-99). Therefore, blended learning seems to have the potential to facilitate the social construction of knowledge by providing face-to-face and online opportunities for interaction and collaboration. This leaves open the question as whether knowledge construction is diminished in those participants who do not take an active part in online collaboration. As will be explained in Chapters 5 and 6, many participants in this study did not take active part in the online discussions nor did they work collaboratively, yet there were other arenas where they showed evidence of having engaged in the higher levels of cognitive
activity, such as integration and resolution (see p.32), as described by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000).

2.5.3. The benefits of fostering the social aspects of blended learning

The enhancement of the social interactions that occur online is both a cause and a consequence of effective blended learning. The social aspects are essential for the creation of a Community of Practice (Wenger 1998), defined as a group of individuals who have common goals and improve their common practice through regular interactions. If we start from the premise that knowledge is socially constructed, the social aspects of blended learning need to be catered for if learning is to be facilitated. At the same time, many studies have highlighted the enhancement of the social aspects of learning which occur in blended courses for teachers (e.g. Rovai & Jordan 2004; Anderson & Henderson 2004). According to Anderson and Henderson (2004:385-6), the social aspects rather than the cognitive ones are fundamental if professional development is to be sustainable. The authors suggest that there is a link between sustained activity and social processes which can be explored according to various theories such as that of situated learning (Lave & Wenger 1991, Herrington & Oliver 2000), communities of practice (Wenger 1998, Kreijns & Kirschner 2001), reflective practice (Bonk et al. 2001) and social presence (Picciano 2002, Faust 2004, Kreijns & Kirschner 2001).

Palloff & Pratt (2007) suggest that a sense of community is a necessary prerequisite for learning to occur in virtual spaces. This sense of community, they add, can be fostered via asynchronous discussions. Furthermore, in a study of a blended teacher development programme by Henderson (2007), online and face-to-face social engagement was understood to be the strongest predictor of sustained online participation. This social engagement was partly translated into a sense of accountability (2007:170) which impacted positively on the levels of motivation and participation. In a similar fashion, Donnelly (2010:355) contends that ‘Social interaction can contribute to learner satisfaction and frequency of interaction in an online learning environment’.
Another positive consequence of enhancing the social aspects of blended learning is the fact that teachers’ perceptions of their own self-efficacy, that is to say, their ability to influence their students’ learning outcomes in a positive way, can be improved (Takahashi 2011). Not surprisingly, teachers’ perceptions of their own self-efficacy are easily affected by low student performances (Bandura 1997), something which is, in my experience, very relevant to this setting, especially when low performances are linked to low levels of motivation. With reference to this concern, Takahashi (2011) highlights the potential of the social context in shaping teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy, restoring their faith in themselves. According to the author, the meaning-making processes in a Community of Practice (Wenger 1998) may facilitate the empowerment of geographically removed teachers if a virtuous circle of enhanced self-efficacy can be fostered through participation in such community.

Other authors have also highlighted the importance of the development of a sense of community. For Garrison and Kanuka (2004:99), the creation of a community is an essential pre-requisite to foster commitment and also to ensure that learners ‘progressively move through the phases of critical inquiry’. Henderson (2007:163) takes the importance of community a step further by suggesting that effective blended teacher development must provide social spaces so that teachers can ‘realign their identities and practices’, in accordance with Wenger (1998). The link between the social and cognitive aspects of learning in blended settings is also highlighted by Garrison and Kanuka (2004) who argue the need for a sense of community on a social level for higher levels of thinking to be achieved and sustained over time. They say that the nature of learning environments has changed since online learners can ‘be both together and apart –... connected to a community of learners anytime and anywhere, without being time, place or situation bound.’ (Garrison & Kanuka 2004:96). According to Kelly et al. (2007:153) learning is no longer seen only as a process within the individual but as a movement ‘from peripheral to full participation’ in communities of practice.

Also with reference to community-building, a recent study by Akyol, Vaughan and Garrison (2011) showed that participants themselves could readily identify the three Community of Inquiry parameters of teaching, social and cognitive presence
in their asynchronous messages as part of a course on blended learning. However, it is noteworthy that the participants were experienced online learners and that the course was a meta course, with participants being actively aware of the ‘presences’ concept. These factors may have enhanced the sense of community, as opposed to the present research setting in which participants were using a virtual learning medium for the first time and were completely unaware of the conceptual frameworks underpinning the study.

Despite the clear importance of enhancing the social aspects of the blended experience, this might not be easily achieved in virtual spaces. In fact, many factors may hinder active participation in the virtual arena. A study by Wettasinghe and Hazan (2006) evidenced the competing priorities that in-service teachers face in their daily professional lives which in their study led to lower levels of participation in virtual discussions, similar to that by Henderson (2007:169) who refers to the ‘competing demands’. The authors also found that the role of the facilitator is a major one in ensuring online visibility. Both the competing demands resulting from the participants’ heavy workloads and the role of the tutor, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, have been significant in this study. For many participants, the importance of the tutor role featured significantly in their discourses of effective professional development, yet the nature of the tutor role they conceived was different from the one I was trying to project. While I tried to act as facilitator, they expected a tutor role of a more directive nature, which might have affected the online dynamics. Similarly, participants complained that their very heavy workloads prevented them from spending enough time in the virtual spaces. One possible solution for future programmes of this kind is to emphasise the roles played by individuals in the virtual arena and how these may have a direct impact on the group learning processes (De Laat & Lally 2004; Donnelly 2010). I return to explore and discuss this in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.5.4. Exploring design in blended teacher development

Course design in blended learning has been extensively discussed, yet it remains an elusive issue, probably due to the need for situated design to make the best use of the particularities of each educational setting. The ongoing design of the ACDP
programme in this study was informed by the relevant literature, yet I also made the most of the participants’ requests and opinions, acknowledging their status as local experts who must have a say as to how their own teacher development processes will occur. In my role as tutor, designer and researcher, I was aware of the fact that a situated understanding of the users’ professional context is paramount for effective design of courses involving technology, as suggested by Blythe (2001) who also emphasises the importance of participants’ opinion in what he terms ‘user-centred’ design (2001:332). Similarly, Srinutapong et al. (2005) report on a study in which a team of local and international experts designed a blended learning programme to support in-service teachers in the integration of educational technologies in the Asia Pacific region. Despite the ‘expert’ status of those in charge, teachers were asked to collaborate both during the design and implementation stages. The authors maintain that the close collaboration of all stakeholders resulted in a sense of ownership and a desire to make the project succeed (2005:23.4).

Many design suggestions have been put forward by several researchers. Carman (2005) identifies the following ingredients in successful blended learning design – synchronous or ‘live’ events, assessment, self-paced learning in the form of multimedia or interactive tasks, collaboration and performance-support materials (resources). In my context however, it seems that this combination could be stressful for participants given their limited ICT literacy combined with heavy workloads, which I believe lend support to the idea that flexibility is a necessary ingredient in each particular setting. Delfino and Persico (2007) report on a 5-year case study of a pre-service teacher training course in Italy which was originally fully face-to-face and gradually became blended through the introduction of learning technologies. As in the present study, the researchers were also designers and tutors for the course. One of the conclusions drawn was the need for increased flexibility (2007:361), together with the design of a combination of summative and formative assessment techniques and a strict balance between online and face-to-face tasks.

Although Salmon’s (2000) five-stage design framework was originally created for online learning, I believe its stages are worth exploring in blended settings as well.
The author proposes five stages in online learning, which she labels *access and motivation, online socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction* and *development*. The idea of helping participants progress through different stages seemed meaningful, especially the idea of implementing a socialisation stage before moving information exchange and knowledge construction, although a particular feature of this study is to ask how these may be distributed across the blend. Although this framework was highly relevant to this setting, I did not experiment with it, given that it was my intention to explore the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al. 2000) in combination with Kumaravadivelu’s Postmethod framework (2006b).

As regards the relationship between online and face-to-face learning, for Derntl and Motschnig-Pitrik (2003:19), ‘it seems clear ... that online phases ‘must’ be followed by presence phases for face-to-face discussions and to deepen online experiences’. Their findings suggest that blended approaches only result in increased motivation when the tutor is perceived by participants as ‘highly open, respectful, and understanding’ (2003:21). Donnelly (2010:354) also emphasises the importance of continuity between the face-to-face and online environments, so that the blended learning experience occurs ‘in a seamless manner’ and helps to ‘enhance, extend or transform’ the face-to-face experience. This was one of the main ideas informing my course design, in which I attempted to use the virtual arena to enhance and extend the learning that had been fostered in the face-to-face meetings.

As far as task design is concerned, Felix (2002:6) suggests that meaningful virtual learning tasks share the characteristics of communicative tasks as suggested by Widdowson (1978) in the sense that these have to be authentic, contextualised and meaningful. Fisher et al. (2006:4) identified certain vital ingredients, such as external ‘conceptual input’, structured dialogue and reflection with an online tutor, mentor, facilitator or peer, and an action research orientation. In every case, the authors suggest, ‘teacher learning is seen as inherently complex – a situated process that is ongoing, social and dynamic.’
2.6. Conclusion: integrating the principles

My understanding of the research setting, my experience as a Uruguayan TESOL teacher and teacher educator, and my explorations of the literature which I have described in this chapter allowed me to visualise the design of the ACDP programme. The outcomes of this visualisation can be seen in several documents through which the programme was launched in 2008, such as the one below, which was given to all teachers and directors in the provinces informing them of the aims and content of the course, and hopefully persuading them to join the programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims of the course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To enable participants to become independent, reflective and critical practitioners, capable of making informed decisions regarding their teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To assist participants in upgrading their skills and knowledge regarding various aspects of teaching methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To facilitate teacher development through peer collaboration.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding principles behind ACDP design</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge is a social construct, so collaboration plays a key role in successful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge has a contextualised character, so the context in which it is used must be borne in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning can be seen as a process of continuous reflection through which participants construct a view of the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This document also relates to the epistemological principles underlying the research, in that it sees knowledge as a contextualised construct being created by the participants individually and with others. This idea, which I expand on in the next chapter on research methodology, was also evidenced in the type of assessment designed for the programme, as seen below.
**Assignment 1 (August):** A 1500 to 2500-word assignment describing an action research plan focusing on classroom management. Assignments must include:
- An analysis of the context
- Identification of an appropriate focus
- An outline of the research plan
- Possible problems and expected outcomes

**Assignment 2: (December):** A 2000 to 4000-word assignment focusing on one of the following areas: writing, speaking, classroom management, motivation. Assignments must be based on an action research project and must include:
- Principles informing the area
- A report on action research plan and findings
- A statement of what has been learnt (i.e. a theorisation)
- A practical outline of how to use the relevant findings/conclusions

Although I will discuss the evolving design of ACDP in the upcoming chapters, I believe it is important for the reader to see at this point, how the design features of ACDP were articulated in 2009, when the technological component was introduced, as this articulation was influenced by my engagement with the literature described in this chapter.

**ACDP 2009**

The Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP) is a two-year course aimed at helping teachers to develop professionally. Originally designed as a methodology course, it has now been re-designed so as to include a language component (ACDP Language), as requested by some participants. ACDP is based on the following principles:

The importance of offering a course which is based on participants' actual needs, which are constantly evolving. Flexibility and 'learner-centredness' are therefore integral to successful professional development.

The value of working in collaboration with peers and the course tutor in order to solve classroom problems and enhance our understanding of various issues related to our profession.

The importance of working with practical ideas in ways that will help us understand why we teach the way we do and learn how to develop our teaching to suit our own particular situations.

The value of technology as a tool for professional development, not only to provide access to materials, but also to enhance communication, networking and critical thinking skills.
The documents shown above reflect how I integrated my thinking, feelings and professional experience together with what I learned from a critical analysis of the literature on blended learning and teacher development, into the design of the Anglo Continuous Development Programme. ACDP was the means through which I intended to facilitate the participants’ empowerment, and it was the action research perspective which would allow me to theorise what constituted locally appropriate course design and pedagogy.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological aspects of this action research study and provide an overview of how the different data were analysed.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction: research position

This study was based on the assumption that there are multiple realities, each of which is constructed by individuals in the interaction with others and the environment (Von Glasersfeld 1989). Therefore, within the continuum of potential ontological positions researchers may adhere to, this research is situated within an idealist position which asserts that ‘reality is only knowable through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings’ (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:11). Despite the potentially contradictory use of the term ‘knowable’ in the definition above by Ritchie and Lewis, I assumed that in this study, the realities described are those constructed and therefore ‘known’ by the research participants and myself through our interactions. These socially-constructed realities are also influenced by our experiences and the ways in which we re-construct our socio-cultural, historical and political contexts.

Linked to this ontological position is the epistemological notion of social constructivism (Vygotsky 1981; Lave and Wenger 1991) or constructionism, as described by Willig (1964), according to whom the principles underlying social constructivism imply that ‘what we perceive and experience is never a direct reflection of environmental conditions but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions. This does not mean that we can never really know anything; rather, it suggests that there are ‘knowledges’ rather than ‘knowledge’”(Willig 1964:7).

This epistemological and ontological positioning affects not only the design of this study, but also the various methodological decisions that have to be made prior to the start and during the research process (Creswell 1998), since research is ‘a composite and interrelated set of activities, riddled with persistent ideological and epistemological assumptions’ (Sanger 1994:177), which are in turn shaped by the
purposes of the research and the characteristics of both participants and researchers themselves (Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

In this case, the study was conceived as a result of a pragmatic need to improve the professional lives of a certain group of teachers and as such, conceptualising it as an action research project seemed natural to me, since ‘generating theories about work has to begin with the work’ (McNiff & Whitehead 2002:4). My main aim was to encourage participants ‘to develop confidence in their own independence of mind and spirit, to play with new ideas, to challenge me, and to resist all efforts by others in their social contexts to bring their thinking to closure.’ (McNiff & Whitehead 2002:5). I wanted to facilitate the process of empowerment through professional development, which would allow the participants to critically reflect on their professional realities and challenge any existing inequalities by voicing ‘their own thoughts in terms meaningful to themselves’ (Edge & Richards 1998a:340).

In the next section I expand on the implications of this action research perspective for this setting.

3.2. Action research

‘Action research is designed to improve... [the participants’] capacities to solve problems, develop skills (including professional skills), increase their chances of self-determination, and to have more influence on the functioning and decision-making processes of organizations and institutions from the context in which they act.’ (Boog 2003:426)

Given the contextual factors described in Chapter 1, as well as my ontological and epistemological assumptions and beliefs about research, this study aimed at going ‘beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform these practices’ (Somekh 2006:1). I particularly emphasised the need for local understandings and the importance of not simply theorising on educational practices, but also improving these practices (Edge 2001a; Boog 2003), to allow participants to benefit from the process.
As an action research study, this project was based on the idea of doing research with people rather than ‘on’ or ‘about’ them (see p.27). I set out to design and implement a programme which would help teachers of English in provincial areas of Uruguay to examine and reconstruct their practices (Freeman 1993) in order to become more competent, confident and autonomous professionals. My role in this study was manifold, as I was course tutor, course designer and researcher at the same time. This constituted an enormous advantage in terms of immersion in the field, as I was able to gather data from each and every one of these perspectives. On the other hand, this multiplicity of roles implied a need for extensive reflexivity, in order to develop a clear awareness of my effect on the research as well as the effect the research was having on me as an individual.

I understand reflexivity as a process where the researcher becomes increasingly aware of the effect of the research on him/her, as well as on the effect the researcher herself/himself is having on the research study. In that sense, ‘A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions’ (Malterud 2001:483). I will refer to reflexivity in greater detail in section 3.8. of this chapter as well as in Chapter 8.

Throughout the design and implementation of the programme I worked with participants in action research cycles in order to diagnose their needs, plan a way forward, put ideas into practice and then reflect upon implementation in order to re-plan and thus begin a new cycle. The continuous needs analysis enabled me to understand what was particular in this context in order to tailor the programme to participants’ needs. By implementing the programme I was able to theorise about the practice of blended teacher development and also reflect on what was possible in terms of helping participants create an improved professional environment for themselves. In this way, the action research cycle was closely related to the cycle of empowerment shown on page 35.

This collective cycle of empowerment was paralleled by participants’ individual action research cycles, in which they analysed their own classroom practices and
planned specific courses of action which were then reflected upon and re-planned before each new cycle began. Both individual and collective action research cycles contributed to shaping each other.

3.3. Data generation

In 2007, in order to design and implement the Anglo Continuous Development Programme, I needed to gain a clear understanding of the state of professional need and aspiration of the prospective participants. One perspective of this issue was available to me through my work with teachers in Province C, where I had started to conduct teacher development sessions every Friday since the beginning of that year. Notwithstanding the value of this information, I knew it was necessary to have an overview of the situation in all the provincial areas of the country for the programme and the study to be designed in an effective manner. This is why I designed the needs analysis that I conducted in November 2007.

3.3.1. The needs analysis (2007)

I decided to send out a questionnaire that would reach all teachers in provincial Uruguay (an estimated average of 300), enquiring about their perceived needs and interests. The questionnaire contained a cover page introducing ACDP as ‘a methodology course for [provincial] teachers which is tailored to your needs and interests’ and was divided into four sections: beliefs about teaching and teacher development, needs and interests regarding teaching methodology, beliefs about computer-based teaching and learning and preferences regarding ACDP design and assessment (Appendix 1.1.)

The results of the needs analysis (Appendix 1.2.) provided me with fundamental information as to the teachers’ methodology-related interests, their access to computers and internet or lack thereof, and their preferences regarding course design and assessment, all of which I made use of at the time of planning the first iteration for 2008.
3.3.2. The main study (2008 to 2010)

Armed with the information obtained through the needs analysis as well as my experience as a teacher educator, course designer and tutor in the provinces, I started by exploring the possible ways in which I could generate data to answer my two research questions:

- **Can blended learning become a tool for professional development within a framework of particularity, practicality and possibility** (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b)?

- **What roles do face-to-face and online cognitive, social and teaching ‘presences’** (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) **play in the process of such development?**

The fact that the programme consisted of a blend of face-to-face and online learning experiences, as described in Chapter 1, made the following data sources readily available to me over the three-year data generation period: e-mails, questionnaires, assignments, post-session reflections and VLE activity. To offer the reader an idea of the scope of these data, below I present a table with the number of participants in each iteration, together with the exact number of e-mails, questionnaires, assignments and post-session reflections that were generated and analysed, before describing what each data source consisted of.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mails</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires (100% returns)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 (98% returns)</td>
<td>2 (96% returns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-session reflections</td>
<td>6 sets of (38)</td>
<td>VLE activity</td>
<td>VLE activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also include samples of all the data types above in Appendix 2.
3.3.3. A closer look at the data arising from interactions

Throughout the ACDP programme, **e-mails** were one of the communication tools most frequently chosen by participants. Prior to the introduction of the VLE in 2009, I used e-mails extensively myself to communicate with participants, and even after the VLE took centre stage, many participants still chose this medium, something which I discuss more extensively in Chapters 5 and 6. As from 2009, the interactions on the VLE constituted a fundamental source of information, providing me with the opportunity not only to learn more about the participants and setting but also about the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) which was one of the two conceptual frameworks informing my study. These e-mails were one-to-one transactional exchanges initiated by the participants and based on course content, but often containing social, interpersonal elements as well (Appendix 2.1.)

As from 2009, another data source I used were the interactions occurring in the VLE. I not only used the forum exchanges to explore the teachers’ discourses, but I also kept a record of the virtual tasks and materials they generated in their own personal spaces (Appendix 2.2.).

Another data generation tool used throughout the ACDP programme were the feedback **questionnaires** which I asked participants to complete during as well as at the end of each iteration. These consisted of a series of questions offering guidance for teachers to analyse the professional development experience in greater depth, not only for the purpose of obtaining feedback on the design of the course but also as a means for them to reflect on their commitment and performance during the programme. The questionnaire responses offered a means of triangulating data, in that they constituted a further data source to explore participants’ views and professional needs, as well as providing useful information for the re-planning stage of each action research cycle. Given the action research nature of the study, these were both research and course tools (Appendix 2.3.)

A further data source from participants was their **assignments**, whose nature was different depending on the course iteration. During 2008, the only data of this kind
were the action research-based assignments, while in 2009 there were other sources apart from the latter, such as classroom research forms and teaching materials and resources which the participants themselves developed (Appendix 6). In 2010, the design of online materials by participants constituted the most important data source of this nature. As regards the use of the participants’ assignments as data, I was aware of the potential conflict of interest inherent in the fact that I had a double role as course tutor – who had to mark assignments – and researcher. However, this did not constitute a problem, given the fact that the assignments were not compulsory, and that all participants who did submit them were well aware of the fact that their work would be used by me as research data. Moreover, over the years they often commented that they were pleased to be able to contribute to the research project in this way, as they knew it was part of the process of developing a programme to help them in the best possible way (Appendix 2.4.).

Finally, what I have termed ‘post-session reflections’ can be defined as an activity conducted at the end of every face-to-face session, which consisted of providing a trigger such as a statement or a question and asking participants to anonymously write down their thoughts on a certain issue relating to the topic/s that had been dealt with during the meeting. These post-session reflections proved to be a very useful data source and were used consistently throughout the 2008 iteration. For 2009 and 2010, I decided not to use these any more as I sensed participants were somewhat tired of the dynamic and this might affect the quality of the data I was collecting (Appendix 2.5.).

It is worth noting that most data offered by participants were in English, even though a few of them sometimes resorted to their mother tongue (Spanish) when writing private e-mails to me. For the sake of transparency, whenever this was the case I present both the original message in Spanish and my translation into English. I am aware that, to a certain extent, such translation involves a re-interpretation of the data (Steiner 1975:45). Although in the initial stages of the study I pondered the idea of asking a certified translator to safeguard against this potentially subjective re-interpretation (Temple & Young 2004:163), I soon
decided that the most coherent decision given the reflexive, action research nature of this study, was to translate the messages myself.

The above-mentioned sources arose from my interactions with the participants and those between the participants themselves. However, I had three further data sources, which were my field notes and memos, my researcher journal and the EMCD, Cooperative Development sessions which I shared with my supervisor. I termed these sources 'personal researcher data', since these were not shared with participants at any time and were reflexive in nature.

3.3.4. A closer look at the personal researcher data

The aim of generating these ‘personal researcher data’ was to be able to foreground the reflexive dimension of my research; that is, my awareness of the mutually shaping influences exerted by the researcher on the research and vice versa (Edge 2011:35-38).

The field notes I made during the face-to-face meetings recorded my feelings and thoughts during these instances, whilst my memos, which differed from the field notes in that they were written after the events and during the analysis, providing an additional dimension to enhance the analytic procedures in which I engaged (Appendix 2.6.)

Conversely, my researcher journal evidenced my reflections-on-action, providing a window on my feelings and reactions towards certain situations and events happening over the years, as well as a fundamental source for the triangulation of other data. I used my researcher journal to record my ideas and reflections not only after the face-to-face meetings but also as I engaged in planning or data analysis. I also used it as a space in which to record anecdotes and document significant events, such as e-mail exchanges with my supervisor, my employers or the teachers I was working with (Appendix 2.7.) Keeping a research journal provided an opportunity for me to tell the research story and the researcher story in parallel, thus foregrounding the complexity of the action researcher's role.
The last type of personal researcher data I used in this study were the **E-mail Cooperative Development (EMCD) sessions** I engaged in with my supervisor. Below I provide a succinct overview of the Cooperative Development framework (Edge 2002) this e-mail variant is based on, as well as an explanation of how the EMCD sessions generated data that were very relevant and useful as a tool for triangulation in this study Appendix 2.8.

### 3.3.4.1. Cooperative Development and E-mail Cooperative Development

Cooperative Development (Edge 1992, 2002) is a framework for disciplined, non-judgemental discourse, in which two people, the Speaker and the Understander, work together based on the principles of respect, empathy and sincerity (Edge 2002:26), for the Speaker to become empowered through heightened awareness of his/her own discourse. Simply put, for this to happen, the Speaker and Understander work for regular periods during which the Speaker articulates his/her ideas while the Understander Attends non-judgementally, before Reflecting back to the Speaker what he/she has Understood. It is this non-judgemental Reflection that allows the Speaker to see his/her own discourse from a different perspective, thus opening up the space for further exploration and development of his/her ideas. Apart from the basic moves of Attending and Reflecting, there are other fundamental moves such as Focusing, Thematizing, Challenging, Disclosing, Goal-setting, Trialling and Planning\(^1\), all of which assist the Speaker and Understander in creating a safe and trusting environment for their self-development.

As regards the EMCD sessions I have referred to, these are a form of Cooperative Development discourse (Edge 2002) conducted via e-mail, in which the Understander provides a non-judgemental Reflection of what the Speaker shares, offering another articulation for the Speaker to react to and therefore further his/her understanding of the situation described. Both the EMCD sessions and the research journal were a means for me to foreground the reflexive dimension of my research.

\(^1\) For a detailed explanation of all the moves see Edge 1992 and Edge 2002.
research, adding another ‘layer’ of meta-discourse and therefore awareness to the already existing ones.

### 3.3.5. Summary

After the needs analysis period and for the duration of the main study (2008 to 2010), the following data were generated and used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-Tutor interactive data</th>
<th>Personal researcher data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mails</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLE activity</td>
<td>Analytic memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Research journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>EMCD sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-session reflections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using various data sources presented several advantages. First of all, it allowed for the comparison across data sources to find complementary or contradictory data, allowing for methodological triangulation. Also, since every data-generation method has its strengths and limitations, I was able to enhance the trustworthiness of the study by gathering information in different ways. For example, in the case of questionnaires, a potential limitation is the fact different respondents might interpret the questions in different ways. However, if there are other data sources through which similar data can be accessed (e.g. post-session reflections), the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn is enhanced.

On the other hand, given the large amounts of data available, I had to introduce safeguards against data overload (Woods, Patterson & Roth 2002), which could have rendered the research project unmanageable. In this case systematicity and well-thought data organisation methods, such as the categorisation of data into easily-retrievable folders identified with venue name, session topic and date were fundamental. I also engaged in parallel data generation and analysis processes, which allowed me to assess the quality and scope of my data periodically and thus prevented the problem of data overload.
3.4. Conceptual frameworks for analysis

As stated in my research questions (see p.63), through this study I wanted to explore the role of face-to-face and online teaching, social and cognitive presences (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) in the process of developing a blended approach to teacher development based on the parameters of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility* (Kumaravadivelu 2006b). *Particularity* in this context refers to the importance of developing a situational understanding of participants’ realities, something which had been mostly overlooked in previous attempts at professional development programmes in which participants had taken part. *Practicality* addresses the importance of creating a ‘theory of practice’ (Kumaravadivelu 2006b:173) which results from teachers theorising about their own practice, rather than applying the theories of external experts (Edge & Richards 1998b:572). Finally, the parameter of *possibility* involves the reconstruction of participants’ identities from the awareness of the inequalities that exist in their professional environments (Kumaravadivelu 2006b:174), which are shaped by social, economic and political factors.

At this point, it may be useful to look again at the diagram originally presented on page 35, which shows blended learning in this context as the online and face-to-face interaction of teaching, social and cognitive presences, framed within the parameters of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*. 
A locally-appropriate integration of both conceptual frameworks, e.g. Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry as well as Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) Postmethod conditions is to be understood as follows. In this setting, it is important to become familiar with the particularities of the context, since these not only provide a starting point for the process of empowerment, but also determine what becomes practical for participants. A thorough understanding of this practicality will lead to professional empowerment, thus opening up new avenues for participants to explore what is possible. As a cyclical process, this exploration of the possible affects the state of particularity, and thus a new cycle begins, in which participants become increasingly empowered through their exploration of what is practical.

It is through the methodological decisions described in the present chapter that I set out to explore the feasibility of the conceptual integration above.
3.4.1. Understanding the Community of Inquiry framework for analysis

The Community of Inquiry model resulted from a research project conducted by Garrison, Anderson and their colleagues between the years 1997 and 2001, in which they originally set out to explore online learning environments, specifically through the use of discussion forums. Since its publication in 2000, Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s article entitled ‘Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education’ has been a source of inspiration for researchers, presenting the original model which has since then contributed to furthering our understanding of online and blended learning. Although the Community of Inquiry framework was originally developed for online environments, the researchers themselves have claimed in recent years that its applicability can be extended to blended environments (e.g. Garrison & Vaughan 2008).

According to the official website (communitiesofinquiry.com) ‘An educational community of inquiry is a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.’ This framework represents the process through which meaningful learning occurs, via the interaction of its three constitutive elements: teaching presence, which relates to the teaching acts, social presence, concerning the interactions between the participating individuals, and cognitive presence, relating to the construction of knowledge.

At the start of the process I studied the coding scheme proposed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) to evaluate its feasibility for my research. This implied an in-depth familiarisation with the framework and also the coding decisions, which is why I started by analysing their work in detail. In the next three sub-sections I will describe how Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) conceived the social, teaching and cognitive presence parameters in their Community of Inquiry framework for analysis.
3.4.1.1. Social presence

The authors refer to social presence as the ‘ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally as ‘real’ people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000:94). Social presence can belong to any of the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social presence categories</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>expression of emotions, use of humour, self-disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>continuing a thread, quoting from others’ messages, referring explicitly to others’ messages, asking questions, complimenting, expressing appreciation, expressing agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive</td>
<td>vocatives, inclusive pronouns to refer to group, phatics and salutations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the construct has been repeatedly defined by the authors as an ability displayed by learners (Rourke et al. 2001:4; Garrison & Anderson 2003:49; Garrison & Vaughan 2008:20), it has also been described as being ‘a function of both learners and teachers’ (Rourke et al. 2001:8). Moreover, Garrison and Anderson (2003:54) insist on the importance of the model set by the tutor for social presence to be fostered. This leads to some lack of clarity, in that the authors straightforwardly state that the tutor can and should model appropriate social behaviour, yet it is not entirely clear if some of the tutor’s discourse should also be coded as social presence. This indicates the need for a clearer position as regards the location of the social presence construct, an issue which I take up as the analysis proceeds.

Initially, however, I followed the model that pursues social presence only in participant discourse, since I was particularly interested in understanding how the participants made use of the social elements, and whether this occurred just for the sake of engaging in social interaction or whether it constituted a means to support their cognitive moves. Despite my keenness to explore the teaching presence dimension in depth, I initially coded all of my virtual discourse according
to the teaching presence construct and left the social and cognitive categories to explore participant discourse. I interpreted social presence as the behaviours exhibited by the participants that contributed to creating the rapport that is a necessary part of the building and sustainment of a community of developing teachers.

In the table below I present examples of how Rourke et al. (2004) coded online discourse as social presence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social presence move</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where I work, this is what we do...</td>
<td>Affective &gt; self-disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your message, you talked about Moore’s distinction ...</td>
<td>Interactive &gt; referring explicitly to other’s messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Our textbook refers to...”, “</td>
<td>Cohesive &gt; inclusive pronouns to refer to group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that the terminology used by Garrison and his colleagues does not always reflect the TESOL traditions this study is immersed in. For instance, descriptors such as ‘open communication’ and ‘cohesive’ could be more effectively re-labelled as ‘communicative interaction’ and ‘group cohesion’ for the codes to be more in line with TESOL terminology. However, I have decided to retain the original Community of Inquiry terms, bearing in mind the aforementioned terminological nuances.

3.4.1.2. Teaching presence

Teaching presence ‘focuses on the roles and functions that a teacher performs in order to create and maintain a dynamic learning environment’ (Vaughan 2004:16). Garrison and Anderson (2003:71) observe that despite the essential role of the tutor, ‘all participants have the opportunity to contribute to teaching presence’. There are three different teaching presence categories, as shown in the table below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching presence categories</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional design and organisation</td>
<td>setting curriculum, designing methods, establishing time parameters, utilizing medium effectively, establishing netiquette, making macro-level comments about course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating discourse</td>
<td>identifying areas of agreement/disagreement, seeking to reach consensus/understanding, encouraging/acknowledging/reinforcing student contributions, setting climate for learning, prompting discussion, assessing the efficacy of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct instruction</td>
<td>present content/questions, focus discussion, summarise discussion, confirm understanding through assessment and feedback, diagnose misconceptions, inject knowledge from diverse sources, responding to technical concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Garrison and Anderson (2003:72) add that, ‘As participants develop cognitively and socially, the more distributed teaching presence will become’. In the present study, I therefore use the teaching presence descriptor to label the tutor and participant discourse which allows and encourages teachers to move from problem identification towards resolution and thus support learning. Below I provide some examples teaching presence moves as exemplified in Anderson et al. (2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching presence move</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try to address issues that others have raised when you post.</td>
<td>Instructional design and organisation&gt; Utilizing medium effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counter-example to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?</td>
<td>Facilitating discourse&gt; Identifying areas of agreement/disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your insightful comments.</td>
<td>Facilitating discourse&gt; Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to include a hyperlink in your message, you have to . . .</td>
<td>Direct instruction&gt; Responding to technical concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that in the original Community of Inquiry framework, the social aspects of the teaching presence construct are restricted to those that are directly related to course content (Anderson et al. 2001:4), captured by the ‘facilitating discourse’ category. That is, contributions of a purely social nature are not accounted for within the teaching presence dimension. Through my analysis, I will argue that in the present setting, the teaching presence moves would be more effectively described if there was an explicitly social dimension within the construct, as there is in the work of other authors who had explored computer conferencing prior to the creation of the Community of Inquiry model (e.g. Paulsen (1995) and Mason (1991), cited in Anderson et al. (2001).

3.4.1.3. Cognitive presence

Cognitive presence involves ‘facilitating the analysis, construction, and confirmation of meaning and understanding within a community of learners through sustained discourse and reflection’ (Garrison & Anderson 2003:55). Although it can be evidenced by both the tutor and the participants (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2004:4), in this study I only use it to describe the participants’ discourse, as it is one of the aims of this study to assess whether cognitive activity can be fostered among participants in this blended setting. The cognitive presence dimension is associated with the practical inquiry process, which consists of four sequential categories or steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive presence categories (steps)</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Triggering event</td>
<td>recognise problem, puzzlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>divergence, information exchange, suggestions, brainstorming, intuitive leaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>convergence, synthesis, solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>apply, test, defend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below I present examples of the cognitive presence parameter described by Garrison et al. (2004), who suggest that ‘any group member may purposively or indirectly add a triggering event to the discourse’ (Garrison et al. 2004:4).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive presence move</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It has been argued that the only way to deliver effective distance education is through a systems approach. However, this approach is rarely used. Why do you think that is?</td>
<td>Triggering event &gt; recognising problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One reason I think it is seldom used is that it is too complicated to get cooperation. Another may be the mindsets of those in charge to change practices.</td>
<td>Exploration &gt; divergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We also had trouble getting cooperation. Often the use of new tools requires new organizational structures. We addressed these issues when we implemented a systems approach, and I think that’s why we were successful.</td>
<td>Integration &gt; connecting ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good test of this solution would be to … and then assess how …</td>
<td>Resolution &gt; vicarious application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this context, cognitive presence involves problem identification, exploration and exchange of ideas, synthesis and the eventual resolution of the problems teachers encounter in their everyday practice.

At this point, I believe it is necessary to address the distinction between the terms ‘activity’ and ‘presence’, since I use both of them throughout my analysis to mean different things. I refer to teaching, social and cognitive ‘presences’, as technical terms from Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), whenever these are evident in the participants’ or my own discourse and can be coded as such. On the other hand, any references to teaching, social and cognitive ‘activity’ invoke a more general usage and refer to activity of which there might be an indirect indication in the data, but which is not immediately visible in the participants’ or my own discourse.

During the analysis process, I constantly related the Community of Inquiry analysis to the Postmethod framework. That is, I related my conclusions to the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. Specifically, I sought to interpret my findings and conclusions by articulating them in terms of what each parameter represented in this setting. Throughout the process I realised that the particular,
practical and possible dimensions could not be identified straightforwardly in participants’ discourse and actions, but could be effectively mapped against the conclusions drawn as a result of each analytic cycle.

Having outlined the frameworks guiding my analysis, in the next section I offer an overview of the data analysis process which informed the continuous action research cycles. I provide a detailed account of the processes and explain how these helped me to draw conclusions.

3.5. Data analysis: an overview

As described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), the data analysis process in this study occurred as a combination of deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) analyses. In order to explore the action research cycles from as many angles as possible, I analysed the data in the following ways:

a. I explored the virtual interactions (e-mails and VLE) using the Community of Inquiry framework to identify instances of teaching, social and cognitive presences.

b. I identified the most salient themes in the participants’ questionnaires, reflections and assignments, using a bottom-up approach.

In addition to the deductive and inductive analyses described above, I used the data contained in the narratives in the meta-data or personal researcher data (EMCD sessions, journal) to identify the themes traced in the bottom-up analysis, and to explore the nature of the action researcher's role. This decision to present and explore the narratives was not conceived from the initial stages of research planning, but rather arose as a result of the action research cycles. Originally, I had intended to analyse these 'personal researcher data' through an inductive thematic approach. However, as my research progressed and I became more aware of the role of reflexivity, the narratives in these personal researcher data became more meaningful to me as a tool to illuminate my action research journey for the reader and for myself. In particular, I was able to map the narrative and reflexive dimensions of my account, as explained by Fay (2008). It was thus that I was able
to examine my own research position and therefore ensure the quality of the audit trail I provided in my thesis.

Figure 3.2. – Mapping narrativity and reflection-reflexivity (Fay 2008)

As regards the narrativity dimension, I attempted to foreground the researcher narrative, which is not always made explicit in research texts. In terms of the reflection/reflexivity continuum, I emphasised the reflexive dimension so as to clearly present my voice and identity and thus enhance the transparency of the process. I return to these issues in Chapter 8.

During each data analysis cycle I followed a certain procedure, although the process was not necessarily linear but often iterative. The starting point for analysis was the classification and organisation of the data into separate, easily retrievable folders as soon as they were collected. I then familiarised myself with the data, often noting down my impressions as memos or entries in my journal. I left the data for a while before approaching them again, and then began the process of combing them.
In the case of the Community of Inquiry framework the process was quite straightforward, as it was simply a matter of deciding which of the pre-designed teaching, social and cognitive presence categories best fit the data, and reflecting on why some categories failed to offer a complete picture of the situation. Once all the data had been coded, I tried to find alternative ways of explaining the patterns of occurrence of the teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters (see for example 6.4.2.).

For the rest of the interactive data (questionnaires, assignments, post-session reflections), the coding was inductive and often more challenging. In accordance with Sanger (1994:176) I believe that research which can really make a difference is often the result of the rigorous yet creative insights of the researcher rather than the ‘painstaking reordering of indisputable facts’. To combine these two elements of rigour and creativity and thus make the analytical process as rich and comprehensive as possible, I repeatedly combed the data to identify the main themes in the participants’ and my own discourse. The initial coding process was highly iterative, as I merged codes, strove to find appropriate denominations and reduced their numbers before attempting to find the overarching themes. Once these themes had been identified, I sought to find alternative explanations for their salience (see p. 98).

Finally, in order to explore the personal researcher data I decided to focus on the ‘small stories’ contained in these data (Georgakopoulou 2006:130), defined as ‘a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell’. My aim in presenting these narratives was two-fold. On the one hand I wanted to trace the themes identified through the inductive analysis as a means of enhancing the rigour and trustworthiness of the study. On the other hand, my aim was to shed some light on the role of the researcher and on what being a reflexive action researcher entails. To this end, I first scrutinised these ‘meta’ data and attempted to trace the overarching themes that had surfaced in the inductive thematic analysis of the interactions. Afterwards, I attempted to de-construct and re-construct the narratives in order to engage in a
reflexive examination of my role as an action researcher, which in turn allowed me to understand how my narrative positioning affected the reflexive quality of the account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data types</th>
<th>Analysis cycles: 2008-2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mails, VLE activity, assignments</td>
<td>Deductive Community of Inquiry analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interactions: questionnaires, post-session reflections</td>
<td>Inductive thematic analysis of the interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (reflexive)researcher data: research journal, EMCD sessions, field notes, memos</td>
<td>Exploration of the narratives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1. Types of analysis conducted during this study.**

To enhance the reader-friendliness of the text, the inductive, thematic codes (for questionnaires, reflections and assignments) will be displayed on the left of the data, as seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive code</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 3.3. Presentation of the thematic analysis**

The deductive, Community of Inquiry codes (for e-mails, VLE exchanges and assignments) will be displayed on the right of the data, using different colours as a visual means of facilitating the reader's understanding of the analysis process.
3.5.1. Uncovering the different layers of understanding

Throughout the analysis process, I explored different layers of understanding in order to gain a better insight into the action research process and the answers to my research questions. In the first place, I explored the narrative of my research, retaining the chronological aspect and attempting to offer a reflexive understanding of how the action research unfolded. Secondly, I explored the data through the lens of my analytical and conceptual frameworks (Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s Community of Inquiry (2000) and Kumaravadivelu’s Postmethod parameters (2001, 2006b). Both models aided my explorations of the data and this in turn allowed me to assess their feasibility and applicability to the present context. I identified instances of teaching, social and cognitive presence in the participants’ and/or my own discourse, reflecting every time on how much they were showing me about the participants, their teaching realities and the efficacy of the ACDP programme. That is to say, I explored how far these social, teaching and cognitive presence moves related to the particular (i.e., the defining features of the setting), the practical (what participants perceived as useful and relevant), and the possible (the possibilities for development they generated and viewed as feasible).

A further layer of exploration and understanding was that of my multiple roles in this research; that is to say, I analysed the relationships and multiple effects of my interconnected roles as a teacher educator, course designer and action researcher. Through the generation of different data sources, I observed and reflected on how I experienced this multiplicity of roles and how I acted on this awareness.

I explore each of these layers (the action research narrative, the conceptual analysis, the researcher journey) in the data analysis chapters (4, 5, 6, and 7).
3.6. A closer look at the data analysis process

In the following sections I describe each of the three analytic processes in greater detail to provide the reader with a clearer idea of the data analysis in this study, drawing on specific examples.

3.6.1. The inductive coding process

In order to analyse the questionnaires, reflections and the assignments, I used an inductive approach to thematic analysis, through which I repeatedly reviewed the data in order to identify the themes that featured most significantly in the participants’ discourses. Kehrwald (2008:93) defines thematic analysis as ‘the search for and identification of common threads that extend throughout a set of data’. My thematic approach to analysis was inductive, in that I explored the data sets by coding and then identifying the most significant themes from the codes.

I coded at the utterance level, considering an utterance as a unit of meaning which communicates both a ‘who’ and a ‘what’ (Gee 2005:35). Each of the initial topics in the data was identified with a particular code. This provided flexibility and allowed me to focus on meaning instead of giving undue attention to length or having to artificially streamline the data to make them fit particular categories. It should be noted that I sometimes used multiple codes for the same utterance (e.g. p. 101, 104, 105), in the view that discourse is multifunctional (Brown & Yule 1983: 71).

As suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003:87), I considered theme identification a process in which one repeatedly attempts to answer the question ‘What is this expression an example of?’ The starting point for the identification of themes was the generation of inductive codes. Given that I was immersed in the field and due to my own experiences as a teacher and teacher educator, I had preconceived ideas about some of the codes I might generate. For example, I expected them to express lack of confidence in using computers, as I knew they had limited access to technology. However, although my a priori ideas were valuable, I was also aware of the need to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Richards 2003:110-11, Simpson & Tuson...
1995:3; Delamont 1992:45). I did this by consciously trying to see the data from an outsider’s perspective, trying to position myself as someone who is familiar with the topic but does not know the socio-political, cultural and historical context well. To assess salience, apart from identifying codes on the basis of repetition, I used other techniques as advocated by Sanger (1994) and Ryan and Bernard (2003), such as identifying metaphors, similarities and differences, as well as the absence of certain discourses (e.g. sections 5.2.4, 5.2.5.). While coding, I was aware of how Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) dimensions of particularity, practicality and possibility operated in this setting and how the dynamic nature of all the elements meant a constant repositioning as a result of each new action research cycle.

After going through the data repeatedly and re-working the initial codes wherever necessary, I grouped the codes into broader themes using different strategies. My prior knowledge and experience in the field played a relevant part, although I tried to examine the data from different standpoints and continuously looked for alternative interpretations. For example, in the table below are the codes I grouped under the theme ‘Traditional views on teaching and learning’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of practical ideas</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice versus theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as main knowledge source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scepticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in articulating needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time, I also pondered alternative interpretations, such as the fact that at least some of these codes could be grouped under the theme ‘insecurity’. However, after repeatedly revising the alternatives and considering my knowledge of the broader socio-cultural context, I decided the aforementioned theme was the one that captured the common thread most effectively. In this case, it is the ‘traditional views’ that give a recognisable basis for the category. Whether these are best seen as the basis for participants’ sense of security or insecurity, is a different and variable issue.
During these explorations, I sometimes used mind maps to explore the potential connections between codes. Finding the most salient themes was not only a way of reducing the number of codes, but more importantly allowed me to see the overarching issues underlying these teachers’ behaviours and discourses. Such themes provided a source of triangulation to further my understanding of how the Community of Inquiry parameters were operating at the time, and also provided an opportunity to construct a locally-appropriate understanding of the dimensions of *particularity, practicality* and *possibility*.

As an example, below is a table with the codes identified in 2008 and the themes that I derived from them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of practical ideas</td>
<td><strong>Traditional views on teaching and learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice versus theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as main knowledge source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scepticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in articulating needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of social aspects of TD</td>
<td><strong>Desire to please the tutor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive views on reflection and collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive views of tutor and course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of having learned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td><strong>Culture of heavy workloads</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for practical ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for general solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of computers</td>
<td><strong>Technology-related insecurity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of ICT competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See pages 100-101 for an explanation of the decision to thematise in this way.
In order to draw conclusions, once I had found the overarching themes, I tried to think of alternative interpretations that would explain the various elements at play in a satisfactory manner and enable me to move forward, not only in terms of my understanding of participants’ realities but also regarding course design. I also added researcher debriefing as an additional measure to enhance trustworthiness, by sharing my interpretations of the data analysis process and interim results with my supervisors and the participants, and occasionally discussing my conclusions with other doctoral candidates who offered their perspectives as well. My reflections were then applied to the course design, and that provided the starting point for each new action research cycle. For example, during the process of identifying themes I shared my progress with another doctoral candidate who offered his own interpretation of the analysis, which helped me to confirm my themes or modify them.

My analyses of the different yearly data sets offered snapshots of different moments in participants’ developmental processes and allowed me to trace the different layers of understanding described in section 3.5.1 throughout the three-year period. To illustrate the aforementioned process, below are some examples of how themes were created from the initial data coding. It should be noted that these data (which do not show the initial but the final codes) are drawn from a 2008 questionnaire and are intended as an example (see section 4.4.1. for the process leading to my decision to thematise in this way).
In my opinion [the 2008 sessions] were very useful because I learned new things which I took them into practice with my students.

Importance of practical ideas
Traditional views on teaching and learning
(other codes belonging to the same theme: practice vs theory, tutor as main knowledge source, scepticism, tutor as resource, tutor as expert, difficulty in articulating needs)

Yes, [the course] made me realise how important it was to ‘keep moving’ and reflecting with colleagues which is always enriching.

Importance of social aspects of TD
Desire to please the tutor
(other codes: positive views on reflection and collaboration, value of reflection, positive views of tutor and course, perception of having learned)

At the beginning I did [keep a journal] but then a matter of ‘time’ made it impossible for me.

Lack of time
Culture of heavy workloads
(other codes: assessment as pressure, request for practical ideas, request for general solution)

No, [I didn’t use e-mail] because I don’t like computers. However, after attending this session I’m not so sure about it.

Dislike of computers
Technology-related insecurity
(other codes: lack of ICT competence)

3.6.2. The Community of Inquiry analysis

I used Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s Community of Inquiry framework (2000) to analyse the virtual interactions between myself and the participants and between the participants themselves. Depending on the year and data sets I was analysing, the use of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) framework was either restricted to its three basic notions (teaching, social and cognitive presence) or was used fully by describing each code with its three layers (e.g. teaching presence > direct instruction> injecting knowledge from different sources).

In my analysis of the 2008 virtual interactions I used Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) basic notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence rather than the full analytical framework, given that the e-mail data available were of a
different type from that the authors had used in their research. For instance, instead of coding the extract ‘Be careful. Remember you need to look at it from the author's perspective too’ as ‘Teaching presence > direct instruction > diagnosing misconceptions’, I simply used the code ‘Teaching presence’, without identifying the deeper layers. I did this in order to conduct a preliminary evaluation of my data for the 2008 action research cycle, and also to assess the relevance of the Community of Inquiry framework to this blended setting.

Having explored my data and asserted the relevance of the Community of Inquiry framework through the analysis of the 2008 data, I began the analysis of the 2009 virtual interactions, some of which (the VLE ones) were very similar to the data types used by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). However, since the basic social, teaching and cognitive presence notions applied to the 2008 e-mails had proved to be relevant to this blended learning setting, I decided to explore the Community of Inquiry framework further and see if using it fully on the 2009 e-mails would allow me to discover more about blended learning in this context, acknowledging the limitations and challenges involved in this departure from Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) original intentions and ideas. After seeing this procedure offered an interesting perspective, as well as a (sometimes limited) language to describe what was happening, I repeated the full analysis procedure for the 2010 data. In short, the Community of Inquiry framework was applied fully to all virtual interactions from 2009 and 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action research cycle:</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of CoI analysis:</td>
<td>Basic TP, SP, CP notions</td>
<td>Full framework</td>
<td>Full framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than quantify the occurrence of the presences as done by Garrison, Anderson and Archer, I assessed salience on the grounds of repetition and pervasiveness across the different data sources. As an example, below I present an e-mail from one participant, Soledad, in which my comments in block capitals are embedded. Both her discourse and mine are analysed using the Community of Inquiry framework. In this exchange, Soledad and I were privately discussing her action research project. What can be seen below is her original e-mail with my
My purpose for this project is to solve a problem which is to look for techniques in order to help my intermediate-level students to be more creative writers.

FANTASTIC. THE PROBLEM IS THE LACK OF IDEAS THEN? AND THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT IS TO ENHANCE SS' CREATIVITY. AM I GETTING IT RIGHT?

The topic: I am going to investigate a specific aspect of writing as it is: creativity.

SOUNDS GOOD.

Focus: How can I narrow down my issue so that the investigation is manageable? I haven’t found the answer to the previous question because I don’t understand it. sorry if it sounds silly.

YOU MEAN YOU DON’T KNOW HOW TO NARROW DOWN? WELL FOR EXAMPLE, THINK OF STHG MORE SPECIFIC. IT COULD BE WHICH KINDS OF ACTIVITIES ARE MORE EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING CREATIVITY FOR EXAMPLE, OR HOW FAR STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS IMPROVE AFTER YOU DO THESE 'CREATIVE TASKS'? SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

Time: Should I specify how many classes does each activity take? (eg. showing films) Or is it the whole action research?

I THINK THIS REFERS TO THE WHOLE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT. IT'S NOT SO IMPORTANT, JUST AN ESTIMATE WOULD BE OK.
This analysis extract shows how the Community of Inquiry framework could describe the teaching and learning moves in the virtual exchanges on the VLE or via e-mail, as was the case for the data above. In this particular e-mail, Soledad was both exercising her social and cognitive skills to create an understanding of what the assignment involved. I, on the other hand, was using a combination of direct instruction and what Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) term ‘building understanding’, trying to prompt Soledad into expanding her ideas.

As regards the social presence dimension, both of the extracts labelled as such are examples of what Garrison and Anderson (2001) call ‘open communication > asking questions’. They label all questions asked to the tutor in this way because in their original conferencing context, these exchanges occurred in public rather than on a one-to-one basis with the tutor. Despite the fact that in this context the exchanges were private rather than public, in this exploratory stage (2008) I decided to use the framework in exactly the same way the authors had used it, to assess the extent to which it was feasible in this context.

Also, although the extracts labelled as social presence are clearly social transactions, it is worth wondering whether they could also be coded as cognitive presence, in that the act of formulating the question necessarily involves a cognitive move. However, I decided this kind of multi-functionality is inherent in all discourse, as it would be equally feasible (and not very helpful) to say that teaching presence moves also necessarily involve a cognitive move. Therefore, I decided that following Garrison and Anderson’s guidelines (2001) and keeping the categories separate – whilst acknowledging the existence of potential overlaps – would be more helpful for my explorations (see data analysis in Chapter 4).

3.6.3. Exploration of the narratives in the personal researcher data

As was explained at the beginning of this chapter, I included in this category those data that were not interactive in nature but rather reflexive. Within these ‘personal researcher data’ I therefore included my journal, memos, field notes and Cooperative Development sessions. These were not coded but were rather understood to be ‘small stories’. That is to say, I used the ‘small stories’
(Georgakopoulou 2006) contained in these EMCD data (discussed in section 3.3.4.1. of the present chapter) as a further source to triangulate the conclusions drawn from the other two analyses. These data will appear throughout the main data analyses in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, although I will focus on them exclusively in Chapter 8, in which I foreground the reflexive dimensions of my research.

During the EMCD exchanges, aided by my supervisor’s non-judgemental Understanding, I as Speaker engaged in an exploration of my thoughts and experiences regarding my position in this study, as can be seen in the extract below:

‘…there are a few participants (clearly 3, maybe 2 more) who have really grasped what it is to explore the possible. Maybe not yet in its political sense, but they clearly understand the value of action research, reflection and collaboration. I have been in extensive contact with these participants via e-mail, and now we are working together to design the VLE. With 2 out of these 3 participants I’m thinking of, I have also heard a lot about their personal lives, for example about the fact that one of them left her husband some months ago, and the other one was left by her husband. This is absolutely fine by me, there was nothing I might consider inappropriate or too detailed – nothing of the sort - but I sometimes worry that it might affect my research. What I mean is that I am not uncomfortable with their telling me about their personal lives, it’s just that I want to be careful. I also think that maybe it’s just me worrying too much... Maybe deep down I still have some positivist ideas about the detached researcher that I’m not aware of...’ (EMCD exchange, February-March 2009)

The extract above shows how EMCD allowed me to be self-critical and assess particular circumstances from different standpoints. In this particular case I was not only reflecting on relationships but also on roles and how these were shaped by my epistemological position.

Apart from EMCD, my research journal also served as a tool for engaging in reflexive thinking. Through it, I was able to reconstruct my experiences and reflect-on-action, as can be seen in the extract below:

*The session in [Town A] was great. I made the fact that I want them to be co-designers more explicit. I insisted on the idea that they have to suggest and*
offer opinions so we can all together design something that is useful for them all. They were also thrilled about the language session, or so I thought. They asked me if I could do something about the following: it seems that their FCE CAE and CPE students failed horribly last year in writing, so they are worried that they might not be applying the right standards when they correct compositions during the year. So they want to have a session in (the capital) so that we can explain to them how we mark and how standards should be applied. I then e-mailed (my employer) and told her and she seemed responsive. (Research journal, 18 April 2009)

3.7. Trustworthiness

Different authors suggest different standards that determine the acceptability of qualitative research. In general, validity and reliability are considered to be fundamental, although some authors such as Lincoln and Guba (1985:290 in Richards 2003:286) choose not to use the traditional terminology and suggest the importance of attending to ‘trustworthiness’ instead. However, other authors such as Morse et al. (2002) argue that qualitative researchers should always use the terms validity and reliability to provide the rigour that ensures the quality of mainstream science, and warn against the dangers of examining these issues once the research has been completed. Given that the terms reliability and validity might be associated with statistics due to their origin in the natural sciences, I chose to refer to ‘trustworthiness’ throughout the study, which I believe is coherent with my epistemological and ontological positions, as described in the opening section of this chapter.

As a researcher, my position is that there are various ways of interpreting reality (Graneheim & Lundman 2004) and that subjectivity plays a fundamental role in the quality and transparency of the action research process. As such, the researcher’s subjectivity needs to be embraced and examined reflexively, rather than safeguarded against. Trustworthiness also involves being honest and transparent about the processes, decisions and actions, and providing clear audit trails for other researchers to be able to construct an in-depth understanding of the research in question.

To ensure trustworthiness, several measures were taken. First of all, a variety of data sources were used, as described in section 3.3. I provided a clear audit trail
throughout my study, to enable the reader to understand the events, decisions and analysis processes I described. Given the ontological and epistemological positioning of this research as well as its action research nature, instead of focusing on replicability, I tried to gain a better understanding of this as a particular case, emphasising ‘the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, with a shift from generalisation to contextualisation.’ (Kvale 1996:232). I also engaged in peer debriefing with my supervisors and other doctoral students with whom I often discussed my work. I embraced the subjective nature of my manifold roles in this study, purposefully examining my research in a reflexive manner.

3.8. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an active, ongoing process of critical reflection that occurs during every research stage (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:274), characterised by ‘detachment, internal dialogue, and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of “what I know” and “how I know it”’ (Hertz 1997:vii). According to Mason (1996:6), it implies researchers ‘should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data’. For Mauthner and Doucet (2003:418), researchers tend to over-simplify the issue of reflexivity by assuming that the voices of research participants will speak for themselves. Instead, they should acknowledge the fact that these voices are being presented through the researcher’s choices. I have attempted to respect these views throughout my work, by acknowledging the fact that although I am attempting to present the research participants' ideas, the interpretation of these is mine. As explained earlier in this chapter, in this study I have tried to highlight the reflexive dimension by explicitly presenting the researcher’s story through the narratives contained in my personal researcher data. This intention to highlight the researcher role, however, does not imply that the trustworthiness of the study is diminished with regard to the research story, which I have tried to represent transparently through the different strands of analysis and the provision of a clear audit trail.

Reflexivity played a key role in my research, not only as a means of enhancing trustworthiness but also as a tool to explore my role in greater depth and thus
reach conclusions which might be otherwise not so readily accessible. As Mauthner and Doucet suggest (2003:419), it was important to situate myself both socially and emotionally in relation to the research participants, especially those I was focusing on. As such, it provided an additional source of data to be analysed. To engage in reflexivity, I used Cooperative Development (Edge 2002:18) as ‘a mixture of awareness-raising and disciplined discourse’ which helped me to understand and theorise my role.

3.9. Ethical considerations

Throughout the study I adhered to the ethical guidelines for research as stipulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004). I gained access to the field at the start of the process and confirmed that my research was seen as being in the best interests of both the institution and the participants (Appendix 3.1.). At the beginning and end of the pilot study and again during the main data generation period, I distributed consent forms among participants and explained in detail what participation in the research implied (Appendix 3.2.). Data were stored securely at all times and only shared with the University of Manchester tutors and supervisors for academic purposes. I used pseudonyms instead of participants’ real names in order to preserve their anonymity, and they were given access to data as stipulated by the Data Protection Act (1998).

Before the study, I consciously considered the possibility of participants not wanting to continue being part of the research at any given point. To ensure that this was possible without affecting the participants or the study, I managed the data in such a way that all participant data that were not anonymous could be easily disaggregated.

As was explained in section 3.3. of this chapter, the fact that I decided to use participants’ assessed work as data did not constitute an ethical problem, as these assessed assignments were not compulsory and on submitting them, participants were well aware of the fact that I intended to use them for research purposes.
3.10. Affordances of the research design

The fact that I have assumed multiple roles in this context could be regarded as a strength or a limitation of the research design. However, given the key role played by reflexivity in my study, I consider the various roles I adopted a challenge that can prove highly enriching if dealt with in a reflexive manner. On the other hand, the fact that this is an action research study in which participants are well aware of the research focus may lead towards certain socially desirable attitudes and behaviours on their part (Nederhof 1985; Muijs 2004). That is to say, the fact that I played the role of course designer, tutor and researcher may have favoured certain discourses on the part of participants. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Nederhof’s (1985) and Muijs’s (2004) arguments arise from a realist perspective which safeguards against potential ‘contamination’. From an action research perspective, though, such social desirability is acknowledged as part of the process and not regarded as undesirable. Moreover, extensive triangulation with data from different sources and the anonymity of many of the data generation procedures contribute to offering participants the necessary space to express their thoughts openly and honestly.

3.11. Conclusion

Although some methodological decisions were made prior to the start of the research process, many others were shaped according to the continuous action research cycles that occurred, making the analytical process a dynamic one. The various parallel ongoing data analyses such as those described in this chapter provided a window on the developmental processes operating at different levels, which I will describe in greater detail in the next three chapters which deal with different stages in the action research project.
CHAPTER 4: THE FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

4.1. Introduction

Writing in retrospect is a challenging exercise. However rigorous and exhaustive the data analysis has been, there is always the feeling that the story might have been different had it been written as it was happening. The time perspective, on the other hand, can provide an opportunity to foreground the reflexive dimension of the research, making it more explicit and transparent. Hoping to achieve this transparency, in this chapter I tell the story of the preparatory fieldwork which took place between April and November 2008.

I then describe and reflect on the action research process which occurred during the first year of the Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP), as a result of which I gained a better understanding of the particular, practical and possible dimensions in this research setting (Kumaravadivelu 2006b). Furthermore, I show how I applied the Community of Inquiry notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence to some assignments and e-mail conversations I had with participants and reflect on what these uncovered, not only about my research but also regarding the relevance of the notions to this context. I also display my search for meaningful themes in the other data types, which were carefully and repeatedly ‘combed’ (Miles & Huberman 1994) in a bottom-up thematic analysis (Thomas 2003).

4.2. Designing the Anglo Continuous Development Programme

By the end of 2007, I had convinced my employers of the importance of designing and implementing a professional development programme for teachers in provincial areas of Uruguay, which would not only widen access to educational opportunities in an attempt to end the existing geographical divide, but also constitute a chance to create a community of provincial teachers. More importantly, around 40 teachers in different areas outside the capital were keen to
be involved in the first trial run. My aim was to depart from mainstream transmissive models of teacher education (see p.21) in favour of an action research approach to development with a particular emphasis on reflection and collaborative work. The design of the programme was based not only on this aim but also on information I had gathered from different sources. My own experience as a teacher of English, teacher educator and visiting examiner had allowed me to witness how different my 'capital-city' teaching reality was from that in the provinces. Also, my review of the literature on blended learning and teacher development as well as the educational reality of Uruguay at the time, described in Chapters 2 and 1 of this thesis respectively, had an influence on the decisions I made.

At the time of designing the programme, I had encountered Garrison, Anderson and Archer's Community of Inquiry framework (2000), which drew on the notions of teaching, social and cognitive presences as interacting elements in a successful online educational experience. Even though the ACDP scheme was not a fully online one, like those on which the authors had originally based their framework, the Community of Inquiry elements appeared to me to be relevant to blended and even face-to-face learning, as described by the authors in other papers (Garrison & Kanuka 2004:97; Vaughan & Garrison 2005; Garrison & Vaughan 2008). Informed by this idea, I decided that the course sessions and materials would be designed in order to promote teaching, social and cognitive activity to support participants' professional development. Another framework which influenced the evolving implementation of the programme was Kumaravadivelu’s Postmethod framework (2006b) with its conditions of *particularity, practicality* and *possibility*, about which I set out to discover more during the first cycle.

Based on the frameworks as well as the existing realities and resources, I negotiated the design of the course with my employers. As was explained in Chapter 1, it was decided that the Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP) would be a two-year teaching methodology course, different from all other courses offered to date in that I, as tutor, would travel to the provinces instead of asking participants to travel to the capital city. For 2008, I would travel to two main venues, Towns A and B, where people from nine different areas would meet.
The first yearly block would consist of seven face-to-face meetings in each venue, supplemented by weekly tasks and e-mail contact with me as necessary. According to the needs analysis conducted in 2007 (Appendix 1.2.), there would be a different topic area for each of the seven meetings. After each meeting, the topics would continue to be explored via the weekly tasks and e-mail communications. For assessment purposes, participants would be asked to define a topic of their interest and develop an action research project to act on a particular aspect of their professional realities. In the second year, a VLE would be introduced as a tool for communication and development, thus making the programme a blended one.

4.3. Summary of the 2008 experience

As was described in Chapter 1, the first ACDP iteration was both exciting and eventful for me. It was a time of discovery, during which I learned not only about the participants and their challenging professional environments, but also about life outside the capital city of my country. I examined my experiences reflexively at all times, embracing the subjectivity of my experience and enjoying the novice researcher’s passion with which I tried to document each and every one of the events in my researcher journal and field notes.

In each venue I was always treated with the utmost hospitality, and each of the seven face-to-face sessions in each town was an enjoyable learning experience for me. For the duration of ACDP 2008 (April to November) I collected different types of data: e-mails, participants’ assignments, post session reflections, questionnaires, field notes and entries in my research journal (see Appendix 5 for the data generation prompts used in 2008). The analysis of these data from different perspectives allowed me to shed light on two main issues: the participants’ state of professional need and aspiration and the potential of virtual ‘teaching conversations’ as learning opportunities. In Postmethod terms, the discovery of these particularities aided my explorations of the possible by allowing me to understand and act with reference to the practical.

In the following sections I present the detailed analysis process through which I discovered the above mentioned affordances. In section 4, I show how I analysed
data obtained during the face-to-face sessions in a thematic fashion (see Appendix 4 for a list of the codes and themes). The initial codes, which I later grouped into themes, will be displayed on the left of the data. In section 5, I show how I analysed the e-mail teaching conversations by applying the Community of Inquiry notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000).

4.4. Understanding the participants’ state of professional need and aspiration through inductive thematic analysis

In the bottom-up thematic analysis, the main themes I identified in the teachers’ discourses, related to their state of professional need and aspiration in 2008, were the following:

- Traditional views on teaching and learning
- Culture of heavy workloads
- Desire to please the tutor
- Technology-related insecurity

I realised they had deeply ingrained ideas about the role of the tutor, which undoubtedly shaped their views on teacher development as well as their expectations of the course. I learned about their work arrangements and how these often determined certain teaching ideas and habits. The participants’ hectic teaching schedules led them to complain about lack of time and this was the most common reason put forward for not complying with all the course requirements. The fact that they had little time also influenced their expectations of the ACDP course – in other words – what was practical for them. They wanted ‘quick-fix’ solutions and as many ready-made ideas as possible, rather than the more time-consuming and longer-term reflection and collaboration, which they considered to be ‘theoretical’ or removed from their daily practice.

One of the major outcomes of the 2008 action research process was that I was able to learn more about the participants’ needs, lacks and interests. The deconstruction and reconstruction of the experience that occurred throughout the

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3 See page 21 for an explanation of how I have used the term 'traditional'.
analysis allowed me to build a rich understanding of the participants’ professional lives, which informed my subsequent course design decisions. To illustrate this journey of understanding, I have made a careful selection of the data analysis extracts that are most explanatory and significant (see Appendix 4 for a full list of the codes and themes for this first action research cycle).

4.4.1. Learning from the face-to-face meetings

In this section I describe the process through which I gradually learned more about the participants’ professional realities during the face-to-face meetings, and especially as a result of their individual, post-meeting reflections. I will show the inductive analysis process by presenting the initial codes I used for the post-meeting reflections and showing how these were grouped into the four aforementioned themes.

At the end of the first face-to-face meeting, having presented and discussed the idea of engaging in teacher development through reflection and collaboration with colleagues, I recorded the participants’ initial reactions towards the ‘new’ approach by asking them to write an anonymous comment, based on the prompt: ‘React to the ideas discussed today by sharing your thoughts anonymously’. I was pleasantly surprised to find the vast majority of the reactions were very positive and even enthusiastic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive views on reflection and collaboration</td>
<td>“What is life if full of care and there’s no time to stand and stare?” This session has made me start thinking of the importance of ‘standing back and staring’. I’ll do my best to reflect on what I do more often. The idea of collaboration, especially in the sense that everybody’s ideas should be welcome, not only mine, has made me think!!! To me reflecting is one of the main things that you need to become a better teacher, as well as being part of a group of reflective teachers to exchange ideas, materials, etc. Knowledge is important but thinking about what you know is even better. I like to share ideas with colleagues so I think I would like to go on working in the way we did it today. Thanks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only 3 out of the 36 participants who handed in their comments in that first session had shown some scepticism towards the ideas proposed, yet none of them had dismissed them completely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scepticism</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not used to collaborative work so I want to see if it is useful or worthy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t really like ‘reflection’ very much but I admit it helps a lot if I want to improve myself as a teacher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve heard about interesting ideas on how to improve myself as a teacher, but are they possible to carry out?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My enthusiasm at what I had interpreted as nearly full approval was evident in my journal writing after those initial sessions:

*I felt great, especially in [Town A], I felt they were all so motivated and were nodding their heads to what I said all the time. In [Town B] it was brilliant too, but at the beginning I somehow felt I was not convincing them, I felt they were looking at me sceptically. It did change radically after I told them a bit about my life and my research (after the break). Maybe I should have done that from the beginning!* (Research journal, April 12 2008)

As can be seen in the journal entry above, I had sensed some scepticism from the participants in one of the venues, though at the time I interpreted this as a problem connected with the meeting dynamics rather than the ideas I was proposing. Having coded the participants’ reflections as ‘positive views’ on that first meeting, I began to consider alternative themes to capture what the data were showing. After repeatedly going over the analysis, I decided on the ‘desire to please the tutor’ theme. This was because although much of participants’ discourse appeared to be in line with my own (e.g. ‘reflecting is one of the main things that you need to become a better teacher’), there were other instances of scepticism, which given my experience in the field I knew were more likely to influence the participants’ actions. That is, despite the fact that in general terms they seemed to be in favour of the new approach I was trying to advocate, I knew that I could not rely on this translating into practice. Therefore, an alternative interpretation that I believed described what was happening was that they were not firmly convinced of the new approach but did not wish to make this evident to me, possibly given the passion I had shown, and the fact that we had established a very good relationship. It was thus that the ‘desire to please the tutor’ theme emerged. It is important that this
theme should not be seen as expressing cynicism on my part, or as an accusation of insincerity on theirs. Realistically, it seemed safer to establish a theme I could be sure of than to proceed with a face-value acceptance that might turn out to be naïve. However, this was not to reject the possibility that a desire to please the tutor, in a context of attractive ideas and a strong affective relationship, might lead participants to experiment in ways they would otherwise have rejected out of hand.

After the second meeting, I was interested in exploring participants’ perceptions of the factors affecting their professional development, so I asked them to reflect on which elements they considered most important: the tutor figure, their work with peers or their individual reflections. To some extent, albeit crudely, these three notions were related to the Community of Inquiry’s teaching presence (the tutor figure), social presence (their work with peers) and cognitive presence (individual reflections) (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2000). It was at this time that I first became aware of the preponderance of the tutor figure in their discourse as the main source of knowledge, a view consistent with a more transmissive approach to teacher development than the one I was advocating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor as resource; Importance of social aspects of TD</th>
<th>Personally, I think working with a tutor is a good thing because you have the chance to ask if you have any doubts and you can express your opinions and you also have the opportunity to share your problems with colleagues from other places and see that yours are the same as theirs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as resource</td>
<td>I think that working with a tutor is useful because he/she helps you with new ideas or trends and then we can try with our students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as expert</td>
<td>In the first place I would put, work with a tutor, in my opinion this person is better prepared and brings great ideas, maybe taken from places that we can’t access because of different reasons. I think working with a tutor is excellent because you have a ‘sense of direction’ and you negotiate and someone can trust on and feel you are making the best of your time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My journal discourse once again reflected my enthusiasm for what I was doing, and my conviction that the ideas I was suggesting were the best way to facilitate the participants’ professional empowerment:
I started off by explaining why we were working in this reflective, collaborative mode. I said I knew they expected tips, ideas, learning about the latest trends, but that was only a temporary solution. What they really need to learn is to become critical, reflective practitioners, who can see beyond fads and critically assess anything they come across... I enjoyed the session SO MUCH. This kind of thing really makes me happy, though I don’t know exactly what it is. Maybe getting people to discover new ideas, making them feel understood. (Research journal, May 9 2008)

At the time of the second face-to-face meeting, I was already aware of the fact that they wanted ‘tips, ideas, learning about the latest trends’, but I was also convinced that I knew exactly what they needed, an idea which I would later dismiss for fear of becoming immersed in the same mainstream approach to teacher education I was trying to depart from (see section 9.8.2, p.264). I felt my enthusiasm was connected with the idea of helping participants to ‘discover new ideas’ and ‘making them feel understood’. After a careful analysis of the participants’ reflections for this second meeting, I decided on the ‘traditional views on teaching and learning’ theme, in the view that it captured the essence of their discourses regarding professional development.

During the third session, on classroom management, their interest in ‘recipes’ had become obvious to me, and this resulted in a feeling of disappointment which was reflected in the field notes I took during the June 2008 meetings.

Carmen wants tips – ready-made activities that she can use with students. This says it all. They just don’t want, or maybe they’re not ready for, my collaborative-reflective approach.
After article by Bax, Rosario complained that the author didn’t offer any solutions to the CLT/Context approach dichotomy, so the article wasn’t useful for her. So this might show their interest in ‘recipes’.
I always feel they’re expecting input, ideas, solutions, so I chose to reorder the activities so after the break we start with something ‘new’ = individual learner differences. (Field notes, June 2008)

The first extract shows I was not sure about the reasons for their lack of enthusiasm towards the approach, which clearly upset me, as expressed in the phrase ‘This says it all’. At the end of the session, I decided to ask them to write down anonymously as a post-session reflection, what it was exactly that they wanted to discuss during the following face-to-face meeting. I considered this was a good opportunity firstly, to see how clearly they could articulate their needs, and
secondly, to use their comments to plan the upcoming face-to-face meeting. On analysing the comments, I realised few of them were able to articulate their needs beyond a vague request for practical ideas, as can be seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for general solution</th>
<th>How to motivate teenagers, please? Help us!!! SOS!!!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The key to success in getting our teenagers involved in the learning of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teenagers’ motivation: how to motivate them to speak more English in class. How to make them like writing (motivate them again).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can we motivate teenagers to write and speak English in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for practical ideas</th>
<th>Practical motivating activities to do with them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know there must be tips, ideas I am not trying that I could apply to see them more aware in class and willing to participate. I want them to have a hunger for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practical ideas – ready to put into practice are necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting the parallelism between their teaching and learning experiences. In both cases, participants seemed to view the existence of practical ideas as having a direct effect on motivation. That is, their discourse shows they regarded practical ideas as tools for motivating their learners, whilst at the same time these ready-made ‘tips, ideas’ directly related to the perceived usefulness of ACDP and their motivation towards it. I considered their discourse of requesting practical ideas might somehow be related to their traditional ideas on teaching and learning, which made them view the tutor as a source of ready-made solutions (practical ideas). On the other hand, I was also convinced that at least to some extent, it was a consequence of their heavy workloads, hence the creation of the ‘culture of heavy workloads’ theme. Due to my experience of working as a teacher educator in the provinces, I was aware of their tight schedules and how much they welcomed any materials and resources that could help them to save time.

By the time the fourth face-to-face meeting had arrived, I was concerned by the fact that not all of them were taking the opportunity to keep in touch with me via e-mail, so I decided to investigate how they felt about this kind of communication by asking them to write, at the end of the session, an anonymous answer to the question 'How do you feel about interacting with me (or any other tutor) via e-
This would also provide me with valuable information relating to the introduction of the VLE which I was planning for the following year. The reasons that were put forward for not contacting me via e-mail were mostly lack of time, lack of competence and/or confidence in using computers, and a dislike of computers in a few cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dislike of computers</th>
<th>I would like to contact you but my problem is that I don't like computers at all. I recognise they are very useful nowadays but I feel reluctant to use one. I think they are a waste of time as I am very anxious and impatient person. Sorry for that but...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as resource; Lack of ICT competence</td>
<td>I believe emailing with a tutor can be a very good opportunity to clarify your doubts and have a quite immediate response to all your necessities! It would be great but you have to be familiar to computers!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of ICT competence; Lack of time</td>
<td>In my opinion, it would be great to communicate with you but I’m very shy, I’m not used to using computers and the biggest problem is TIME.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I teach English from 7 am to 12 am then from 2 pm to 9 pm. After having dinner with part of my family among other things I prepare the classroom for the next day. At weekends I correct homework, I plan lessons and prepare some material. I also read. I’m very slow with the computer and maybe that’s the reason why I do not write to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as source of ideas; Value of reflection</td>
<td>Tutors are great help/give ideas on our everyday work. You can share with them and your colleagues on your experience. It is always rewarding to spend some time reflecting together, and tutors are essential to make us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These comments helped me to make better sense of their constant requests for practical ideas, although I knew other factors, such as their previous experiences of teacher education, or the lack of them, could also be determining their state of need and aspiration. As can be seen above, the view of the tutor as a source of practical ideas was also a theme that featured prominently at this time. It was after analysing reflections such as those shown above that I decided to add a ‘Technology-related insecurity’ theme to the existing ones, as I felt it would allow me to complete the picture of the participants’ state of professional need and aspiration at this point in time.
Because I wanted the programme to fulfil their expectations as closely as possible, after the fifth face-to-face meeting (on writing) I decided to continue exploring their beliefs about teacher development. This time, I asked them to answer the following question as an anonymous post-session reflection: ‘What sorts of activities help you become a better professional?’ As I analysed the comments, I suspected that some of them might be offering socially desirable responses, mentioning activities they were not actually willing to engage in, such as peer observation. This appeared to me as a mismatch between their espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974), although it could simply have been related to their not wanting to disappoint me, given that they knew very well the kinds of activities I considered relevant to furthering their development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of collaboration; Tutor as expert</th>
<th>One of the best ways of learning is sharing knowledges and doubts with colleagues but this is better if you have a tutor to lead the conversations and the ideas to a good ending.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual work; Collaboration</td>
<td>Attending workshops, reading on my own, courses, downloading from internet, watching colleagues lessons and discussing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing opinions/activities with other teachers, attending courses, attending congresses, this type of session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think that working with a tutor clarifies my doubts or encourages one to try different ideas in the classroom and to be more critical. If I share ideas with colleagues is easy but not useful to put into practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as resource; Tutor as expert</td>
<td>I think that working with a tutor clarifies my doubts or encourages one to try different ideas in the classroom and to be more critical. If I share ideas with colleagues is easy but not useful to put into practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although many of them suggested the importance of individual reflection through reading, as well as the value of working with colleagues (discussing and collaborating), once again the tutor figure featured quite prominently in their discourse, as did the idea of quick-fix solutions or practical tips. The analysis of the post-meeting reflections such as those above confirmed the relevance of the ‘desire to please the tutor’, ‘culture of heavy workloads’ and ‘traditional views on teaching and learning’ themes.
At the end of the seventh and final 2008 face-to-face meeting, I asked the participants to complete a questionnaire to evaluate the course (see Appendix 5.4.). After having a preliminary look at the questionnaire responses, I recorded the following impressions in my journal.

_I also gave out the final questionnaires and I’m very happy because although I haven’t finished processing yet, they are AWESOME so far._ (Research journal, October 6 2008)

_I had a quick look through the questionnaires and they were amazing, so positive. I’m ecstatic 😊_ (Research journal, October 10 2008)

Through careful analysis I came across many of the themes that had surfaced in the participants’ discourse throughout the year. Firstly, the fact that some of them wanted practical ideas and did not see my approach as fully relevant was evident in a few responses to the question ‘Was the theory/balance practice appropriate?’ such as the ones below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice vs theory</th>
<th>Perhaps I would prefer more practice and less theory.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think it was because there was not so much theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and all of it had practical implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, I think so. Although a bit more of practice it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>would be better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only during 2009 would I realise the significance of the statements above, as except for these three, the rest of the participants had expressed satisfaction with the theory/practice balance in 2008. When asked ‘Is there anything you would have liked to be different?’ most of them had nothing to say, or suggested changes that were not to do with the course itself. For some participants at least, this might have been a result of their previous experiences with transmissive models of teacher development.
Difficulty in articulating needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nothing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I nearly froze during wintertime 😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really I haven’t thought that, perhaps sessions should be on Saturday’s morning but is a suggestion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think any part should be changed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time, I interpreted responses such as the above as being the result of the difficulty participants had in articulating their needs and wants, although I also suspected they could be another example of the social desirability of their discourse. Nevertheless, it might have been the case that participants were indeed satisfied and did not have any important changes to suggest, especially considering the fact that they did not have other similar continuous professional development experiences against which to compare this one.

Furthermore, in the answers to the question ‘Did you keep a diary?’ the discourse of lack of time appeared very prominently once again. In fact, most participants had not kept a diary, and the few who had, had used it as a means of taking notes and summarising rather than reflecting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of time</th>
<th>Not really, for a question of time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t. I gave up keeping it but it’s interesting if you take your time to do it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t. Maybe lack of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By asking them about assessment (‘Was it a good idea to be assessed through optional assignments?’) I confirmed that although approximately half of the participants regarded the assignments favourably, some of those who did not want to be assessed had very strong feelings against the issue.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment as pressure</th>
<th>It was. When assignments are compulsory you feel a very strong pressure in you and finally give up the course.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personally, I would've left the course if the assignments had been compulsory as I had some health problems at the beginning of the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as pressure; Lack of time</td>
<td>Yes it was. I felt exhausted and overloaded with work in the middle of the year and if the assignment had been compulsory I would have given up. But as it wasn’t I had the chance to keep on coming and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of processing and analysing all the responses, I confirmed my initial impression that the evaluations had been positive on the whole. This idea was also confirmed in the general comments below, where the idea of the tutor as source of ideas and knowledge once again surfaced, as did the theme of ‘culture of heavy workloads’ evidenced in their constant references to lack of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive views of tutor and course; Idea of provincial community</th>
<th>All the course was great and the tutor too. You make the course enjoyable and we feel very comfortable coming [to class] with you. Thanks!!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you very much! This kind of courses help teachers in the provinces to keep up-to-date and not feeling alone. Let’s go ahead together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as main knowledge source</td>
<td>Thanks for your patience and for sharing this year with us – especially your knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of having learned; Lack of time</td>
<td>I learnt a lot about all the different areas of teaching and learning. I wish I would find the time or make the time to use all these ideas with my students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was also interesting for me to see there were comments related to the idea of working together as a community, which was one of the main aims behind the design of ACDP. At the time, I was very pleased with the results of this evaluation and felt extremely motivated to re-plan and thus begin the second action research cycle.

In order to give more background to the sample analyses presented here, Appendix 5.5. contains more responses to the final 2008 questionnaire from one of the venues, which have been sufficiently processed for the current purpose.
4.4.2. Conclusions drawn from the inductive thematic analysis

The analysis shown above offered me a very helpful chronological view of the year-long experience. By grouping the various thematic codes into themes, as was shown throughout section 4.4.1., I moved towards a richer and more situated understanding of these teachers’ state of professional need and aspiration. The four umbrella themes below were pervasive across the different data sets and to a great extent determined the outcomes of the 2008 experience:

- **Traditional views on teaching and learning** (practice vs theory, tutor as main knowledge source, scepticism, tutor as resource, tutor as expert, difficulty in articulating needs)
- **Culture of heavy workloads** (lack of time, assessment as pressure, request for practical ideas, request for general solution)
- **Desire to please the tutor** (positive views on reflection and collaboration, importance of social aspects of TD, value of reflection, positive views of tutor and course, perception of having learned)
- **Technology-related insecurity** (lack of ICT competence, dislike of computers)

It was clear from the start that the participants held quite traditional views on teaching and learning, related to the over-emphasis on the ‘Applied Science’ model described by Wallace (1991, see p.22). This was evidenced in their ideas of the tutor as the main source of knowledge, which in turn appeared to diminish the importance of learning from peers. In their discourse, these were evidenced in their theory versus practice discourse and the very central role assigned to the tutor. In addition, these ideas led to some scepticism towards the less traditional approach I was offering as learning opportunities. At the same time, I realised that probably due to economic factors, there was a culture of working long hours which determined their constant complaints about lack of time, as well as the views of assignments as undue pressure and the requests for practical, time-saving tips. In addition, many of them seemed intent on not disappointing me, thus the socially desirable discourse which I readily identified as from the initial stages. Finally, the
technological possibilities resulted for many of them in a surge of insecurity that was in some cases overcome, whilst in others it resulted in frustration.

In the next section I will show my analysis of the e-mail conversations through which I explored the relevance of the Community of Inquiry notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2003), which will be displayed as purple, red and green codes on the right side of the data. This strand of analysis complemented the thematic one shown above, helping me to assess the effect that ACDP was having (or not) in their professional lives.

4.5. Virtual teaching conversations as tools for empowerment: The deductive Community of Inquiry analysis

‘...some of the teacher presence activities do not take place in common forums and are conducted through private email, voicemail or telephone. Thus, the conferencing transcript provides a snapshot and an indicator of teacher presence activities.’ (Anderson et al. 2001:14)

At this point, I would like to remind the reader of how the Community of Inquiry framework was applied to the data in this chapter, which correspond to the first course iteration in 2008. Given the exploratory nature of my research questions, in this first attempt to test the feasibility of the framework to this context, I decided to apply the basic teaching, social and cognitive parameters to the data, rather than the full, three-layer descriptors (see p.72-76).

The deductive Community of Inquiry analysis allowed me to explore the dimension of possibility, as I learned that the virtual e-mail conversations I had with some participants were a potential tool to facilitate their professional empowerment. On analysing the virtual conversations, I was able to witness a movement towards higher-order thinking, linked to a high degree of direct instruction and supported by social presence. This resonated with my idea of development and empowerment, and encouraged me to further explore the dimension of possibility in 2009 by designing online tasks on the VLE to promote similar virtual conversations.
From the first meeting I encouraged participants to keep in touch with me via e-mail in order to clarify doubts and share ideas, and although not all of them engaged in this kind of communication, those who did so regularly appeared to profit from these ‘teaching conversations’. In this section I will draw on teaching conversations and assignments from two participants to illustrate how during the preparatory fieldwork the notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence could be identified.

These participants, whom I have called Sofia and Adriana, were from different provinces and did not know each other, nor did they meet at any time during the 2008 and 2009 iterations, since they attended the face-to-face meetings at different venues. Even though I have analysed many more examples of similar processes undergone by other participants, I have chosen Sofia and Adriana for different reasons. Firstly, I selected only two participants because I considered this analysis a good example of what was happening, not intending it to be a numerically representative sample. Secondly, since Sofia and Adriana did not know each other, there was no possibility of their behavior having been due to being aware of how the other one was proceeding. Finally, I believe that even though their different personalities are evident in the ‘teaching conversations’, the processes undergone through which they deepened their understanding of the task are similar.

As was explained in Chapter 3 (section 3.6.2.), it should be noted that whereas Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) coded public conversations within a VLE, the virtual data I will be coding in this chapter consists of private e-mail exchanges taking place in 2008. As was explained at the beginning of the present chapter, given the significance of this difference between my one-to-one e-mail data and the public conferencing data used by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), instead of applying the full coding scheme I decided to analyse my 2008 data in the light of their three basic notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence. Since the e-mail exchanges were based on assignments the participants had to complete, I also draw on these assignments to trace the participants’ movement towards higher-order thinking. By exploring the 2008 e-mails and assignments, I intended to understand better the particularities of this context and what kind of learning
opportunities were most appropriate to facilitate the participants’ professional empowerment.

In terms of the usefulness of the framework, it is worth highlighting that the multi-functional nature of discourse sometimes determined an overlap between presences. For instance, both the cognitive and teaching acts occurring in these virtual conversations are inherently embedded in a social act, as they are part of an exchange between two people. However, I discovered that the embeddedness of the three categories in this setting went beyond the inherently social nature of communication. In fact, some of my teaching presence discourse was of a purely social nature, discourse which has not been accounted for in the teaching presence descriptor as originally devised by Anderson et al. 2001 (see p.74). In a similar manner, some of the social presence of participants was evidencing cognitive moves, meaning that apart from the purely social or interpersonal moves, there were others with a more transactional aim which evidenced cognitive activity. I discuss these issues further in the sections that follow.

Although there were many participants with whom I exchanged e-mails, I have chosen to show the exchanges which I believe are most explanatory of the above-mentioned events for the reader. I begin by showing extracts from my online conversations with Sofia, who participated in ACDP over the three-year period.

4.5.1. Sofia

Sofia first e-mailed me at the beginning of the course to ask for advice on her assignment:

**Data**

*Hi Magdalena, I'm Sofia from [town n]. I'm writing to ask for your help. I was trying to complete "my action research plan " in the last booklet you gave us but I feel at a loss. I don't know if the topic I chose is correct for this type of research. I thought of what I was worried about and this is what came out: "students' lack of confidence to speak English in the classroom, especially my group of senior 6 students ". So, once I have the topic I don't know how to go on. What's the relevant data I'm supposed to collect? I don't quite understand how to go about this research. Can you help me, please? Thanks a lot.*

SP

CP

SP
Sofia initiated the interaction with a social move which invoked my teaching presence (‘I’m writing to ask for your help’). Her ideas about my role were transparent in her statement ‘I don’t know if the topic I chose...is correct’. That is, she thought that her choice of action research topic could be incorrect and that it was I who needed to establish whether it was right or wrong. As for the cognitive presence displayed, it indicates that Sofia was operating at the level of information exchange at the time, simply articulating her ideas as a means of confirming their appropriacy (‘I thought of what I was worried about and this is what came out’). Towards the end of the message her social move was again invoking my teaching presence, as she was straightforwardly asking me to provide information (‘What’s the relevant data I’m supposed to collect?’). The social, affective quality of her message was evident to me in the following requests for help, in which I also sensed some urgency or discomfort, e.g. ‘I’m writing to ask for your help’; ‘I feel at a loss’; ‘I don’t know how to go on’; ‘Can you help me please?’.

In my reply, the teaching presence was evident. It was mostly direct instruction in that I provided information to answer her questions, for example ‘To do this, you can reflect on...’; ‘...or you can ask students...’ However, the tentative tone was
pervasive across the message in the constant use of modals can and could. I was also trying to facilitate Sofia’s movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking through prompts, such as ‘What are you going to do to solve this problem?; ‘What kinds of activities will you use?’. I intended to be supportive by encouraging her to continue exchanging ideas with me, e.g. ‘I’ll be happy to discuss things with you’. In the last part of the message, I responded by reacting to her statements of unease, sometimes even mirroring her choice of words:

‘Is this any help?’ (‘I’m writing to ask for your help’)

‘Let me know if it’s cleared things up for you’ (‘I feel at a loss’)

In short, the above extract could perhaps be said to evidence a certain teaching style, in which the tutor’s teaching presence is clearly defined by its predominantly social nature. The discovery of this embedded social presence made the coding process more complex, given that I decided to maintain the original coding which did not fully account for the social aspects of the teaching presence construct. Despite the fact that there was evidently more to the teaching presence domain than what Garrison et al. (2000) had first proposed, I decided to continue to experiment with the original framework, in order to evaluate its suitability for my setting, and in the view that despite the differences between the original research setting and the present one, it could constitute a very helpful aid in the understanding of the characteristics of this teacher development process.

In her next e-mail, Sofia did not ask any further questions because she seemed to have ‘a clearer idea’ of what was needed. In terms of the analysis framework, the social presence in the message is clear in that she was making reference to our previous exchange, although the extract is also indicating the cognitive act of understanding and planning.

Hi Magdalena, I think I have a clearer idea of what I have to do. I will try to do my best. Thanks a lot. See you. Take care.

SP

A few days after the above, she e-mailed with more questions. This time I also sensed she expected me to provide solutions instead of exploring them herself.
Hi Magdalena, can you help me, please? Could you give me any idea about activities to foster my students' confidence, as you suggested? Or where can I find any ideas? Another thing you suggested was to find out more about the reasons they have for not speaking, should I give them another questionnaire or should I do it informally? Thanks a lot.

Take care

In this message, there was little evidence of Sofia having moved towards higher levels of cognitive activity, as she was in fact turning my previous advice into new questions without adding ideas of her own and without having made any decisions. In terms of teacher development, I thought she was far from being autonomous, but at the same time she was invoking my teaching presence by displaying her social presence, which seemed a step in the right direction. That is, she was intending to move forward by asking the tutor for help. In my reply, I decided to use her position as a starting point to facilitate her move towards more critical thinking, which is why I provided some of the direct instruction she was requesting.

Hi [Sofia]! Good to hear from you. I think you could start by giving them easy, fun speaking activities to make sure they are not frustrated, and then increase difficulty when you realise their confidence has improved. Again, this is just an idea, you might want to do it differently. In terms of which activities to do, I think the most motivating types are either those activities which involve talking about yourself, or maybe games. Have you explored any of these?

1. http://esl.about.com/od/conversationlessonplans/Conversation_Lesson_Plans_for_English_Learners_at_All_Levels.htm
2. www.onestopenglish.com,

I think you could give them another questionnaire yes, or maybe have a whole-class discussion? Would that make them uncomfortable? You have to decide on the one which you feel will provide the most accurate information. Hope this helps
In the above reply, the fact that the social was embedded in the teaching could also be appreciated. Despite the fact that at first sight the message seems almost purely a direct teaching act, the social aspects of my teaching style became apparent to me in the tentativeness of phrases such as ‘Again, this is just an idea, you might want to do it differently’ and ‘You have to decide on the one which you feel will provide the most accurate information.’ In these social-teaching acts I was positioning the agency in her, encouraging her to exercise her decision-making skills. I was engaging her both intellectually and affectively, using my teaching presence to demand her cognitive presence.

Although in these data Sofia was clearly highly dependent on my input, her assignment showed how she had moved towards higher levels of cognitive activity, which was clearly evidenced as cognitive presence:

> We have been exposed to the notion of ‘action research’ as a way of improving our teaching. As I understood it, it has to do with reflecting on what we do in the classroom, why we do it and what results we get. Based on this reflection we can spot problems we or the students are having, so we should act to solve them and see what results we get and reflect again to go on or change direction. Therefore, it is like a circle where you are always reflecting and doing something about this reflection. As it is expressed by Richard Pring: “action research aims not to produce new knowledge but to improve practice” (Reading 3.2, “Developing an evidence-informed classroom”). I consider all teachers do action research in some way or another, perhaps without being fully aware of it. Personally I believe it is a good way to improve my own teaching now I have been able to spot some problems to apply action research on.

Clearly, it would not be possible to identify teaching and social elements in assignment discourse. However, I believe the assignment shows how the teaching and social presence moves helped participants, in this case Sofia, build her arguments and therefore move towards the highest levels of cognitive activity. Sofia provided a clear description of how she had first been exposed to the concept of action research, which could be interpreted as the triggering event, in Community of Inquiry terms. She had interpreted the ideas in the light of her own experience (‘As I understood it, …’), and had also effectively integrated these ideas.
with others in different sources (‘As it is expressed by Richard Pring, …’). It is arguable whether she actually managed to reach the level of resolution described by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), although her final meta-comment appears to provide some evidence of this: ‘Personally I believe…’

In the same assignment, she went on to describe her research plan in more detail and was able to draw conclusions from the implementation of the action research plan we had been discussing in the e-mails.

I believe one way of helping them to speak more is to make them feel confident, trying to include topics they are familiar with and they like. In their textbooks they have a task in which they have to write an article about a topic they are interested in. Therefore, as a follow up they will have to do an oral presentation about it. I believe it could work; even though they will have to speak in front of their partners, they will be talking about a topic they like and have chosen themselves. They will also have all the necessary information ready beforehand so I hope it will be easier for them than to improvise. As we have learned that “action research” implies: observing, reflecting, planning and acting, I cannot stop here. Now that I have learned what kind of activities could help my students improve their confidence, it works as a circle, I will go on trying these activities, observing, reflecting and acting consequently. I feel I need to devise more activities to foster their self-confidence and I should try to use a varied kind of speaking activities, such as gap-filling exercises, games, comparing and contrasting, etc. To make them enjoy the “speaking” part of the lesson. Surely they feel much better working in pairs or small groups than speaking in front of the whole class. As a next step I will try the following activities I have found in internet and see what happens:

Sofia seemed to have learned more about her students and acted in accordance with this new knowledge in order to improve her teaching reality. From the triggering event in the e-mails when she had recognised the problem, in this extract she showed evidence of having explored the topic, brainstormed solutions and reflected on the possible outcomes: ‘I believe it could work; even though they will have to speak...’ She had also moved towards the level of resolution, by seeking solutions, applying these and reflecting on outcomes: ‘Now that I have learned what kind of activities could help my students improve their confidence, it works
as a circle, I will go on trying these activities, observing, reflecting and acting consequently.’

In her assignment discourse, Sofia not only showed a movement towards higher levels of cognitive activity, but also the empowerment resulting from the realisation that action research could help her to improve her classroom reality. However, it is also possible that she may have – consciously or unconsciously – attempted to provide a response that would fulfill the expectations she knew I had. Nevertheless, as was discussed in Chapter 3 (see p.94), I believe in an action research setting the issue of social desirability is not to be safeguarded against but examined reflexively. In this case, even if Sofia’s discourse were to be thought of as evidencing some of this social desirability, the whole process had undoubtedly helped her to improve her professional reality, or at least to move in a direction that was useful. There are echoes here of my discussion above regarding the decision to interpret positive responses to new ideas as a desire to please the tutor (see p.100), rather than as an indicator of changes in practice. In neither case are the two necessarily altogether separable.

This was one example of how the e-mails I exchanged with participants allowed them to engage in cognitive activity and enabled me to learn more about them as individuals and their needs, aspirations, beliefs and preferences. In particular, by exploring the teaching presence in my discourse I was able to see its prominently social nature, whilst my analysis of the social presence moves by participants indicated the cognitive nature of some of these moves. In the next section I will refer to Adriana to show how our e-mail exchanges influenced her articulation of ideas.

4.5.2. Adriana

Adriana was another participant who, very much like Sofia, appeared to expect reassurance and direct instruction from me.
Dear Magdalena,

hello, how are you? I'm sending you my assignment, I'm not sure about it, I'd like you see it and maybe if there is enough time you could tell me what I should correct or change. Thanks a lot. See you soon

SP

In this e-mail about her first assignment, Adriana was clearly asking me to tell her what was right or wrong: 'I'm not sure about it, I'd like you see it and maybe if there is enough time you could tell me what I should correct or change.' In Community of Inquiry terms, asking questions of the tutor is considered to be a social move, even though it also clearly shows some cognitive activity. Because this was an assignment through which I wanted to highlight the potential of action research as a tool for development, I did not think their ideas about their own contexts could be incorrect. I wanted participants to explore their reflective potential, which is why I replied by saying:

A very thoughtful and interesting piece! I have added some comments in capital letters in some places where I feel there are a few things to be explained further. See whether you agree with my comments. And let me know if you need any more help from me.

TP

In my reply, I encouraged her by describing the piece as 'thoughtful and interesting'. I attempted to draw her in, prompting her to think further by signalling 'some places where I feel there are a few things to be explained ...' I wanted to stress the point that it was not a matter of my correcting her errors, so I suggested she should decide whether she agreed with my comments. As I had done with Sofia, I made myself available for further consultations. Again, this teaching move evidenced how I was facilitating discourse (in CoI terms) using an explicitly non-directive approach, i.e. asking participants to make the decisions themselves.

Later on in the year, after having submitted the first piece, Adriana intended to start working on another piece, but was once again not quite sure of how to go about it.
Hello, how are you? How was your trip? Here I am trying to start again with a new work, but this time is more difficult. I don’t know why exactly maybe because we haven’t seen each other for a long time. I’m thinking about which topic would be the best to prepare, I’m completely lost. Could you help me? What’s your opinion about writing or motivation? I was thinking about ICT too, because it’s something new for me and I believe that it could be very motivating. Should the assignment be prepare similar to the one before?

In this extract, Adriana’s discourse was evidently social, as she was openly asking me questions, such as ‘how are you?’ and ‘how was your trip?’. In fact, the message can be said to have, within the social, both interpersonal and transactional elements, the former evidenced in the opening part described above. Once again, although her message was showing social presence in Community of Inquiry terms, this (transactional) social presence was indicative of cognitive activity (‘I was thinking of ICT too, because it’s something new for me...’). Through her social presence she was making a cognitive move and thus invoking my teaching presence, conveying a sense of urgency in her choice of words, e.g. ‘I’m completely lost. Could you help me?’ My response was fairly long and detailed.
Lovely to hear from you :-) My trip was excellent, I had a great time and worked very hard too. I'm very happy to help you with your second assignment. The original instructions were:

A 2000 to 4000-word assignment focusing on one of the following areas: writing, speaking, classroom management, motivation. Assignments must be based on an action research project and must include:

· Principles informing the area.
· A report on action research plan and findings.
· A statement of what has been learnt (i.e., a theorisation)
· A practical outline of how to use the relevant findings/conclusions.

But we can adapt this to your needs and interests, and of course, possibilities. Both of the topics you suggest seem great. The main problem seems to be that you cannot gather data at this point because your students have finished, haven't they? So if you talked about writing or ICT, could you say what you have done so far and how you intend to continue for example? In terms of Action Research you would be reflecting on what you have observed and planning for the future.

What do you think?

I responded to the social elements in her message in my interactional opening 'My trip was excellent, I had a great time and worked very hard too'. According to Garrison (personal communication), this type of teaching move is directly related to the social. However, it is not clearly accounted for in the teaching or in the social presence parameters. In this sense, although the social nature of the teaching presence parameter is to a certain extent captured in the 'facilitating discourse' descriptor, there are instances of purely social elements in the tutor's discourse (such as that in the message above) that need to be accounted for.

I reacted to her urgent tone by reassuring her that I would provide the help she needed, 'I'm very happy to help you with your second assignment.' There was also some direct instruction, in that I provided the rubric in the message. I also offered clear directions, in 'So if you talked about writing or ICT, could you say what you have done so far and how you intend to continue for example?' However, my teaching discourse was once again marked by tentativeness through the use of modals and questions, and in the fact that I offered to adapt the assignment so that
it would fit her ‘needs and interests’. I attempted to provide the support she needed but at the same time tried to position the agency in her.

In Adriana’s next message, the social and cognitive elements were again evident:

*Hi Magda,*

you are right I finished lessons on 22nd Nov, I think I’ll based my work on observations that I made in my group of senior 4, that was a group which worried me a lot especially in writing and as you said I’ll plan for next year. *Where can I find material for THEORISATION, what means exactly? next week I’ll send you something about what I am doing and you tell me if it is what you want.* thanks a lot, you are so kind with us.

In terms of cognitive presence, she articulated an important decision with regard to her assignment and her work for the following academic year. She also asked me about the meaning of theorisation, but instead of expecting all the answers, she was open to finding some answers herself (‘Where can I find material...?’). This seemed a movement towards greater autonomy, although it was counterbalanced in the last statement ‘I’ll send you something about what I am doing and you tell me if it is what you want.’ This showed the mismatch between my expectations and Adriana’s. I was in fact trying to provide her with tools to examine and improve her practice, and she was concerned about doing what ‘I wanted’. The social presence elements were also clearly visible in her e-mail, not only in the use of questions, but also in the closing in which she was openly expressing appreciation: ‘thanks a lot, you are so kind with us’. Once again, the social presence dimension comprises different types of social moves. In this example, ‘Where can I find material for...’ is a transactional move of a cognitive nature, whereas ‘thanks a lot, you are so kind with us’ is clearly interpersonal. In fact, this reference to kindness could be her reaction to the fact that I had not shown any disapproval at her not having completed her assignment.

In her next e-mail, Adriana chose to use Spanish. This could have been due to a certain degree of self-consciousness about her command of the language (Heredia & Altarriba 2001:164) or an increased familiarity with me.
hi Magda,

espero estes bien, te envío el trabajo con lo que me pediste, esta marcado en negrita, ¡alá sea lo que tu deseabas! te cuento que hoy en la tarde me vuelvo para el campo y no vuelvo hasta el lunes que es cuando pensamos llegarán los resultados de examenes de nuestros alumnos. Gracias por todo lo que nos enseñaste y ayudaste en todo este año, y espero que el prox año nos podamos encontrar nuevamente para seguir aprendiendo mucho más. MUY FELIZ NAVIDAD QUE ESTA NOCHE BUENA EL NIÑO JESUS TRAIGA MUCHO AMOR Y PAZ A TU HOGAR Y QUE EL NUEVO AÑO SEA MEJOR AUN QUE EL QUE SE ESTA TERMINANDO!

[I hope you are well, I am sending you the piece with what you asked me, it’s in bold, I hope it is what you wanted. I also wanted to tell you that this afternoon I’m going back to the countryside and will stay there until Monday, which is when we think we will have the students’ exam results. Thank you for everything you taught us this year and for helping us so much, and I hope we can work together again next year to continue learning much more. MERRY CHRISTMAS I HOPE THIS CHRISTMAS EVE BABY JESUS BRINGS LOVE AND PEACE TO YOUR HOME AND I HOPE THE NEW YEAR IS EVEN BETTER THAN THE ONE THAT IS ABOUT TO END!]

Once again, Adriana was explicitly showing her desire to submit an assignment that would please me (‘I hope it is what you wanted’). Her choice of words to express gratitude was also signalling her views about our professional relationship: ‘Thank you for everything you taught us this year and for helping us so much’. Instead of referring to her development as her own, she was positioning the agency in me. In terms of social presence, its interpersonal, affective nature was clear in her good wishes for the holidays, which she emphasised with the use of block capitals. In this message, the social presence dimension was different from that in the previous one, in which there were also more transactional elements, which are related to cognitive activity.

Her movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking was clear in various parts of the assignment she submitted, such as the one below, in which her cognitive presence was evident:
In my opinion one way to tackle this problem is to find the root of the problem and start from there. As one aspect of the problem is cultural, that is in their culture, it is unusual for students to talk out loud in class and the other aspect could be that students feel really shy about talking in front of other students I will try to create and establish my own classroom culture where speaking out loud in English is the norm. I will start by arranging the classroom desks differently, using the horse shoe way, and decorating the walls in English language and culture posters. I try to teach my students classroom language and keep on teaching it and encourage them to ask for things and to ask questions in English, giving positive feedback, also helping to encourage and relax shy students to speak more.

In her assignment, Adriana was operating at the levels of information exchange and resolution, by brainstorming ideas and synthesising. She was also effectively predicting problems and planning solutions, as can be seen in the extract below.

There are many potential problems that could interfere with this experience. First of all, the fact that the majority of the students are reluctant to speak English, may complicate the activities they have to complete. Students will often use their L1 as an emotional support at first, translating everything word by word to check they have understood the task before attempting to speak. I will be patient as most likely once their confidence grows in using English their dependence on using their L1 will begin to disappear.

Despite not having shown much independence initially, her action research plan and assignment had allowed her to reflect on her practice and develop her ideas. Through the analysis of my teaching conversations with Adriana and with other participants, the complex nature of the social presence construct became evident, in that it contained both interpersonal and transactional elements, the latter of which could be argued to be of a cognitive nature. I was also able to confirm the need for a label to account for the social nature of some of my tutor discourse, which was not explicitly catered for in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) original framework.

Although there were many more participants with whom I exchanged e-mails during the preparatory fieldwork, I have chosen to present Sofia and Adriana as significant examples of the role played by the e-mail teaching conversations in the
first ACDP iteration. Our teaching conversations provided very important information about the potential of the Community of Inquiry framework for analysis, which I will reflect on in the next and final section of this chapter.

4.5.3. Conclusions drawn from the deductive Community of Inquiry analysis

By applying the basic teaching, social and cognitive presence notions to the e-mails and assignments from the first iteration, I was able to learn through and about the Community of Inquiry framework.

As regards the former, the framework allowed me to visualise the potential of the e-mail teaching conversations in helping participants move towards the higher levels of cognitive activity, which was only occasionally visible as cognitive presence in the e-mails, but was realised as such in the assignments. This was a very relevant interim finding, as I believed this kind of exercise could help them develop the tools needed to solve their everyday problems, thus making them more competent and confident professionals. In terms of the framework itself, other issues called my attention. I was able to see that the presence parameters were often embedded in one another. In particular, I clearly visualized the complexity of the social presence construct and the need to consider whether its cognitive aspects, which I have referred to as transactional, were aptly captured within the social presence dimension. Moreover, I felt there was a need to create a descriptor to account for some social acts within the teaching presence construct. I reflect and expand on these and other issues in the following chapters.

4.6. Reflecting on the first action research cycle

As a result of the 2008 action research cycle, I reached two main conclusions which informed the subsequent decisions I made regarding the introduction of the VLE for 2009.

- Their state of professional need and aspiration was marked by their traditional views on teaching and learning, their heavy workloads and their limited ICT skills.
In the first place, I was able to learn more about the participants' state of professional need and aspiration. I realised their traditional views on the role of the tutor determined their scepticism and in some cases resistance to the 'new' approach I was trying to advocate, in which the tutor's role was one of facilitator or 'guide on the side' (Rourke et al. 2001). Their heavy workloads also influenced their discourse as teacher-learners, which worked against the learning opportunities I was presenting them with, as they regarded these as not being 'practical' enough. The virtual arena constituted a challenge for some and a hindrance for others, a difference which could be due to their individual learning styles or the different levels of technological expertise.

Notwithstanding the setback that this greater understanding of the participants implied in terms of pursuing the reflective, collaborative, action research approach to professional development, the second discovery lent support to my idea that the online medium could facilitate these teachers' empowerment.

- **The e-mail teaching conversations facilitated the participants' movement towards higher levels of cognitive activity, which was often evidenced elsewhere.**

The use of the Community of Inquiry notions to examine the e-mail data allowed me to see that it was possible to help participants move towards higher levels of cognitive thinking via the virtual conversations. More precisely, I was able to see how the social and teaching elements were essential support for the cognitive movement to occur. Such cognitive activity was mostly referred to in the e-mail conversations, but generally became tangible in the assignments, as was seen in Sofia’s and Adriana’s cases. This is in line with what is proposed by Garrison et al. (2004:3) who suggest that 'As a product, critical thinking is, perhaps, best judged through individual educational assignments. The difficulty of assessing critical thinking as a product is that it is a complex and (only indirectly) accessible cognitive process.'
I also became aware of the fact that the social, cognitive and teaching activity were often embedded in one another and therefore difficult to isolate. In the case of participants, their highly social discourse often invoked my teaching presence. In my responses, I discovered my online teaching discourse contained embedded social discourse which in turn invoked the participants’ cognitive presence. Such social discourse on the part of the teacher, it appears to me, needs to be accounted for in the coding framework for it to provide an accurate picture of the dynamics in this setting.

In short, the analysis of the 2008 data presented in this chapter allowed me to confirm that the Community of Inquiry notions could aid my understanding of the potential of virtual communication as a tool for professional development. In Postmethod terms, I learned more about the particularities of this research setting which in turn determined the mismatch between the teachers’ views of what was practical and my own. The parameter of possibility was represented in 2008 by the e-mail teaching conversations, which seemed to facilitate participants’ cognitive movement towards higher-order thinking. Working with the two analyses in parallel and visualizing the results through the Postmethod cycle of empowerment lens, I was able to deepen my understanding about what constituted effective professional development for participants and how best to provide it. Armed with these new understandings, I set out to re-design the Anglo Continuous Development Programme for its 2009 iteration, which I will describe and reflect on in the next chapter. Before turning the reader’s attention to the next iteration, however, in the next and final section of this chapter I would like to share some of my personal researcher data to illustrate how and why a more dramatic than expected transition occurred.

4.7. December 17, 2008

Hi Julian,

I’m so sorry to be contacting you again so soon, but immediately after we hung up, I got this phone call from the (Town A) director. To make a long story short, she said my final questionnaire had sparked up some discussion among the teachers working for her who had taken ACDP (about 12-15 out of the 30 in that group). Apparently, even though their evaluation of the course had been so positive during our last session, they wanted a more practical
course for 2009, as they felt the whole business of action research and reflection was too vague and not entirely applicable. They wanted a language and pronunciation improvement course, with practical ideas for the classroom.

I said I had handed them lists and lists of ideas and techniques for them to discuss and evaluate (and I worked so hard to put those together), and explained that the AR angle was what would last beyond the fads etc, etc, I gave her my whole argument. She said she understood but was worried they might drop out if I didn’t offer what they wanted, and insisted on the language course, which I of course said I couldn’t do...

I’m sure you can imagine how I’m feeling... Having these Ts say the course was not useful is hard to swallow, especially after the fantastic evaluation questionnaires - it comes as such a nasty surprise. Especially when these are not exactly happy times domestically speaking, and I am trying very hard to be brave and strong, and keep going. Sorry to be saying all this, you don’t need to know it, but I just feel kind of sorry for myself at the moment, a feeling I have always despised...

I hope I can find a solution...
(E-mail, December 17, 2008)

As can be seen in the e-mail above which I wrote to my supervisor, my pride and enthusiasm at the success of ACDP were short-lived, as I learned through one of the local directors that what I had perceived as very positive feedback was in fact disguising participants' views that my collaborative, action research approach ‘was not practical enough’. Even though I was aware of their interest in practical ideas, I had in no way foreseen that anything like this surge of negative feedback would occur, especially after the feedback questionnaires which I had considered so positive. In retrospect, this confirmed the accuracy of my earlier intuition about the participants’ ‘desire to please the tutor’. The understanding that some participants and directors were not as pleased as they had expressed in the feedback questionnaires was not only disappointing for me, but it also made me feel insecure as a course designer about the 2009 iteration which I was preparing. Despite this disappointment, however, the information allowed me to make informed decisions at the time of re-designing the programme for its next iteration, which I discuss in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: THE INTRODUCTION OF THE BLEND

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I describe and reflect on the 2009 action research experience during which a Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) was introduced as a tool for professional development within the Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP) to enhance engagement and offer internet-based learning opportunities (Garrison & Vaughan 2008:5).

As was done in the previous chapter, I will show how I reconstructed the 2009 action research cycle by integrating the inductive (thematic) and deductive (Community of Inquiry) analyses. I present the events in this action research cycle in a chronological manner, by drawing on different data sources:

- VLE activity
- E-mail exchanges
- Questionnaires
- My research journal and reflexive memos

I will show the reader how the inductive and deductive analyses of the 2009 data allowed me to draw the following conclusions, which I have translated into situated principles:

a. Through the inductive thematic analysis I learned that there were tensions between the learning opportunities I offered and those the participants decided to seize. I realised that they were interested in the learning paths I set before them provided that these were straightforwardly translated into teaching acts. With regard to the Postmethod conditions of particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu 2006b), this could be explained as a difference
between our perceptions of what was practical and possible in this context.

**Principle 1:** Teachers may be more interested in the type of single-loop learning that can be directly translated into teaching acts, and this type of learning should be viewed as a valid example of professional development.

b. Through the deductive, Community of Inquiry analysis (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2000) I was able to confirm the embeddedness of the teaching, social and cognitive presence constructs. In addition, I could see that in Community of Inquiry terms, the 'absences' were as significant as the 'presences'. In other words, I confirmed that the presences were distributed over the different spaces. For instance, the fact that cognitive presence was limited in the participants' VLE discourse did not mean that it was non-existent, but rather that the social elements in the VLE were pointing towards other arenas where the cognitive acts were occurring. Similarly, the limited social presence did not indicate the absence of a sense of community, as there was evidence that some of this social presence was being realised in the face-to-face arena.

**Principle 2:** In blended learning environments, the Community of Inquiry elements may be embedded in one another, and are often distributed across the various teaching and learning arenas.

In order to illustrate the inductive and deductive analyses, this chapter is organised as follows. I first show, in section 5.2., how the data arising from interactions, such as the questionnaires, were analysed inductively to identify the most prevalent themes in this iteration (see Appendix 6 for the data generation prompts used in 2009). To enhance the audit trail, throughout this strand of analysis I draw on VLE and e-mail data as well as on my personal researcher data. In section 5.3., I show how the e-mail and VLE activity were analysed through the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000). It is important to note that as distinct from the 2008 data for which I used the basic
social, teaching and cognitive presence notions, in this chapter I apply the full Community of Inquiry coding scheme to the 2009 data. During the Community of Inquiry analysis, I occasionally also draw on the thematic analysis to triangulate findings and construct a richer understanding of the setting.

5.2. Discovering participants’ interest in single-loop learning

*Principle 1: Teachers may be more interested in the type of single-loop learning that can be directly translated into teaching acts, and this type of learning should be viewed as a valid example of professional development.*

In this section I present the inductive thematic analysis to provide a chronological view of the 2009 action research cycle. Throughout this section, I shall draw on the different data sources to show how I reached the conclusion that participants were keen to seize the blended learning opportunities I offered so long as these could be directly transformed into teaching acts.

5.2.1. The ACDP 2008 to ACDP 2009 transition

The decision to introduce a virtual space for ACDP was based on my analysis of various contextual affordances and the data gathered during the 2008 action research cycle. As discussed in section 4.7 (see p.128), it was marked by a certain pressure and need to conform to the demands of some participants and directors.

At the time there was still an impending need to bridge the ‘geographical divide’ between the provinces and capital city in terms of TESOL teacher development (see Chapter 1). I considered the virtual space could become an appropriate tool to build a community spirit (Ramsey 2003:33; Rovai & Jordan 2004:11; Garrison & Kanuka 2004:97) where participants could reflect, share ideas and work together towards their professional empowerment. This space would provide an extension of the face-to-face meetings, encouraging every individual to have a voice. I also knew that the VLE could provide an alternative learning space, catering for individual differences in learning styles (Felix 2002:3). Despite some technology-related issues such as the poor quality of broadband connection, the whole project
seemed a challenging yet feasible endeavour for the participants, myself and the institution.

My design decisions were informed by the 2008 experience, throughout which the theme of theory versus practice had featured prominently in participants' discourse as well as in my private journal reflections. In the evaluation questionnaire that I had asked participants to complete at the end of the 2008 iteration (Appendix 5.4.), among the sea of potentially socially desirable responses to the question ‘Was the theory-practice balance appropriate?’ the idea of practice being more important than theory had been clearly stated, as in the examples shown below, similar to those on page 106.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice vs theory</th>
<th>A bit more of practice it would be better.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe more practice would be welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe, as we were pressed for time, there was more time devoted to theory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was only when I analysed these questionnaire data in depth that I realised this kind of response was not unexpected, given that I myself had formulated the item in a manner that would fuel the dysfunctions of the theory-practice dichotomy (Clarke 1994). In my struggle to explain to participants my view that theory and practice should not exist in isolation, I wondered whether I was falling into the trap of becoming the outside expert who tries to indoctrinate teachers with an idea that has proved meaningful to her. I tried to empathise with them, seeking answers for their ‘practice not theory’ discourse in their enormous workloads. To some extent, this line of thinking offered a potential explanation for the events leading to the director's phone call presented in the previous chapter (section 4.7, p.127).

During the analysis, I realised that this theory versus practice dichotomy could also be explained according to the distinction made by Argyris and Schön (1974) between single- and double-loop learning, the latter of which happens when the values and assumptions behind the learning act are questioned as a result of it. In this context, I intended to make double-loop learning available to participants, yet
they were mostly interested in the direct relationship between the learning input they obtained from me and its translation into teaching actions. This single-loop learning thread which ran through my research experience could in fact have been partially responsible for the very limited amount of public exchanges in the VLE. Given participants’ lack of interest in the kinds of learning that implied reflection, the articulation and public sharing of thoughts might have seemed irrelevant to their immediate needs. Amidst these ponderings, I worked hard to develop the new version of the programme to be launched in April 2009.

5.2.2. Participants as co-designers

I was keen to encourage participants to have a say as to course design, so that the programme would accommodate their learning preferences rather than my teaching ones (Edge 2011:134). Over the summer break, I was frequently in touch with some participants via e-mail whom I invited to take part in the design of the VLE space, given that they had spontaneously maintained the flow of communication with me after the end of the academic year. It was thus that Cesar, Juliana, Soledad and later on Luis were involved in the initial design stages. Interestingly for me, from the beginning of this collaboration the idea of a VLE as a valid learning context for the participants’ students was present in their discourse, as can be seen in Juliana’s e-mail:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Community of Inquiry analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cómo se va a manejar esto? se supone que ellos van a poder visitar estas páginas o sólo nosotros? creo que a raíz de esto se podrían hacer varias actividades lindas en clase!!! y supongo que sí van a leer no? esa es la idea verdad?</td>
<td>SP&gt; open communication&gt; asking questions;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How is this going to work? Will our students be able to visit these pages or is it just for us? I think that this could lead to many nice classroom activities!!! And I suppose they are going to see this, right? That’s the idea, isn’t it?
Again, this was linked to the fact that they were reacting to the virtual space as teachers rather than learners, seizing the teaching tools in the learning opportunities I was offering them, as explained in Principle 1.

In terms of the Community of Inquiry analysis, the social presence in the message does not detract from the fact that Juliana was clearly making a cognitive move, asserting the new space as an interesting possibility and exploring ideas while invoking my teaching presence to seek clarification. Despite this enthusiasm, she was either unable or felt no need to respond to my request for suggestions, very much like Soledad, whose e-mail was equally enthusiastic but did not contain any design ideas. Cesar’s reply, on the other hand, was much more significant in terms of their role as co-designers, as can be seen below.

_Cesar’s message evidenced cognitive presence of a considerably high level, as he was integrating my ideas with others of his own (‘I remember you mentioned something about the possibility of a chat room, though I’m not sure if that would be the same or sth. more of a facebook-wall-like message board would work,’). Like any participant-tutor exchange, this cognitive move was embedded in discourse of a social nature, clearly marked in the opening (‘Sorry about the delay...’). On the other hand, the social presence dimension in the message showed an_
acknowledgement of the work I had been doing and signalled a willingness and motivation to continue working on this project (‘I’m going to keep thinking about it and do some research on the topic’).

Apart from Cesar’s suggestions above, there was little more that was useful regarding the site design in my exchanges with these participants. Our e-mail communications continued in a question-answer fashion, where I added resources and tasks to the site and asked their opinions, a dynamic which I found frustrating at times. This apparent failure could have been due to the fact that in pedagogical terms, I was asking participants to engage in an activity which they were not prepared for. My aim in designing the blended programme was to enable them to gain the necessary skills to become autonomous, yet I was asking them make suggestions as to what would help them become autonomous before actually having reached that state.

During the 2009 iteration, I gradually came to understand that I needed to start by providing the kind of learning they were expecting and use this as a starting point for development. As advocated by Stevick (1980:33), I needed to have a clear understanding of the participants’ position with regard to my pedagogical plan of helping them attain a higher level of autonomy and confidence. Without this understanding of the particular and practical dimensions in this setting, devising a sustainable course of action would be extremely challenging, if not impossible.

5.2.3. Adapting course design to embrace the particular

As I set out to design the VLE with some advice from these participants and interacted with the literature, the contextual affordances I knew so well surfaced to influence my design decisions. Despite the many warnings in the literature about the dangers of under-using VLEs (e.g. Donnelly 2006, 2010) – that is, using them as little more than online libraries – I knew that in this particular setting where participants had so far had limited access to educational resources, the virtual space was bound to be considered a primary source of classroom teaching ideas. Despite this ‘repository’ use being very much against what the literature suggested, I acknowledged it as a particularity of the context. I therefore uploaded
a considerable amount of materials and provided links to an endless number of websites. In the knowledge that this particular use of the VLE would not in itself lead to much cognitive activity, I created discussion forums to engage them in reflection, using their perceived need for these resources as a starting point for further development. As I became increasingly aware of the fact that participants were exclusively interested in the teaching tools they could obtain from this learning process, I realised if that was what they wanted, I needed to make this kind of learning available for them. This seemed to confirm my idea articulated in Principle 1, that participants were interested in the kind of learning that would be directly translatable into teaching acts.

When the time came to plan the initial face-to-face meeting, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the fact that this year there was one more venue to visit (Town C), a few teachers would be unable to continue while other new teachers were joining the programme, and there was a considerable amount of virtual work for me to do with the introduction of the Moodle space. I had decided to have a third venue because it would mean an advantage for some of the participants from the centre and north of the country, who would have to travel shorter distances. The number of participants in 2009 was 36, compared to the 38 who had taken part in 2008. Given all these issues, on the one hand ACDP 2009 was an exhausting prospect, but at the same time I was excited by the fact that the project which had in 2007 seemed almost impossible to realise was now in full swing. This feeling of professional empowerment did not alleviate the impending feeling of anxiety I expressed in the memos written the day I sat down to plan the face-to-face session.

_ I have been putting this moment off for days, if not weeks. Today is March 17, and we’re starting on April 4. Plenty of time it seems, but it flies, and the closer the session gets the more I fret. I wish I was more excited, I think the nerves are preventing me from enjoying the process. (Memo 1, March 17 2009)_

_ I start by citing an article which teases out the issue of motivation into different aspects. However, five minutes later I have opened another Word file entitled ‘practical ideas’. I am thinking, though, maybe I can ask them to come up with the practical ideas after we tease out the concepts? (Memo 2, March 17 2009)_
The memos once again show the extent to which I worried about the theory/practice dichotomy and how this was having an impact on my pedagogical decisions at the time. In another memo written on the same day, I articulated the idea of re-thinking the face-to-face dynamics in order to cater for participants’ perceived needs.

*I have concluded that I might have to find a more appropriate balance between teaching presence and social presence. Maybe I have been relying too much on social presence in my attempt to make this course learner centred. I think they need to be reassured that I am an authority so to speak, and maybe they need a bit of note taking and lecturing to feel they are moving forward. I don’t mean zero discussions, but I think I need to reconsider the dynamics because they obviously have an effect on people’s perceptions of me and the course.*

(Memo 3, March 17 2009)

Drawing on the Garrison, Anderson and Archer research terminology (2000), I formulated this as placing greater emphasis on teaching presence instead of relying so much on the social aspects of the programme. I had come to the conclusion that my knowledge was under scrutiny (‘they need to be assured that I am an authority’) and that participants needed some of that expert lecturing that I had so often questioned (‘maybe they need a bit of note taking and lecturing to feel they are moving forward’). Apart from the pedagogical twist, to give the programme an enhanced professional appearance, I started using a data projector and organising the face-to-face meetings around PowerPoint® presentations. In terms of the Postmethod parameters, this signalled an interaction between what was *particular* about this setting and what was *practical* for participants, my understanding of which had led to changes in my pedagogy. These new understandings and pedagogical changes seemed to lend support to the idea that participants were exclusively interested in what they could translate into teaching acts, as articulated in Principle 1.

### 5.2.4. Re-designing assessment

Having reflected on the 2008 experience and analysed the final course evaluation data, I decided to re-design the assessment features of the programme. In the table
below, some sample responses to the final (2008) questionnaire item ‘Was it a good idea to be assessed through optional assignments?’ can be found, the themes in which also informed my reformulation (parts of this analysis are also shown in section 4.4.1, p. 108).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment as pressure; Lack of time</th>
<th>I felt exhausted and overloaded with work in the middle of the year and if the assignment had been compulsory I would have given up. But as it wasn’t I had the chance to keep on coming and learning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When assignments are compulsory you feel a very strong pressure in you and finally give up the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personally, I would’ve left the course if the assignments had been compulsory as I had some health problems at the beginning of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as tool for TD</td>
<td>It allows you to develop and improve your own interests or problematic areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The assessment is always a way to make us work and go a little further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as career step</td>
<td>I think it is ok, because if we want to grow professionally and we are conscious of that and we WANT TO DO IT, I think the assignments are another step in our career to go through.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, opinions were divided on the issue. While some participants went as far as saying that they would have stopped attending had it been compulsory to submit, others saw the assignments as a way of ‘going a little further’ professionally. Therefore, I grouped the codes into a theme which I labeled ‘conflicting views of assessment’.

As regards the impact of this analysis, as a course tutor and PhD candidate whose doctoral work depended on this project, I – perhaps not surprisingly – viewed the ‘dropping out’ discourse as a threat. In this light, I decided that a healthy compromise would be to ask each and every one of them to provide some evidence of the impact ACDP was having on their professional lives. I offered new possibilities so that aside from an assignment they had a choice of submitting a portfolio of classroom research forms or a portfolio of lesson plans, both of which I
thought might be perceived as less daunting than the traditional assignment. By opening up the possibilities, I hoped I would be engaging all participants in documenting this impact and that from this articulation, reflection would follow (Stacey & Gerbic 2007).

However, the possibility of engaging participants in submitting proof of their learning seemed more distant as soon as the first face-to-face meeting was over. The discourse of lack of time had appeared again during the meeting, when participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to reflect on their expectations of the course (Appendix 6.2.). In response to the items ‘Use the space below to make any comments/suggestions’ and ‘Is there anything about yourself that you would like me to know?’, my attention was drawn to responses such as the ones below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of time</th>
<th>As everybody else I’m very short of time but I’ll do my best to do everything I can.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This year I’m really busy because I’ve taken much work, but I’ll do my best, I promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m a bit tied up with work at the moment, so it’s a bit difficult for me to get online.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may have been this re-surfacing of the ‘Culture of heavy workloads’ theme which determined that only 10 out of the 36 participants accepted the learning opportunities I offered by submitting proof of their learning. This could also be interpreted as a flaw in course design, perhaps due to having broadened the possibilities in an excessive manner, or as a result of a misinterpreted learner-centredness on which I based my decision of letting participants decide what they needed, even when this perceived need involved avoiding assessment. However, another possible interpretation is that participants may not have seen the immediate relevance of the submission as these assignments required them to reflect-on-action, something which they did not see as being directly translatable into teaching acts. This strand of analysis therefore lent some support to my idea that participants were mostly motivated by the transferability of their learning experiences into their classrooms, which seemed consistent with my first principle – that is, their preference for single- rather than double- loop learning. I viewed
this development as a result of the interaction between what was particular about
the setting and what was practical for the participants, according to which I
adapted the programme design and pedagogy as part of my ongoing action
research cycles.

5.2.5. Going online

As soon as the Moodle space was launched in April 2009, I discovered the levels of
online activity were far below what I had expected. As part of the ongoing action
research cycle of design, I was keen to explore the reasons for such low levels of
participation in order to further my understanding of how the online space could
facilitate the process of professional empowerment. At the end of one face-to-face
session, I asked participants to write an anonymous response to the question ‘How
can the online space contribute to your professional development?’ The initial
codes can be seen in the data samples below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool for communication</th>
<th>I personally have not made any contributions on line but reading what other teachers have sent is also very interesting and it gives us the chance of being in touch with people attending ACDP in other places.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It would help us to be more up to date teachers and also to have a wider range of colleagues where to communicate from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for teaching;</td>
<td>I hope I'll start using it soon. I think it's a powerful tool to apply to my classes. And best of all, it saves time because there's plenty of material already prepared for us. It will also help me develop my computer skills which are quite poor. I think this would be a great improvement in my professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for teacher</td>
<td>A lot because we will find a lot of information, material, experiences, I hope to visit the place more often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for learning</td>
<td>Because it is a new way to learn and I consider that it is a very innovative resource.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I grouped these codes which were pervasive across the data set under the theme
‘Practicality of Moodle in this setting’ as I believed this was an effective way of
describing how Moodle featured in their discourse at this stage. The exploration of
this theme showed participants were keen to use the online space not only as a repository of ready-made ideas and a tool to communicate with each other, but also as a teaching tool to use with their own students, something which had already surfaced during the initial design stages. In this sense, the practicality of the VLE was a means to explore the dimension of possibility.

The vast majority of participants were taking part invisibly or informally (Gulati 2004), using the space mostly as a source of ideas and lesson plans and ‘reading what other teachers have sent’. Nearly 30% of them were actively communicating with me by replying to my posts privately via e-mail, which made me wonder whether the public domain was being purposefully avoided, or if there was an actual need for more explicit technical support. I decided to provide this support by designing handouts that offered detailed explanations on how to use the basic Moodle resources and activities, as can be seen in the example in figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1. Sample handout

Several handouts which contained step-by-step instructions and screen shots were uploaded to the Moodle space in order to make them easily retrievable. This measure helped those participants who were already showing a somewhat proactive attitude, but did not entail a significant change in online behaviour among those whose online activity was invisible. This was significant to me as another example of how I strove to reach an understanding of the relationships
between the particularities of the context and what the participants perceived as being practical, a process which had a continuous effect on my evolving pedagogy.

5.2.6. From online learners to online teachers

Although I had led the technological innovations with the creation of the online space for ACDP, during the early stages of the 2009 programme, the Student Centre was created at the suggestion of the four participants who were collaborating with me on the VLE design, as was documented in my journal at the time.

_I am working with Cesar, Juliana, Luis and Soledad to create acdponline.net. They suggested doing something similar for our students, so now I have created www.students.acdponline.net. Let's see how this works. This year the whole of ACDP seems to be taking a more technological angle...(Research journal, April 4 2009)_

Although in the original design I had intended the VLE to be used mainly as a tool to enhance reflective practice, I was open to this new suggestion because it had in fact been articulated by the participants themselves from the very start. I thought it was curious that they had been mostly unable to articulate their needs beyond requests for practical ideas, yet they had been so assertive about this particular use of the online space. This was showing a proactive attitude on their part and an ability to find affordances for themselves in the technological aspects of the programme, behaviours which I wanted to acknowledge and foster.

Given the enthusiasm some participants showed about working on this virtual space for students, I offered them the possibility of submitting a portfolio of online tasks as evidence of the impact of ACDP on their professional lives. This statement of what was practical for participants seemed to lend further support to the idea that they were interested in engaging in professional development insofar as the ‘input’ could be directly translatable into teaching ‘output’.

The introduction of the Student Centre resulted in increased online activity, as can be seen below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>acdponline.net (Main site)</th>
<th>students.acdponline.net (Student Centre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>143 visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>177 visits</td>
<td>148 visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas in April there had been a total of 143 visits altogether, the same participants had doubled the number of visits in May (325 between the main site and the Student Centre), which shows they were more actively engaged or at least curious about the online spaces. As had been the case with the introduction of the Moodle handouts, this did not have a significant effect on the visibility of participants or the amount of public exchanges, although it did increase the number of private e-mails I received.

Once again, participants were reacting as teachers, exploring and evaluating the ideas I had intended them to use as learners. The fact that they were solely focused on utilising the resources effectively rather than sharing ideas with colleagues could – at least partly – explain why the above mentioned Moodle handouts did little to increase participant visibility and why the vast majority continued to learn vicariously.

5.2.7. Conclusion: Reflecting on Principle 1

*Teachers may be more interested in the type of single-loop learning that can be directly translated into teaching acts, and this type of learning should be viewed as a valid example of professional development.*

As part of my analysis, I tried to build a complete understanding of the 2009 discourses and events by reflecting on the themes that had surfaced inductively. I occasionally triangulated my understanding by means of other analyses, as seen throughout section 5.2, always drawing on my reflexive subjectivity at the time of interpreting the events and processes in this action research cycle. The themes identified were the following:

- Practicality of Moodle in this setting
Conflicting views of assessment
Culture of heavy workloads

As was seen throughout section 5.2, the participants repeatedly asserted their interest in the kind of learning experience that could be readily transformed into a teaching tool. Some were clearly against the implementation of formal instances of assessment, such as assignments. This led to our having conflicting views on what was practical for them. While I viewed assignments as opportunities for professional development, they were perceived as a threat, or perhaps as not being directly relevant to their everyday classroom realities.

In the next section I present the deductive Community of Inquiry analysis of the 2009 data, in order to show how it increased my understanding of how the teaching, cognitive and social presence parameters operated in this blended setting.

5.3. Exploring the distributed nature of the presences

Principle 2: In blended learning environments, the Community of Inquiry elements may be embedded in one another, and are often distributed across the various teaching and learning arenas.

In this section I show how the Community of Inquiry analysis together with my insider perspectives and experiences allowed me to interpret the ‘absence of the presences’ as a signal that in this context, the teaching and learning acts were distributed across different teaching and learning spaces. Moreover, through the analysis I also concluded that the teaching, social and cognitive presences were not always clearly discernible from one another.

5.3.1. Initiating the interaction

Although most participants had started visiting the site soon after the face-to-face meeting, only a few did so visibly. I initiated the interaction by creating a discussion forum entitled ‘Ideas that work’, which served a two-fold purpose. On
the one hand, it was intended to encourage the teachers themselves to provide the much-sought ideas for the classroom. On the other hand, I expected that the exercise of articulating and sharing would enable participants to reflect on their own and each other’s experiences in order to create a better understanding of the particularities of their contexts.

I predicted several challenges such as the occurrence of lurking, the reasons for which have been repeatedly cited in the literature as limited ICT skills, poor group dynamics and the perception of having nothing to contribute (e.g. Beaudoin 2002; Preece, Nonnecke & Andrews 2004). In this context, however, I suspected there was a higher degree of complexity. This being participants’ first time as VLE users, there were additional challenges to be faced. As digital immigrants (Chatti & Jarke 2007) they had to use their sometimes limited ICT literacy to express themselves in this virtually unknown space. Furthermore, as non-native speakers of English they had to express themselves in a foreign language, which implied not only a cognitive difficulty but also the potential danger of losing face in front of their colleagues. Thirdly, although all the participants who gathered at the same venue knew each other, there were many others they had never met face-to-face, which might have led to an increased sense of discomfort with the online interactions. Although I pondered the idea of creating discussion groups, since it was my intention to create a community of provincial teachers I decided to use the virtual space as a common space for discussions.

However, it should be noted that despite the fact that not all participants were visible, this silent use of the virtual environments is not necessarily negative but may be the result of a certain learning style, as often is the case in traditional face-to-face environments where some learners are less visible than others. In fact, the term ‘vicarious learning’ is often used to offer a more pedagogically empathic understanding of this attitude towards the virtual spaces (e.g. Sutton 2001; Kawachi 2003).

Bearing in mind the above mentioned challenges, I decided to provide a model message myself in order to enhance participants’ confidence and break the ice. I
initiated the discussion by posting a message in which I explained how I had been working to develop my students’ writing skills using word processing software.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Community of Inquiry analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have started putting this idea into practice this year with my 15/16 year-olds at secondary school. Instead of asking them to hand in paper and pen homework compositions, I allow them to email their work to me. I correct their pieces using the review tools in Word, then convert the files into pdf and email them back. I have explicitly told them the idea behind this is to make the writing process easier and more motivating. I have also emphasized the importance of using less paper to help the environment. If anyone needs to know how to use the review tools or convert into pdf, I will be happy to explain. Takes only a couple of minutes.</td>
<td>TP &gt; direct instruction&gt; injecting knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TP &gt; building understanding&gt; drawing learners in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from sharing my experience, I tried to ‘draw participants in’ by offering technical support so that they would have the necessary tools to experiment with the idea themselves. As can be seen in the analysis column, the data themselves can only be coded as teaching presence in terms of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) original concepts, although there is clearly a social as well as a cognitive element in them. In fact, since teaching is a social act, it cannot by definition occur in isolation. Besides, the very act of articulating the idea to transmit to participants is a cognitive act of information exchange. Despite this multi-functionality, the Community of Inquiry guidelines appeared to be very useful in offering a structured framework through which to analyse public online activity, since they helped to visualize the patterns of interaction and therefore informed the evolving design of the online and face-to-face aspects of the programme.

Although this post would not necessarily lead to an extended discussion, I trusted that it would provide a starting point for participants to share their views and experiences in motivating students to write. One participant, Soledad, immediately took the opportunity to ask me more about this experiment, and did so publicly by posting her reply to the forum.
Hi Magda, I would like to learn how to use the review tools in Word and how to convert files in pdf format whenever you can. I would like to try this way with my Junior Link student who doesn’t like writing. Thanks a lot.

The extract above can only be coded as social presence according to the Community of Inquiry framework, yet it is clearly signalling the cognitive engagement of the respondent. The fact that it is the (social) acceptance of an invitation does not detract from the fact that it shows a move into the cognitive (‘I would like to learn how to’). It is noteworthy that although cognitive presence cannot be evidenced in the extract itself, its ‘absence’ is signalling that it might be occurring in the future, possibly in the participants’ classroom or in the course’s face-to-face arena.

This sample exchange can also be linked to Principle 1, in that it shows a larger-scale move that was occurring for many participants. As explained in the previous section, participants were very much restricting their teacher-learner status to that of teachers, by reacting as the latter in seizing the practicalities from the possibilities I offered. The path I had drawn for them to follow was that of empowerment through reflection, collaboration and action research. Instead, they were looking for single-loop learning, which they drew from the programme by directly translating their learning experience into teaching resources. Whilst ACDP was in progress I resented this type of move, interpreting it as a personal failure in transmitting my ideas or even a lack of charisma, although I was later to reconstruct it in a different way.

5.3.2. Private versus public interactions

Quite frequently the interactions occurred on a private level, since many participants replied privately to forum posts or simply chose to contact me or each other via e-mail rather than through the VLE. This could be due to the existence of the face-to-face domain in which there was enough interaction to fulfil the teachers’ social needs. In fact, it may be the case that in blended environments such as this one, public interaction in the VLE does not play such a fundamental role as might be the case when the online medium is the only one available for social
communication, thus supporting the idea of the presences being distributed across the different arenas.

Nevertheless, some participants regularly replied to my posts by e-mail, embedding their responses in social discourse of the type that would be desirable to foster group cohesion in public VLE interactions. The fact that this occurred in the private domain could be signalling a lack of confidence on their part, due to the various factors described earlier (lack of ICT skills, use of a foreign language, lack of online learning experience). Alternatively, it could be showing that participants did not perceive the virtual interactions with peers as a valid tool for their professional development, maybe due to a deeply-ingrained culture of individuality, or perhaps as a consequence of their traditional views on teaching and learning, as was explained in Chapter 4 (p. 98).

In a few cases, though, participants did choose to share experiences and projects in the public domain. In the extracts below, Maria Sofia was posting her reply to a message in which I encouraged them to make suggestions for the upcoming work on speaking skills.

```
hi Magda! How are you feeling? It would be great if you could help me. The subject I’ve chosen for speaking is ‘Friends’ I was thinking about starting my lesson showing them some scenes of the soap or sitcom (I do not know exactly what it is) ‘Friends’ Do you think it is a good idea? Any suggestions would be welcomed. Take care of yourselves! XXOO
```

As was the case for Sofia’s message analysed on page 115, strictly following the Community of Inquiry guidelines, the message can only be coded as social presence, although the participant’s discourse is clearly showing a cognitive movement (‘The subject I’ve chosen for speaking is... I was thinking about...’), which could be described as a triggering event. At the same time, it is invoking the teaching presence of the tutor (‘It would be great if you could help me’; ‘Do you think it is a good idea? Any suggestions would be welcomed’). Even though she was clearly asking a question of me as her tutor, the fact that she did so publicly on the VLE shows a deliberate move towards sharing her experience with others, which is why the code ‘open communication’ seems fully relevant to this extract.
Encouraged by Maria Sofia's public expression, I took my time to craft a reply that would be encouraging and also engage her further.

Hi Maria Sofia!
I’m fine, feeling much better thank god.
I think your idea of starting the speaking lesson with scenes from the sitcom is very nice. What level will you be using it with?
A good source of scenes from friends is youtube, for example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekVqDXUHWMg. That is a scene where they fight, but if that’s no good you can easily find others.
After the scenes, what were you planning to do?
I don’t know which level you were thinking of, but just in case, if you go into ACDP Methodology and look under August, there is a PDF entitled ‘friendship problems’. Maybe that helps?
Let me know.

The opening part of my message (‘I’m fine, feeling much better thank god’) is a clearly social move within the broad teaching presence move that is contained in the message. This kind of social teaching move, which is unrelated to course content, is in fact related to social presence. However, the Community of Inquiry framework does not explicitly cater for this type of social teaching presence within the teaching nor the social presence parameters, which is why I have argued that it is necessary to provide a label to account for the social aspects of the teaching presence construct (see p. 124).

In the next part of the message, I not only provided the direct instruction she was asking for but also attempted to engage her further towards the end, by asking questions and making reference to hearing from her again (‘What level will you be using it with?’; ‘Let me know’). Because this is clearly a one-to-one exchange, it may not in actual fact be drawing other participants in, but rather providing opportunities for vicarious learning.

In fact, a few other participants also made their regular postings public, as will be seen in the rest of this chapter, but the vast majority either replied privately or simply took part silently, reading their colleagues’ contributions but not
contributing themselves. As a tutor and course designer, I learned that even if this type of posting did not lead to the type of interaction I intended it to, it reflected the fact that this was as far as participants were ready to interact with each other virtually. This could be supporting both of the situated principles presented in this chapter. Firstly, it could be the case that participants were not interested in interacting with each other, since they did not see this as being straightforwardly usable in their teaching realities. Otherwise, in line with the idea of the presences being distributed, it may have been the case that interactions of this kind were occurring in the face-to-face arena in each venue, and this made them redundant for participants in the online space.

Visualising this limited virtual interaction as another *particularity* of the context which affected what was viewed as *practical*, I decided to accommodate these parameters by adapting my pedagogy. I did not insist on participants addressing each other but was satisfied as long as the one-to-one interactions with me occurred in the public arena, so that at least vicarious learning was facilitated for others. Nevertheless, I continued to explore the possible meanings of these replies to me, wondering if the lack of online learning experience might be another factor determining them, and decided to act on this by designing an exclusively social space which I called ‘The ACDP pub’.

5.3.3. Fostering the social: The ACDP Pub

I considered one possible way of encouraging participants to take part in the online discussions was to foster the sense of community, making them feel more at ease. I intervened to foster the online community spirit by creating a forum that was explicitly social, for all participants to learn about each other and therefore feel less inhibited to express themselves in the public domain. In early June, two months after the 2009 iteration had officially started, I launched the ACDP pub. Once again, I established the guidelines as explicitly as was possible in my opening post.
Hi All,

I was thinking we could have a social space here on acdponline, that’s why I have created this ‘ACDP pub’ forum. Though all of you know the ACDP participants that you meet monthly, as you know there are 3 different groups so there are many people you’ve never met. That’s why it would be a good idea to get to know each other, at least online 😉

So, what I expect you to do here is tell everyone else something about you. I will start myself so you have an example:

I've been teaching English for 13 years at the Anglo, since I was 19. I love teaching teenagers, probably because they keep me updated! I have to admit I’m not so keen on teaching small children because they exhaust me physically... Apart from teaching, I am also studying at the moment - in fact, I have been studying non-stop since 2000, and still have at least 3 more years to go. When I'm not teaching or studying, I love spending time with my husband, with my friends, and also with my nieces. I am also quite sporty - I enjoy jogging, going for long walks, and doing water sports. I've been bodyboarding since I was 14 but unfortunately I'm not very good 😆

Anyway, I suppose that this is more than enough for starters. Hope to hear from you all! Oh, and one more thing, when you reply to this, do so through the acdp site, not by email because if not I will be the only one who gets it!

Have a great weekend,

Magdalena

As can be seen above, I was very explicit about how participants were expected to proceed in these social interactions. I considered this deployment of guidelines a strategy to enhance participants’ self-confidence and facilitate their participation.

In terms of the Community of Inquiry coding scheme, the analysis of this particular message reinforced my idea of the need in this setting for a descriptor within the teaching presence parameter that would encapsulate the strictly social nature of some teacher discourse. Although the exclusively social content of my message (‘I've been teaching English for 13 years at the Anglo, since I was 19...’) is coded within a teaching presence move aimed at advising participants on content construction, I believe it would be necessary to acknowledge its social aim by creating a ‘social teaching presence’ label. This would account for instances such as
these, in which the social aspects of teacher presence play a fundamental role in engaging participants.

Despite the fact that a few more participants became visible through this social forum, the dynamics were not what I had predicted. Although they followed my explicit example in terms of content construction, instead of replying to my post, each participant started a new thread entitled ‘Hi from (Name)’. This decision to begin new discussions rather than continuing the original thread seemed to me a consequence of their lack of experience in using online forums, and in some cases it could even be due to their limited competence and confidence in using computers in general. The majority of these threads did not function as such, but rather as independent texts which in most cases I was the only one to comment on. There were a few exceptions in which there was some public interaction, as was the case of Florencia.

*Hi everybody! My name is Florencia. I’m from Centro Anglo (Town T). I’ve been working at the Anglo for 14 years. I’m 34, I am married and I have a 15-year-old daughter. I teach for 14 hours a day so my day is quite long and tiring but rewarding. However, some days I feel I shouldn’t have got up, especially those days when my teenage students are really difficult. I teach all the different levels, but I prefer children and adults. Anyway, talking about something different, I love doing aerobics and when the weather is good I enjoy walking in the park. I also like spending time at home tidying up or sleeping until later which is only possible on sundays. Ok, I could go on and on but I believe this is just enough. I hope to learn about more people. Bye!* 😊

On analysing Florencia’s post, I was able to differentiate between two categories within the social presence construct. Most of the message involved her emotional expression and self-disclosure (e.g. ‘I’m 34, I am married and I have a 15-year-old daughter.’). However, towards the end of the message Florencia addressed the group, encouraging her colleagues to share information about themselves (‘I hope to learn about more people. Bye!’). I was the first to comment on this post, using it as an opportunity to encourage those whose activity had so far been restricted to vicarious learning to become visibly active.
Hi Florencia! Thanks for sharing. I hope this is encouraging for all our silent ACDP classmates across the country 😊

I’m thinking if you like tidying up, you’d be a very welcome guest in my house!! 😊

See you on Friday,

My reply above once again evidences the need to account for social presence within the teaching presence parameter. Despite being contained in a teaching move to draw in participants, I believe my attempt to use humour (‘I’m thinking if you like tidying up, you’d be a very welcome guest in my house!! 😊’) would be more accurately described as a social move.

Soledad also responded to Florencia’s message, and her reply showed a true interest in collaboration, as can be seen below.

Hi Florencia,
I’m Soledad from Town B. You told us you prefer working with children. I work with children from 9 years old and I was wondering if you would like keep our children in touch throughout internet since most of my students love being in contact with other students and it’s a way of motivation for them. What do you think about it?
I hope to hearing from you soon.

This was the end of the public exchange, although it did continue privately between them. One other participant, Luis, made explicit reference to Florencia’s message, as seen below, although he initiated a new discussion instead of replying to her post. Once again, this could have been due to Luis’s lack of experience in using forums.
I've teaching English in ANGLO Town A since 1993 and I'm an Art teacher working at secondary school, I graduated in 1999. I prefer working with teenagers maybe because they usually have plans for the future, and to a certain extent it makes me think about it and motivates me.

When I'm not working I like studying, perhaps more than working ! But for my free time I have many interests, friends, painting, fishing, sunbathing, going to discos, driving, playing basketball, and also sitting comfortably near a fireplace (it's COLD !) . . . with half a glass of scotch on Sundays. Tidying up ? I had to revise in order to write the words. See you

Very much like in Florencia’s introductory message, this message was purely social, even though the different social presence categories can be discerned in it. For the most part, the message involved self-disclosure about Luis’s habits and interests. However, towards the end he made direct reference to Florencia’s message (‘Tidying up? I had to revise in order to write the words.’), which shows an attempt at using humour as well as an acknowledgement of Florencia’s previous posting. I promptly acknowledged his reply, relating my experience to his, and mirroring his tone by attempting to use humour myself:

Thanks Luis! Very impressive list of interests too 😊

I agree with what you say about teenagers, when I don’t want to kill them 😘 I find the interaction with them incredibly motivating.

Like in the previous extract, I believe this use of humour evidences the social nature of the teaching presence construct. This not only provides further support for the embeddedness of the social and teaching presence parameters, but also signals a need for a descriptor within teaching presence to account for teaching moves that are unrelated to course content such as the above. Although Garrison and Anderson (2003:85) suggest that ‘purely social or personal exchanges are welcomed but are best conducted in the chat room or coffeehouse’, I believe the role of such exchanges in engaging participants and facilitating their cognitive activity may be undervalued in the original Community of Inquiry framework.
Soledad also replied to this post in order to suggest that they collaborate by exchanging ideas on how to motivate teenage students.

Hi,
I’m Soledad from Town B, how are you? I would like to know how do you motivate your teenager students? because for me it’s difficult to get it. I have a specific case but... maybe I can tell you about it later. 

Keep in touch

After these introductions, the ‘pub’ space was only active occasionally. There was a specific bout of activity in late August (2009) when I travelled to Manchester and posted on the VLE a purely social message to participants, to which most of them replied, but in every case this was done privately by e-mail.

As was discussed earlier, this could be showing a lack of interest in using the VLE as a social space. On the other hand, it might be the case that the predominance of self-disclosure and lack of group cohesion could be a result of my pedagogical decision to accept the lack of group interaction insofar as the learning was occurring in the one-to-one public exchanges. Alternatively, the fact that much of the social interaction was happening in the face-to-face arena could be determining the lack of online activity, lending support to the idea of the presences being distributed over the different course spaces.

In fact, the responses in the final questionnaire administered a few months later showed that much of what I intended to happen virtually, not only in terms of social but also of cognitive presence, was happening face-to-face. Below are some sample answers to the question ‘Did you find it useful to meet colleagues from other provincial areas?'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Face-to-face meetings to share experiences, advice; Face-to-face meetings as opportunity for problem-solving</th>
<th>We could share different points of view and experiences. We could also give and ask for advice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I could share ideas and problems with them and we see problems from different points of view.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is always interesting to gather with other colleagues from other areas in order to exchange ideas, solutions to different problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s good to share experiences and this was a good opportunity to do this. Otherwise we never get together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I grouped these codes under a theme which I labelled ‘distributed nature of the presences’, as I believed comments such as those above were evidencing the fact that much of the participants’ social and cognitive activity was taking place in the face-to-face meetings, thus lending support to the idea that course activity was distributed across the face-to-face and online arenas.

After the ‘ACDP pub’ had become silent, two of the keener participants attempted to foster the community sense by posting messages of a purely social nature such as the one below.

I don’t know how you are feeling at this time of the year, but I am exhausted since next Friday Town B we have MOCK EXAM all day long so students are doing tests and working hard, as a result, I have a pile of homework and writing tasks to correct, can you imagine?

This type of post did not generate any public interactions, which at the time I interpreted as a clear indication of the irrelevance of this type of communication for most teachers. This could be suggesting that, in line with what is proposed by Garrison and Anderson (2003) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008), social exchanges need to have cognitive purposes if they are not to fail. However, if we take into account the fact that many participants did reply to my posts regularly, albeit privately, it is inevitable to wonder whether this may be related to their preference for one-to-one interactions with me, which I had acknowledged and respected. This could also be linked to my position of power, or to their traditional, transmissive views of teacher education according to which learning will occur in the interaction with a tutor rather than with peers, as was captured by the 2008 theme of ‘traditional views on teaching and learning’. As was discussed on page 150, I believe the role of the purely social moves on the part of participants and especially of the tutor is one that deserves further examination.
5.3.4. Teaching presence moves

As was explained earlier in this chapter, I constantly tried to facilitate the articulation of needs among participants. I insisted that participants have a say as to how the course content was organized, for it to be immediately relevant to their needs and interests. I often encouraged them to use the discussion forums to make suggestions, as can be seen in the extract below.

Hi Everyone,
In June we will be dealing with edutainment - using songs, videos and games in and out of the classroom. We will also be having a closer look at the Student Centre to see what others are doing and how to best use it. If you want to make any suggestions, please do so here.
See you all soon

TP> instructional management>
organisational guidelines

TP> building understanding>
drawing learners in

In this message, two different teaching presence categories can be readily identified. On the one hand, I was providing organisational guidelines (e.g. ‘We will also be having a look at the Student Centre…’), yet towards the end of the message I was also attempting to draw learners in (‘If you want to make any suggestions, please do so here’). The closing (‘See you all soon’) was in fact indicative of the distributed nature of social presence in blended settings, where social interactions may occur in the virtual and/or face-to-face arenas. This type of opening usually generated very few – if any – public posts, although some participants chose to reply to me privately by e-mail. Below is the example of Carolina from Town A, who used e-mail in her reply.

Hi! I think I need some help. I’ve been trying to correct homework via e-mail, but what should I do after I’ve made all my comments about the material I’ve been sent? I mean, what’s the next step? And where can I find the explanations about how to use the new methods? Thanks very much!
xxCaro

SP> open communication>
asking questions

In this message, the limitations involved in using the Community of Inquiry framework on e-mails became evident once again, as Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) labelled questions as ‘open communication’, considering that they
occurred in a public space in their research setting. Clearly, this is not fully effective to describe a one-to-one e-mail exchange, as is the case in some of the exchanges here. In addition, the fact that this type of question involves a clearly cognitive move of exploration and is invoking the teaching presence of the tutor is not captured by the social presence category. I immediately replied offering the support she required, once again respecting her decision not to ask her questions in the public arena, but attempting to facilitate the learning process all the same.

Hi Caro
Do this: in your word file (I'm assuming you have Word 2003)
1. herramientas >> control de cambios
By having clicked this any changes you make in the text will be highlighted in red.
2. To add comments, look for the icon called 'insertar comentario'. You first highlight the part you want to comment on and then click on the icon. That opens up a space for you to add the comments
Let me know if you can

I will try to make a doc for you with screen prints

My reply to Carolina was at first sight restricted to the technical information she required. However, I tried to draw her in ('Let me know if you can') giving the exchange an open-ended tone and offered further support ('I will try to make a doc for you with screen prints'). This final move, which is captured to a certain extent by the ‘facilitating discourse’ descriptor, evidences a certain teaching style in which even in the midst of straightforward instruction ('injecting knowledge') the teaching act is embedded in the social.

After the first two face-to-face meetings, my observations and the data gathered had allowed me to confirm that the Postmethod parameter of practicality was represented for them by ‘practical ideas'. Although this straightforward provision of materials was not my idea of the type of teaching move that would lead to their professional empowerment, I decided I would make the most of it, using it as a starting point in an attempt to engage participants in discovering the possibilities in the affordances of ACDP.
In that light, I created another discussion forum in which to post practical ideas for
the classroom and reflect on our experiences of applying them. I hoped that in this
way the sense of community would be enhanced and some interesting discussions
could arise, resembling more closely the kind of teacher development task I wished
to promote. I initiated the discussion by sharing a technique I had come across on
the internet. Once again most responses were private as in the case of Margarita,
who used e-mail instead of the discussion forum.

Hi Magdalena,
Nice to hear from you, I have read your mail the story it’s really funny I will work with it.

Just a pair of questions is the LINK (www.eslbase.com) you’ve written free or do we have to pay something??
Because I wanted to look what’s more and a name and a password was asked.

Thanks
kisses
Keep in touch
Margarita

Margarita’s response evidenced cognitive engagement embedded in social
presence in the form of her identification of a resource to work with, which would
then be translated into teaching acts in her own classroom (…‘the story it’s really
funny I will work with it’). In Community of Inquiry terms, I coded this as social
presence, though I wondered whether it could have been straightforwardly
identified as a triggering event within the cognitive presence parameter. This
might be considered to support the distributed nature of cognitive presence in a
blended setting, where very often, as was the case in this message, one can only
visualise certain aspects of the cognitive movement towards integration and
resolution, whilst the others are evident in the participants’ practice. As regards
social presence, apart from the transactional move of asking questions, Margarita’s
message also showed her emotional involvement and desire to ‘Keep in touch’ with
me.
As was explained in Chapter 3 (p.73), Garrison and Anderson (2003:71) maintain that despite the essential role of the teacher, ‘all participants have the opportunity to contribute to teaching presence’. In a few cases, the participants did project their teaching presence in the public domain, using the online discussion forums to share ideas with their colleagues as can be seen in the very concise contribution below, posted by Soledad.

> If you work with little children, please visit the www.starfall.com which is a useful site. I promise you will like it.

Other ‘teaching’ posts were of a more sophisticated nature, making connections between the literature and their experiences, clearly evidencing not only teaching presence but also a movement towards higher levels of cognitive activity, as was the one below from Juliana.

> I would like to share with you all something very interesting I read while doing my assignment on Action Research that made me reflect on my work. Willing (1990) suggests: "Teaching is about negotiation of meanings between teachers and pupils. Skilled teachers encourage pupils' contributions and look for links between the knowledge children bring to the situation and the new experiences to which they are being introduced." While doing action research Pring (a leading educational philosopher, 2000) emphasizes the need for openness, the importance of dialogue with colleagues and of critical reflection on practice. However, provincial teachers are accustomed to working alone, due to some intrinsic and extrinsic reasons so, in general, teachers seek to justify their work rather than criticise it, protecting themselves by not sharing their conclusions with other colleagues.

Although teaching presence was not commonly evidenced in participants’ discourse, I believe postings such as the one above support the idea that if participants are engaged and committed, teaching presence need not be restricted to the tutor’s discourse. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the same extract that was coded as teaching presence could have been described in terms of its social
presence or even cognitive presence, thus strengthening the idea that the Community of Inquiry parameters are embedded in one another.

The second part of the message (‘However, provincial teachers are accustomed...’) shows Juliana’s cognitive move of connecting the ideas in the literature to her own personal experience. This type of message in which cognitive presence was clearly visible was not very frequent, except in the case of one or two participants. Despite my attempts to moderate by acknowledging, reinforcing and summarising ideas and encouraging further discussion, as can be seen below, participation was very limited.

Thank you Luis and Juliana for the very interesting ideas. I agree with both of you. One the one hand, as Luis has very well put it, we must investigate each particular case and see what works for those students. Like you Juliana, I have two groups of students who are doing the same course yet with such different attitudes - in this particular case I believe it is to do with ‘negative leaders’, as we were discussing with Soledad a while ago. So it is essential for me to reflect and work in action research cycles if I want both groups to be successful. Also, I agree with Juliana on the fact that both things and people have changed, and although we were not used to questioning teachers, our students nowadays are. However, I too believe this is a very challenging twist our profession has taken - instead of the eager-to-please students we used to be, youngsters are now more critical. That has to be good on some level... Do you see what I mean? Anyone else care to comment? 😊

I acknowledged and supported those participants who had posted, expanding on their ideas by referring to my own experience. Towards the end of the message, I made an explicit move to involve not only those who had posted but also the rest of the participants (‘Do you see what I mean? Anyone else care to comment? 😊’).

As was seen in the data in this section, the various teaching moves seemed to serve the immediate purpose of exchanging information, yet they were not always successful in drawing learners in visibly, or in facilitating the kind of discourse that evidences cognitive movement. However, I have argued that this cognitive movement, if not very visible in the participants’ discourse, was so elsewhere. As
was explained earlier in this chapter I had consciously made the decision not to force participants to address the group virtually but had respected their learning preferences, be these vicarious learning, public postings or e-mail exchanges.

5.3.5. Conclusion: Reflecting on Principle 2

*In blended learning environments, the Community of Inquiry elements may be embedded in one another, and are often distributed across the various teaching and learning arenas.*

As shown in the present section, I came to two main realisations with regard to the use of the Community of Inquiry full coding framework, which I combined to create the situated principle above. In terms of the research questions this study set out to answer, the principle responds to the second one: ‘What roles do face-to-face and online cognitive, social and teaching ‘presences’ (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2000) play in the process of such [teacher] development?’

In the first place, as regards the embedded nature of the presences, there are different points to be made. Firstly, the teaching presence construct appears not to account fully for teaching acts of a purely social nature. This is a limitation to the use of the framework in this setting, as it did not accurately shed light on my teaching style, which is why I have argued for the need of a ‘social teaching presence’ parameter. Also, the participants’ social presence moves which invoke the tutor’s teaching presence need to be differentiated from the others within social presence, in that their nature is a cognitive one.

Secondly, I discovered that in this setting, the teaching, cognitive and social presences were distributed across the different teaching and learning arenas. For example, the participants’ cognitive presence was rarely seen in the virtual exchanges, yet it was realised in the participants’ written assignments, as was shown in Chapter 4 with Sofia’s and Adriana’s work. In fact, the participants’ social presence moves were often indicative of this kind of cognitive move happening elsewhere. In a similar fashion, there was not much open communication between
participants, which could be due to the fact that the social presence parameter was also being exercised in the face-to-face meetings.

As regards the Community of Inquiry framework, the aim of this stage in the analysis was to explore how far the full framework could contribute to creating an understanding of the teacher development experience in this blended setting. Not only was I able to learn through the framework by understanding further the particularities of the setting and what participants perceived as practical, but I also learned more about the framework. That is, I confirmed on the one hand the need for further exploration of the social dimensions of the teaching presence construct, and on the other hand, the fact that certain types of social presence moves were straightforwardly related to cognitive activity.

5.4. Reflecting on the second action research cycle

The thematic analysis of the 2009 data conducted in parallel with the Community of Inquiry analysis surfaced the following themes appearing in the participants’ discourses that supported the creation of the situated principles.

- Conflicting views of assessment
- The practicality of Moodle in this setting
- Culture of heavy workloads
- The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity

These themes resulted from the thematic coding process, in which I repeatedly searched the data, using codes to label the participants’ discourse. To build a rich description of the events and setting, the codes were grouped into the themes above (see Appendix 7 for a list of the codes and themes in the second action research cycle).

As regards my understanding of the themes, in the first place, the participants’ views on the action research-based assessment were divided, since some believed it to be a tool for professional development while others regarded it as an undesirable component. To some extent this confirms my conclusion that some
participants found the learning opportunities I was offering very meaningful, yet others did not see the relevance of anything that was not directly related to their everyday practice. Moreover, their views on Moodle as a teaching rather than a learning tool also supported principle 1, in that participants were only interested in professional development tools as long as these could be directly translatable into teaching acts. Finally, the fact that cognitive and social activity seemed to occur both in the teaching and face-to-face arenas supported the conclusions drawn from the Community of Inquiry analysis about the distributed nature of the presences (Principle 2).

These themes were different from the ones generated in the first action research cycle, even though both sets of themes are related to the same umbrella themes, which I present below and discuss more extensively in Chapter 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Umbrella themes</th>
<th>2008 themes</th>
<th>2009 themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
<td>Conflicting views of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the technological dimension</td>
<td>Technology-related insecurity</td>
<td>The practicality of Moodle in this setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards the professional development experience</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to please the tutor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout this action research cycle, Kumaravadivelu’s postmethod framework (2006b) aided my theorisation of the processes and events. I was able to experience the continuous and sometimes cyclical processes through which the participants and I discovered the particularities of the setting, explored the practical aspects and became increasingly curious about the possibilities for professional emancipation.
Although participants did not make use of the VLE in the way I had intended, they were able to find affordances for themselves in the blended teacher development experience – as a result of which the VLE was confirmed as a relevant teaching domain. In this sense, they developed an awareness of what was practical for them and this led to an increased sense of ownership and agency in their professions, which they articulated in their responses to the final questionnaire administered in October 2009 (Appendix 6.3.). In their finding new teaching possibilities in the VLE space, not only did they explore what was possible, but they also moved towards an increasingly pragmatic position in the sense explored by Edge (2011:120). That is, their experience as online teacher-learners leading to the assertion of the virtual space as a valid teaching tool entailed the kind of reflection that builds future possibilities.

In terms of the Community of Inquiry framework, there were two main realisations for me. Firstly, I confirmed the idea that in this setting, the teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters were often seen as being embedded in one another. Although the framework developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) divides the categories very clearly, once the descriptors are put into practice it is often difficult to dissociate one presence from the others. This happened more commonly with the social and teaching presences in the tutor discourse, and for the social and cognitive in the participants’ discourse.

Secondly, as was explained in sections 5.3.3 and 5.3.4, through the analysis of the 2009 virtual data I became aware of the need to account for the social nature of the teaching presence parameter. It was thus that I suggested the need for a descriptor to account for some clearly social acts within the teaching presence moves, in the belief that the original teaching presence descriptors cannot describe fully the tutor-participant exchanges in this blended setting.

In terms of cognitive presence, it is noteworthy that Anderson and Henderson (2004) suggest it is the social aspects rather than the cognitive ones that are paramount in supporting sustained professional development. In this context, although social presence could be traced throughout the VLE activity, the limited cognitive presence in the virtual space and only partially effective teaching moves
could be indicating that participants did not perceive the virtual arena as a valid space for their professional development. As can be seen in the examples cited throughout the chapter, cognitive presence was not frequently visible in the participants’ online discourse, which functioned mostly at the level of information exchange.

From the perspective of blended pedagogy, this can be regarded as being due to faulty course design. That is, it could be argued that the prompts and tasks required participants to do little more than work at the cognitive level of information exchange. In fact, the virtual domain seemed to play mainly the role of resource, teaching tool, and anytime and anywhere communication with the tutor.

Alternatively, as was explained in the introduction to this chapter, the lack of cognitive activity and the number of teaching moves that were not responded to could be pointing towards other spaces where the teaching and cognitive acts were operating more effectively. Participants were exploring the possibilities behind the introduction of technology as a teaching tool in their classrooms. A few were already working with their students in blended mode, some others were preparing the online spaces, and the rest were learning from observing their colleagues and trying to become more proficient ICT users. Notwithstanding the different paces, all of them were working towards new possibilities and ultimately, their professional empowerment and emancipation, as was evidenced in the online tasks and materials with which they created new learning spaces for their students (Appendix 8). They were realising that their engagement with technology offered endless possibilities in terms of access to material, for which they had traditionally been dependent on the local directors. Equally significantly, the online spaces implied the possibility of being in touch with their colleagues and with more knowledgeable Others.

It could be argued that much of the cognitive activity was also happening during our face-to-face meetings, when we exchanged views on the suitability of activities in the light of our own individual and collective realities. However, I believe that the most significant cognitive activity was taking place at an individual level, within each teacher’s action research processes where the online and face-to-face
experiences were brought together. Such cognitive activity was not always documented as I would have liked it to be, given that only a few participants kept a journal. However, its impact can be glimpsed in the participants' responses to the evaluation questionnaire (Appendix 6.3.) as well as in products created by participants, such as their assignments and the design of online materials for their students, as described above.

The strict application of the Community of Inquiry framework allowed me to confirm that the notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence could be effectively used to describe what happened – and especially what did not – in the virtual arena in this particular context. True to what Garrison & Vaughan (2008:21) state, I witnessed the ‘cyclical inquiry pattern of learning from experience through reflection and conceptualization to action and on to further experience’. Rather than being evidenced in the virtual domain, this occurred over the face-to-face and virtual environments as well as in the teachers’ classrooms. Quite significantly, it was evidenced when participants first engaged with the VLE, visibly or invisibly, and then reflected and conceptualised the possibilities open to them before embarking on the design of the virtual space for their own students.

In the authors’ terminology, I could claim that there was a cognitive movement from a triggering event (introduction of the VLE) followed by an exploration of ideas leading to a resolution, which in this case constituted an action (design of a VLE space for students) giving start to a new experience in which more triggering events would be found. In many ways, the cognitive processing leading to higher-order thinking could be said to mirror the action research process. Like Garrison & Vaughan (2008:23-24), who admit the impending need for research into the nature of cognitive presence in blended settings, I have learned that ‘Unintended learning outcomes can be most educational’ and ‘True inquiry is exploratory and often unpredictable’.
CHAPTER 6: THE END OF ACDP AND THE NEW BEGINNINGS

6.1. Introduction

September 1st, 2010

I haven’t written here in a while, but suddenly while planning my next ACDP session I felt like documenting some of my immediate thoughts in a memo-like fashion. The face to face meeting we’re having on Friday is an example of how I have not succeeded in convincing participants of the value of a different approach to teacher development. If you see the presentation (speaking ppt), it’s a clear list of practical ideas. Not much theory, because it’s boring, not much reflection because it’s useless, but lots of practical ideas, because that’s what we need. This is what they have taught me in the past two years and a half. I always make a point of avoiding irony, but this time I’m allowing myself because I’m tired and disappointed. Tired of feeling like a walking encyclopaedia of practical (and fun) ideas for the classroom, and disappointed because I didn’t manage to convince the group (though I did convince a few) that there’s something beyond the magic of practical ideas. (Research journal, September 1 2010)

In February 2010, my daughter was born with a vascular anomaly, and had to undergo heart surgery in March of the same year when she was one month old. A few weeks after the operation, in the midst of all the anguish, stress and blessed relief, I was launching the final iteration of ACDP. During 2010, I often regretted my decision to extend the programme for one more year, although I am now able to see how it allowed me to follow up on the impact of my action research. Also in retrospect, I can see that my 2010 discourse, such as that in the extract above, was often tinted with personal and professional exhaustion.

Having acknowledged the feelings that marked this final stage of my study, throughout this chapter I intend to show the reader how my inductive and deductive data analyses, framed in this reflexive subjectivity, allowed me to draw the following conclusions:
The VLE was again asserted by participants as a valid tool for professional development. This development occurred through the use of the VLE as a teaching rather than as a learning tool. In accordance with this, the design of the course evolved in such a way that the emphasis was shifted from the initial reflective, collaborative action research approach towards an increasingly 'craft' approach (Wallace 1991) to the use of technology.

Although the levels of activity in the VLE spaces were higher than in 2009, most of this activity was invisible, with discussion forums being used more sparsely. However, the teaching, social and cognitive activity continued to occur across different arenas as teachers collaborated in small groups to design their own VLE spaces.

I begin the next section by describing the most important conclusions I was able to draw from the 2009 inductive, thematic analysis and explaining how these were translated into course design decisions. I then explore the characteristics of the online activity in 2010 through the Community of Inquiry framework, as well as the participants' final evaluations of the programme, relating these to the conclusions drawn for previous iterations. Towards the end of the chapter, in section 6.6, I refer to the 'new beginnings'; that is, how participants continued their journeys of empowerment beyond the ACDP programme. I end by referring to my research questions before some final remarks where I reflect on what I learned as a result of this 2010 action research cycle.

As was done in Chapter 5, I have coded interactive data such as questionnaires through inductive, thematic analysis (see Appendix 9 for a list of all the codes and themes emerging in 2010). On the other hand, the virtual e-mail and VLE data were analysed using Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) Community of Inquiry framework. As in the previous data analysis chapters, I have included a copy of all the data collection prompts used in 2010 (Appendix 10).
6.2. Learning from the 2009 experience

By analysing the final feedback questionnaires from 2009 (Appendix 6.3), I discovered that participants perceived the technological dimension of the blended version of the programme as a fundamental element in their identity reconstruction (Freeman 1993). Below are some very significant responses to the item ‘Would you say the course has led to any changes in your professional life, or your attitude to it? If so, please describe them.’ Running through all of them is the thread of professional development through technological innovation, although other themes such the value of action research and the role assigned to the tutor figure can also be discerned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development through ICT</th>
<th>When I started the course I was completely illiterate at computers. Now I am a challenger. In the past I knew about the importance but I did nothing. I have had a big transformation. I feel a different person.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ICT knowledge we got was crucial to our teaching. It has set us thinking about changes and innovation in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now I know how to use ICT in class and how to improve some situations in class or the steps to follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development through ICT; Tutor as expert</td>
<td>I’ve implemented using internet with my students and I started planning my lessons in a different way that I used to, taking into account what I’ve learnt from you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT as tool for teaching and learning</td>
<td>At the beginning of the year I felt totally illiterate about computers... I use it all the time and our page ‘acdponline’ has been really useful and important for me. Not only to work with my students, but also for my own benefit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After an iterative process of merging and adapting codes, I grouped those above under the theme ‘ICT as a tool for professional development’, which I believed was the most accurate descriptor for the ideas espoused by participants.

Not surprisingly, discourses relating to traditional ideas on learning and teaching which I had seen across the data sources were still evident at this final point in 2009, as can be seen below:
I therefore included this and other similar codes as belonging to the theme of ‘traditional views on teaching and learning’. The re-occurrence of this theme could be related to the isolation that marked participants’ professional lives, evidenced in the comments below. This isolation, both professional and geographical, provides a potential explanation for the fundamental role assigned to the tutor and the prominence of the ‘craft’ approach to teacher development which featured in their discourse throughout the research process.

| Professional isolation | We don’t have many opportunities of receiving good teachers bringing new ideas to our provinces.
I consider (this type of course) would benefit any teacher, especially the ones in the provinces who do not have much access to this kinds of events or courses. It’s a good way to know what the latest trends in education are and not feeling so isolated.

| Interest in the latest trends; Professional isolation | (The course) is a way to catch up with all the different approaches and technologies which is very difficult in the provinces especially small towns. |

I interpreted the comments above and many others as being related to the participants’ ‘awareness of the need for professional development’, which I identified as another one of the overarching themes at this stage in the action research process. I was quite pleased at the thought that ACDP might have had an awareness-raising function, although I bore in mind the fact that participants might be trying to be compliant.

I was partly disappointed and partly relieved to see that when comparing the two iterations (2008 and 2009), participants described the 2009 block as more relevant due to its more practical nature. On the one hand, this was a disappointment, as it was clear that they perceived the first and second iterations as ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ respectively, which can be seen in the following
sample responses to the item ‘Which of the two blocks (2008/2009) seemed most useful/relevant to you? Why?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice vs theory</th>
<th>2008 gave me theoretical support and 2009 a series of ideas to improve my lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think one is a consequence of the other, but I think 2009 was a bit more practical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In my opinion the 2009 block was more useful because it was more practical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike in 2008, in this questionnaire I had been careful to formulate the item without referring to the theory/practice dichotomy (see p.132), yet the practice versus theory discourses were once again evident in the participants’ responses. To me, this provided further evidence of the salience of the ‘traditional views on teaching and learning’ theme. Notwithstanding how disappointing this widespread opinion and the dichotomy behind it appeared to me at first sight, I realised this perception of the second run being more useful implied that the change in course design had been an effective one. That is, I had been flexible enough to listen to their needs and attempt to fulfil these even when my ideas about empowerment were not in line with those of participants.

In many ways, given the contextual affordances, my experience had been similar to that of working with pre-service teachers. As explained by Edge (2011:23), I had been aware of ‘my responsibility to provide instruction and to confront teacher-learners with issues that I believe to be important, even if they do not identify them as such themselves.’ I felt only some participants had found the idea of development through reflection, collaboration and action research meaningful, as was shown by the fact that not all of them were willing to engage in the online collaborative tasks I designed, and not all of them submitted evidence of their learning. However, I was confident that I had tried to push them beyond their boundaries. And now it was time to prepare the final iteration of ACDP.
6.3. The design of the final ACDP iteration

The feeling of excitement that had inspired the initial design stages of ACDP in late 2007 was very distant from what I experienced as I planned the final ACDP run for 2010. This was partly due to my perception of not having 'succeeded in convincing participants of the value of a different approach to teacher development', during 2008 and 2009, as expressed in the diary extract shown at the beginning of this chapter. As I set out to design the final iteration, I tried to capitalise on the positive aspects of the ACDP experience so far, bearing in mind Fullan's (1993:24) principle that 'You can't mandate what matters.'

In the final evaluations of the 2009 iteration, I had identified the following themes:

- Awareness of the need for professional development
- ICT as tool for professional development
- Traditional views on teaching and learning

As seen in the themes identified above, participants were still espousing an interest in the technical aspects of teaching and learning, which at the time I labelled 'traditional', as explained on page 96. At the same time, participants were able to see the value of ICT as a tool for their professional development, and even more importantly, they seemed to have developed a heightened awareness of the need to engage in the kind of continuous professional development offered through ACDP. I learned that they had succeeded in finding affordances for themselves in the opportunities I was offering, yet the outcomes were not exactly what I had predicted. I confirmed that they were interested in pursuing the so-called ‘practical’ aspects of ACDP, especially the opportunity to integrate educational technologies into the courses they were teaching. Therefore, I decided that the main focus of the 2010 iteration would be to help participants become competent and confident at integrating educational technologies into their traditional courses.

At the participants’ request, sessions would still be based on different aspects of teaching methodology, but a significant slot in these sessions was to be devoted to
Moodle training. Other times, the whole of the session would be approached from the perspective of the VLE. For instance, the topic area ‘teaching writing’ would be approached by guiding teachers in the design of virtual activities to enhance their students’ writing skills. This directive role I would assume as ‘trainer’ for Moodle was also in line with their traditional views on teaching and learning. Bearing in mind the participants’ state of professional need and aspiration at this stage, I foregrounded in my design the need to provide teachers with the necessary tools to become independent of me, in the knowledge that the programme would not continue beyond 2010.

Since my family commitments would not allow me to travel to the provinces as often as would be necessary, the participants and I agreed that we would meet in the capital city one Friday a month for a full-day session. This was not in line with the idea of de-centralisation that framed the programme, yet it provided a series of advantages at the time. Firstly, it was an opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues from other areas, as this did not happen too often in the virtual spaces. Secondly, given the increasingly ‘workshop’ approach to the meetings, holding these in Montevideo would guarantee to a certain extent, a better-quality broadband connection which was essential for the ‘training’ aspect of the session to run smoothly. Finally, it made it possible for participants living in very remote areas to attend, given the fact that they had to travel only once a month instead of every week. These and other characteristics of the design of the final ACDP iteration can be seen in the extract below from the information booklet sent to all the teachers outside Montevideo in November 2009.
• ACDP 2010 will run from April to November 2010, and will consist of 4 face-to-face seminars and continuous access to the online resources and support site: www.acdponline.net
• The 4 full-day seminars in Montevideo (Fridays or Saturdays from 9 am to 6.30 pm) will be held in May, July, September and October, adding up to a total of 32 face-to-face contact hours.
• On the ACDP site, teachers can access different types of materials and lesson plans, engage in discussions with the tutor and other participants, and request support. Although online participation is not compulsory, it will be strongly encouraged.
• ACDP includes both a Language Improvement and a Methodology component, both of which are covered in the face-to-face seminars and internet site.
• ACDP gives participants free online space to use with their students (www.students.acdponline.net). Guided by the tutor, teachers are encouraged to design and implement online activities, although this is not compulsory.
• You do not need to be an expert IT user to take part in ACDP, as constant guidance and support are provided so that all teachers can use the sites profitably if they wish to.
• Participants can decide whether they want to be assessed or not. Those interested in assessment can choose to submit a research-based assignment or a portfolio of reflective tasks.
• The total cost of the course (seminars and online) for 2010 will be $U 3500 per teacher, to be paid in 5 instalments of $U 700 each.

As seen in the document extract above, the technological aspects of the programme had begun to play a more central part than in previous iterations. Participants were ‘strongly encouraged’ to make themselves visible in the online community, and to experiment with the design and implementation of virtual tasks for their learners.

At this point it might be helpful for the reader to see a general overview of the changes that occurred in ACDP in terms of course design. The table below summarises how the different aspects of ACDP evolved and how the programme was re-designed throughout the action research cycles occurring from 2008 to 2010. This evolving design was a consequence of my increasing understanding of what was particular and practical for participants, allowing us to experiment with the dimension of possibility.
Aspects of course design | ACDP 2008 | ACDP 2009 | ACDP 2010
--- | --- | --- | ---
Communication | E-mail ‘teaching conversations’ with some participants | VLE discussions and e-mails, often private rather than public | VLE discussions and e-mails, less frequent than in 2010
VLE activity | n/a | Main site and Student Centre. | Main site (less visible) and Student Centre.
Tutor role | Facilitative | More directive than facilitative. | Clearly directive (for VLE ‘training’), facilitative at times.
Face-to-Face dynamics | Input, discussion, reflection | Direct instruction, discussion, reflection. | Direct instruction, workshop-like sessions, discussion, reflection.

Table 6.1. Comparing course design and implementation for the different ACDP cohorts

As regards communication media, the course evolved from the e-mail ‘teaching conversations’ in 2008 to the introduction of the VLE in 2009, when a few participants addressed the ‘community’, some preferred private interactions, and others took part passively. In 2010, the public VLE discussions did not appear to be such an important tool for participants, since their technical doubts were often solved through peer collaboration as well as the use of the Moodle handouts with detailed explanations, which I had offered for the first time in 2009.

As far as my tutor role is concerned, the action research process allowed me to gain an understanding of the type of tutor the participants believed would be facilitative of their empowerment. From the 2008 iteration, when I intended to have a clear ‘guide on the side’ role (Rourke et. al 2001), my role moved towards a more directive position in 2009 and 2010. Conversely, the face-to-face meetings
evolved from the use of input for discussion and reflection in 2008, to more direct instruction in 2009, and the addition of the ‘training’ aspect during the final iteration in 2010. Given these changes, at times I felt that the face-to-face meetings had all but become a series of lectures and Moodle training workshops. However, throughout the cohorts I continued to retain the principles of collaboration, reflection and action research as a guiding framework for the design of both the face-to-face meetings and online tasks.

6.3.1. Theorising the design of ACDP

From a teacher development perspective, the evolution of ACDP over the years could be explored through Edge’s (2010b, 2011) CATRA framework. The acronym stands for Copying, Applying, Theorising, Reflecting and Action, all of which the author considers interacting elements within a ‘working approach to teacher learning’ (Edge 2011:19). The first of these, Copying, involves the type of learning that results from teachers imitating their more experienced counterparts. Applying refers to the application of learned concepts to develop procedures that are contextually relevant, while Theorising refers to the articulation of conclusions drawn from the two aforementioned processes. These three processes must ‘take place in an environment of ongoing Reflection and Action’ (Edge 2010b:2).

I designed the 2008 version of ACDP informed by the needs analysis conducted in late 2007 (Appendix 1), as well as my experience as a teacher educator and my limited knowledge of the professional realities of prospective participants. In that first iteration, I emphasised the importance of Theorising and Reflecting as essential requisites for informed Action, since these had traditionally not received much attention in the local professional context. However, this approach was not fully practical for participants (except for a few cases), given that they perceived Copying as the most important element their professional development. This realisation allowed me to understand the particular: that each of the interacting elements in the CATRA framework play a fundamental role in this setting, and even if they are all present in a teacher development programme, the focus needs to be placed correctly for it to be successful, respecting participants’ perceptions of what is practical.
Slowly as from 2009 and more markedly in the 2010 iteration, Copying and Applying were to take centre stage. At first sight, this movement towards the ‘core’ skills may appear somewhat counter-intuitive, yet the fact that these teachers were not formally qualified together with their adoption of the VLE as a teaching tool explained their need to imitate and apply concepts. In fact, their constant demand for practical ideas could be interpreted as a need to extend and reinforce their Copying and Applying skills.

From the perspective of single- and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön 1974), I confirmed that participants were interested in ACDP as long as the input provided could be directly translated into teaching actions. Moreover, the fact that these were teachers with no previous experiences of online learning meant that they were possibly feeling like novice teachers with regards to the technological aspect of the programme. Taking these factors into account, it is easier to understand their repeated demands for single-loop learning.

6.4. The role of the VLE in the final ACDP iteration

In the final ACDP iteration, the technological angle of the programme became its main focus. In the knowledge that participants were interested in the VLE as a teaching rather than a learning tool, I tried to facilitate this training process, knowing that development would take place, albeit in a different manner from the one I had envisioned. That is, since participants had found affordances for themselves in the VLE as a teaching tool, I interpreted this use of technology as an alternative path to the same destinations that were empowerment and emancipation. In terms of the opportunities for learning offered by digital technologies proposed by Fisher et al. (see p. 49), it could be said that participants had drawn on the knowledge building and distributed cognition affordance clusters, since they were using the VLE to offer different tasks and materials for their students on the one hand, and on the other hand it constituted a vehicle for accessing materials and resources.
6.4.1. More active but less visible: reconstructing VLE activity in 2010

In general terms, 2010 saw a decrease in visible activity, yet the number of visits increased both for the main site and the Student Centre, as can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of monthly visits</th>
<th>Main site 2009</th>
<th>Main site 2010</th>
<th>Student Centre 2009</th>
<th>Student Centre 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2. Number of monthly visits for the main site and Student Centre in 2009 and 2010.

As can be seen in the table, in most of the months comprising the 2010 academic year, the number of visits was much higher than it had been for 2009, for both the main site and the Student Centre. In both iterations and for both sites, the number of monthly visits approximates a normal or Gaussian distribution, showing that activity was slow in the initial months, it then peaked from May to July and began to decrease thereafter. This decrease in activity as from August could be explained by the fact that August is usually the time when the workload increases for teachers in the provinces, ahead of the November exams their students have to sit. Alternatively, they might have lost some of their initial interest in the programme by that time, although it is significant that this would occur at approximately the same time of the year for both cohorts.
6.4.2. Confirming the distributed nature of the presences

As explained before, despite the numbers described above indicating an increase in activity in 2010, the amount of visible activity in the main learning site decreased significantly in comparison with what had happened in 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36 participants</td>
<td>40 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48 postings</td>
<td>35 postings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication in the discussion forums was sparse, and although some participants contacted me via e-mail, as a tutor I found this silence quite worrying, as can be seen in my forum post below, from June 2010.

**Hi Everyone**

_I meant to create a forum for us to discuss webquests, but I'm slightly worried that I haven't heard from many of you since our face-to-face meeting. So I thought rather than webquesting I'd better stop and ask._

a) _First of all, could you please let me know how you're doing? Even if you've done nothing since our meeting, please reply to this message and let me know! Just so that I know you're alive..._

b) _Very few of you replied to my question about next meeting so here I go again. Is it ok if on the 18th we work on writing and we also continue working on the student centre, recycling what we know and learning new things? Would that be ok?_

_Look fwd to hearing from you all 😊_

My anxiety was clearly evident in the message (‘Just so that I know you're alive’), in which I was in a way surrendering, since I was reassuring participants that even if they had not been working on their sites they need not be worried as communication was what I considered essential. In a way, this lack of communication via the discussion forums could be indicating that they were not
within what the participants considered *practical*. By asking them to articulate their needs and interests, even though this can only be coded as a teaching act, I was addressing the group as a whole and invoking their group cohesion, which the authors consider a social move. As seen in previous chapters, this is evidencing the fact that the teaching, and social presence constructs are often embedded in one another.

Sofia replied promptly, providing her answers to my questions.

*Hi Magda, for me it’s ok to work on writing. It’s always a necessary thing, and I’d also like to go on working on ICT. I’ve uploaded some links under ‘your contribution’, but I haven’t been able to try the webquests yet, I admit I’m not very keen on them. I’ll try...*

Sofia was one of the few participants who, apart from working on the Student Centre, was trying to contribute to the main site for teachers (‘I’ve uploaded some links under...’). Interestingly for me, in a setting where participants often found it hard to articulate their needs, wants, lacks and interests, she had expressed her views on webquests quite clearly (‘I admit I’m not very keen on them’). Once again, although the message can only be coded as social presence, it is clearly pointing to cognitive activity occurring elsewhere, with the visible ‘product’ being her contribution to the site.

Jennifer, who had joined in 2010 and was actively collaborating with her colleague Laura, provided a detailed report of their activity.
Hi Magda! I’m alive and Laura too... safe and sound.

1) We have been talking but not doing much especially on my side. As we both have a Senior 6 group we are planning to do things which we can use in both groups and we want to invite another teacher who has a group but is not attending your course. We have seen great things done and added by Sofia... she’s a really hardworker... but in the meantime we noticed that we were seeing her students answers and WE were looking at her work, which we thought was not very ethical!? Thanks to an email sb sent, it is clear to us now that there was a problem with the enrollment. On the other hand it is great to see how Sofia finds or does all that stuff which encourages us... it is possible!!

2) It’s ok with me. Writing and correcting is one of my big concerns... The 18th is fine. Everything already planned to be there. Sorry I was out so long...promise to start something with S6
Love u all

Laura and Jennifer were keen to collaborate (‘we are planning to do things which we can use in both groups and we want to invite another teacher who has a group but is not attending your course’), and were also motivated by Sofia’s work. The different types of social presence move are clearly evident in the message. Beginning with ‘emotional expression’ (Garrison et al. 2000) in the form of a detailed account of their activity, Jennifer moved on to acknowledge and support Sofia’s contributions, before finally expressing her agreement with the plans I had proposed. From the perspective of the Community of Inquiry coding framework, their message is purely social, although on closer examination it is clear how activity was happening elsewhere, in their private collegial dialogues as well as in their Student Centre spaces, one of which is shown in the screen shot below. The screen shot shows that although discussion was sparse in the online forums, participants like Laura in this case, were designing their own virtual spaces and using them with their students. To do this, they were engaging in cognitive activity, putting into practice what was discussed during the face-to-face sessions and exchanging ideas with their colleagues.
Figure 6.1. Laura’s (Town S) virtual space in the Student Centre.

Cesar also replied promptly in his concise style, always making his thoughts and preferences clear, and reassuring me that he was working actively, offering further evidence that the forums were serving as a tool for reporting activity happening in other arenas.

```
helloooo,
I’m replying within the ACDP site, that’s a start.
Now, about the tasks, sorry but I haven’t really had a chance to do anything, but I will, don’t worry. Anyway, I’ve been trying (on my own) to get my feet wet with the webquests but I think I could use some more work on the student’s centre, Alright? See ya
```

SP> open communication
> constructive comments
based on previous contributions

Gimena openly confessed that she had not had much time to work on the Student Centre due to personal reasons. However, she promised (herself) she would do some work before the upcoming face-to-face meeting.
Dear Magdalena,

I have a confession to make, I haven’t been able to do much work lately as I’m in the midst of moving houses! With a baby! I’m almost going crazy! Lots of cleaning to do!! But I promise I will before our next meeting. Anyway, I think that working on writing and on the Student Centre is great! See you soon.

Even though I found the limited interaction quite frustrating at the time, postings such as those above reassured me that even in the midst of their hectic lives, at least some participants were expressing themselves publicly. It was also encouraging to see participants were mastering the necessary skills for designing virtual tasks, as well as some evidence of collaboration and an intention to continue exploring the possibilities that the VLE embodied. The most reassuring aspect of all was what I was witnessing in the Student Centre, where all the participants were working either individually, in pairs or teams, designing online tasks for their students. In some cases, the students had already been entered to the system and were being encouraged to engage in different virtual tasks, such as the ones shown below:

![Figure 6.2. Online lesson in Moodle created by Sofia from Town N.](image)
In the design of tasks such as those above, participants were, often unconsciously, making use of the principles of reflection, collaboration and action research I had worked so hard to promote. In so doing, they were also putting their higher-order thinking skills to use. That is, they were exchanging ideas, planning solutions and
putting them into practice through the collaborative design of the virtual tasks for their students. In fact, it is important to note that Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001) as well as other authors (e.g. Pawan et al. 2003; Aykon, Vaughan & Garrison 2011) suggest that the highest level of cognitive presence, resolution, is rarely evidenced in online discourse. However, it may be the case that this upper level is evidenced in outcomes such as those above, where participants have ample ‘opportunities to apply newly created knowledge’ (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2001:5).

6.5. The final 2010 evaluation

During the final session in October 2010, I asked participants to write an anonymous comment describing their experience as ACDP participants. In these comments, all participants referred to the impact of ACDP in their lives, which I considered to be captured by the ‘beneficial effects of ACDP’ theme. Many of those final comments were heart-warming, such as the ones below, from participants who had been part of ACDP since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change through ACDP</th>
<th>I cannot begin to tell you how useful (ACDP) is. My practice has changed enormously and my attitude too.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional empowerment through action research</td>
<td>When I enrolled in Anglo Continuous Development Programme course in 2008, I had no idea at all neither how nor how much it would help me as a teacher. It has been the best course I have ever done because it did not give me recipes in order to solve my problems with my students but, it taught me how to detect problems in the classroom and how to create solutions to them according to my needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the repeated requests for practical ideas that had so often disappointed me, it was very rewarding to find there were at least some teachers who made reference to having obtained longer-lasting tools for development. Other participants felt ACDP had been an initial step in their development processes.
I found it really motivating and I got deeply involved. It opened my eyes and my mind, I did not only learn new things but thanks to the programme I also allowed myself to be taught ‘e-things’...

As a (future director) I intend to be aware of changes and to promote them among my teachers.

We’ll try to keep in touch and won’t give up. It’s a first step.

I considered these and other similar data signaled that there was, among participants, a perceptible increase in sense of empowerment, hence the creation of the ‘Feelings of empowerment’ theme. Apart from the idea of continuing development, the intention to share knowledge and collaborate was also evident in some responses such as the ones below, which belonged to the theme of ‘future professional development plans’.

‘This has been like a kick-off, not to get behind with all the new trends. We will appreciate the possibility of having short seminars or courses at our places to get our colleagues involved.’

‘I’m going to try to use and share what I’ve learnt about this platform, links, etc and I really want my colleagues to understand we have a great tool to motivate and help our students to be autonomous.’

For other participants, ACDP had been a source of encouragement to seek formal qualifications, once again evidencing their growing awareness of the importance of engaging in professional development.

‘In the future I want to apply all what you have taught to us, and maybe, if it is possible, I want to do a Teacher Training Course.’

‘I would like to be able to come to other teaching development courses next year(s).’

As in other instances of feedback before this one, no aspects of the programme were criticised nor were any suggestions made beyond a few timid requests for ‘more practice’ in working on Moodle. However, the comments seemed less formulaic and clichéd than some of the questionnaires in previous years had
seemed to me. In fact, since ACDP had evolved according to their needs, the opinions espoused in the comments might very well have been less tinged by social desirability.

For the reader to have an overview of how the themes in 2010 compared to those in previous iterations, below I present a summary of the themes generated over the three-year period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Umbrella themes</th>
<th>2008 themes</th>
<th>2009 themes</th>
<th>2010 themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
<td>Conflicting views of assessment</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the technological dimension</td>
<td>Technology-related insecurity</td>
<td>The practicality of Moodle in this setting</td>
<td>ICT as a tool for professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards the professional development experience</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
<td>Awareness of the need for professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to please the tutor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Future professional development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again in 2010, the themes that were generated were captured in three main umbrella themes relating to the participants’ beliefs, their attitudes towards the programme, and the technological dimension. I expand on the development of the themes over the years in Chapter 9.
6.6. Spreading our wings: the new beginnings

At the end of ACDP 2010, I agreed with participants that they needed to continue their professional journeys without me. Many of them were as tired as I was, others wanted more, and a few wanted to change direction and focus on their language rather than their teaching skills. It seemed like a good time to let them continue on their own, in the hope that I had given them both ‘roots’ and ‘wings’ (Edge 2011), the former embodied in an understanding of the need to find out what was particular and practical for them, the latter represented by the possibility of professional emancipation offered by technology and the principles of collaboration, reflection and action research.

It was decided by the participants and their local directors that each provincial Institute or Centre would have their own Moodle space as from 2011, where all the teachers would collaborate to design virtual tasks to enhance their courses. The work they had done in 2010 in the ACDP Student Centre would be transferred to their new sites, and ACDP participants would be in charge of disseminating the knowledge among their colleagues and designing new virtual spaces for students. In this way, all ACDP participants would become agents of change in their local contexts, helping to spread the use of educational technologies among their colleagues and students.

For one ACDP participant in particular, Soledad, whose journey I will describe in the next chapter, the ‘new beginnings’ involved a larger-scale project. She was responsible and still is, at the time of writing this chapter, for a bottom-up effort that resulted in the introduction of a VLE in state education for the first time. Below is an extract from a 2010 document she presented to her employers at the local secondary school, in which she was drawing on the ACDP tools for professional development that she had found meaningful.
Comenzamos nuestro proyecto (Uso de la plataforma Moodle: Medio de Aprendizaje Virtual), con dos objetivos en mente. Como todos los docentes, sabemos que muchos estamos preocupados por los bajos niveles de motivación entre nuestros alumnos y creímos pertinente buscar alguna solución a este problema. La idea de usar la metodología conocida en Inglés como “Action Research” (identificar el problema, buscar una solución, aplicarla, analizarla y re-adaptarla) nos pareció un buen comienzo y el uso de la plataforma una muy buena herramienta para poder concretar nuestro proyecto.

We began our project (Use of Moodle: A Tool for Virtual Learning) with a two-fold aim in mind. Like every teacher, we know many of us are worried about the low levels of motivation among our students, so we considered it relevant to find a solution for this problem. The idea of using the methodology known in English as “Action Research” (identifying the problem, looking for a solution, applying it, analysing it and re-adapting it) seemed to be a good start and the use of the VLE a very good tool to complete our project.

Soledad’s collaborative project originated in the identification of a problem she knew was widespread and was willing to solve. She considered collaborative action research was the best way to solve this, and had since begun to work with a colleague and friend. At the time the document was produced, Soledad and her colleague intended to involve all the teachers in their school in a cross-disciplinary effort to integrate educational technologies.

Each and every one of the ACDP participants saw the end of the programme with a concrete aim in mind, whether large- or small-scale. More importantly, the fulfilment of these aims involved an intention to collaborate with their colleagues through bottom-up efforts conceived as action research projects.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Projects for 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juliana, Soledad, Margarita and</td>
<td>Institutionalisation of Moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen (Town B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad and Martina (Town B)</td>
<td>Institutionalisation of Moodle for state secondary school and training colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia (Town N)</td>
<td>Personal Moodle space for her students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cesar (Town C)</td>
<td>Institutionalisation of Moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimena (Town E)</td>
<td>Institutionalisation of Moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura and Jennifer (Town S)</td>
<td>Training colleagues in the use of Moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florencia, Zoe and Gabriela (Town T)</td>
<td>Collaborative introduction of educational technologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**6.7. Conclusions**

Can blended learning become a tool for professional development within a framework of *particularity, practicality and possibility* (Kumaravadivelu 2006b)?

Much like the data analyses in the previous two chapters, my explorations of the 2010 data seem to lend support to the idea that blended learning did indeed serve as a tool for professional development in this context. More precisely, the professional development that occurred through the use of the VLE was shaped by the participants’ and my own negotiated understanding of what was *particular* and *practical* for them. The latter was represented by the use of the VLE as a teaching tool rather than a learning one. To explore the *possibilities* inherent in such an innovation, participants demanded a programme which emphasised the skills of Copying and Applying, rather than those of Theorising, Reflecting and Acting.

In short, I set out in 2007 to design a programme involving reflection, collaboration and action research, based on the value of local expertise. Even though this initial design drew on a needs analysis process, it was only when I
became immersed in the action research cycles that I began to discern what was particular about this setting and the participants I was working with. Part of this understanding of the particular was embodied in the interpretation of their view of what was practical. As a teacher educator, while I struggled to reconstruct my schemata on what effective teacher development meant for these participants, we set out to explore the possibilities of emancipation inherent in the educational technologies I was offering. Therefore, my interim answer to this question is a ‘yes’, which I discuss further in Chapter 9.

What role do teaching, social and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) play in the process of such development?

I was able to confirm the idea that despite the unquestionable usefulness of the teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters, it is often the case that the categories are embedded in one another. Furthermore, as regards teaching presence, the fact that it sometimes contained a strong social element may be indicative of a certain teaching style. In addition, the analysis of the VLE data from 2010 lends support to the idea that the kind of higher-order cognitive process that is an essential pre-requisite for development could not always be evidenced in the discussion forums, but was seen as a product in other spaces participants were working on. Through the 2010 data, I was also able to discover that a decrease in the amount of ‘visible’ activity in the main site was in fact linked to an increase in the number and quality of online tasks designed by the participants, lending support to the idea that the presences might be distributed across different arenas in a blended setting.

6.8. Final remarks: Of lights and shadows

As I finalise this chapter, I clearly remember how glad I was to see the end of the ACDP era. Although it had been in so many ways a ground-breaking project, I was relieved when it was over, possibly due to the feeling of exhaustion that had marked the whole of that year for me. As explained at the start of the present chapter, this exhaustion was to a great extent due to the demands of being a new mother with a child that needed so much attention. The unexpectedness of it all
had left me burnt out, and I believe this is, at least partly, why I found this final stage of ACDP overwhelming at times. But as Edge (2011:138) cleverly states, ‘shadows are the inevitable result of light’. At this point in the chapter, therefore, I would like to end with another extract from my research journal in which I hope the reader can discern the light as it fights to make its way in-between the shadows in my discourse:

September 11, 2010

I have now had the two sessions on teaching speaking. One part of me felt frustrated because I have once again been acting as a repository of practical ideas. On the other hand, I have by now learned that this is what they want. And I have found the way to include in every single session I conduct, a slot devoted to reflecting. Maybe not in the terms I originally thought I would be doing this, but it still counts. For example, this year I have been showing them lessons on DVD (from the Harmer book), and we have analysed each lesson thoroughly. Their first instinct, because these lessons are taught by native speakers, is to say they are fantastic, but when I take them through the stages and refer them to the frameworks we have discussed, they realise that that’s not necessarily the case. I have also made a point of asking them to be critical about my demonstrations, and all the materials and ideas I bring to the class. I insist that they think of whether the activities would suit their students, their classes. Nothing works in theory if it doesn’t work in practice, as Julian says.

Having provided a chronological view of the three consecutive programme iterations, in the next chapter I show how the ACDP journey was one of empowerment for two participants in particular, Juliana and Soledad.
CHAPTER 7: JULIANA AND SOLEDAD

‘Teachers create and re-create personal meaning when they exploit and extend their intuitively held pedagogic beliefs based on their educational histories and personal biographies by conducting more structured and more goal-oriented teacher research based on the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility.’

(Kumaravadivelu 2001:551)

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter I describe my experience in working with two participants in particular, Juliana and Soledad, in order to show how they were empowered by the programme experience. To do this, I analyse data from the three-year programme in the light of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry framework. As was explained in Chapter 1 (p.24), having ascertained the relevance of the framework by applying it to data from the three different ACDP iterations in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I am now in a position to use the full analytical framework to track the trajectory of two participants across this three-year period. I also draw on Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility, to interpret how these two participants’ discourse shaped their trajectory and was shaped by it in turn (Johnstone 2002), helping Juliana and Soledad to reconstruct their professional identities (Freeman 1993) by exploring the possibilities available to them (Kumaravadivelu 2006b).

I have chosen to describe my experience with these two participants in particular for different reasons. Firstly, their deep commitment to becoming better professionals despite the often restricted opportunities in their context made them stand out from the rest of the teachers participating in ACDP throughout the data generation period. Secondly, because of our fluent communication, their individual journeys towards professional empowerment can be clearly visualised in their discourse. Although the opportunities for learning I was offering were not equally meaningful for all the participants, Juliana and Soledad are among those whose
stories of empowerment evidence the major potential of a programme such as ACDP, in which the Postmethod parameters are foregrounded. Last but not least, the professional and research relationships we established had an impact on the research itself and also on me as an individual. By exploring all these issues from a reflexive standpoint, I hope to provide a window on their journeys for the reader to visualise how this blended learning programme allowed them to become more confident and competent professionals.

In terms of the questions this action research intervention has set out to answer, both Juliana’s and Soledad’s stories have lent support to the idea that in this setting, a blended teacher development programme can indeed facilitate participants’ professional empowerment by raising their awareness of the particular and the practical in their professions, in order to allow for an exploration of what is possible. Conversely, Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) analytical framework has provided a useful language to analyse their discourse and visualise their movement towards the type of higher-order thinking that is necessary for them to become empowered in Postmethod terms.

For Juliana, her interaction with the possible was linked to her discovery of and engagement with action research as well as the literature in TESOL which she had previously had restricted access to. With regard to Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry notions, during our online teaching conversations, she integrated the ideas from the literature and drew on the social to invoke my teaching discourse, which in turn facilitated her move towards higher order thinking of the kind that she needed to become a more confident practitioner. In terms of Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) Postmethod conditions, she increased her awareness of what was particular and practical in her context, and it was the action research perspective which prompted her to explore the possibilities of professional emancipation in a context marked by an authoritarian director and negative collegial competitiveness.

Soledad reached the same destinations that were professional emancipation and empowerment, yet her exploration of the possibilities occurred in a different fashion. During the first iteration, she capitalised on the social aspects of our tutor-
participant relationship and strove to apply the action research framework to her practice. Like her colleague, during our online exchanges she repeatedly invoked my teaching presence, which offered her a tool to move towards higher-order thinking. However, only when the VLE was introduced did the action research perspective become more meaningful to her, providing a framework for her to explore the possibilities inherent in the use of educational technologies. The type of empowerment that resulted from her engagement with educational technologies can be visualised through concrete outcomes such as the Student Centre or the MSS project for her local state secondary school (described in section 7.3.2. of this chapter).

The present chapter is organised as follows. In sections 7.2 and 7.3, I will describe Juliana’s and Soledad’s explorations of the possible; telling the story of their identity reconstruction and professional empowerment by presenting my analysis of relevant data from different sources. As was done in previous chapters, I will code the data from our virtual exchanges and assignments using Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) notions of teaching, social and cognitive presence. In section 7.4, I will reflect on the various types of impact these participants and I had on each other and the programme, and discuss how our professional lives were shaped by the experience.

7.2. Juliana: Discovering Action Research

‘I cannot separate my personal life and my life as a teacher. My students know a lot about what I am doing most of the time. They know about my likes, dislikes, what my house is like; we have shared birthdays in and outside the classroom and end-of-year parties in my house.’

(Extract from Juliana’s 2009 assignment)

The words above aptly describe Juliana’s professional life, which she perceived as being inseparable from what is personal. Emotional, sensitive, and passionate about her work, during the ACDP experience she offered me a window not only on her career experiences, but also on the complex politics of being a teacher outside the capital city, as can be seen in the extract below from my research journal.
Juliana told me an interesting story about the director. It seems she and another colleague tried to buy some Cambridge ESOL materials (only available in the capital) without telling the director (btw, why should they??). The thing is that mistakenly, the package was sent to the director’s home in Town B, and the woman opened the package (addressed to one of the teachers) and immediately hit the roof. She was furious that they had bought materials without telling her, so she immediately contacted Anglo Montevideo and requested that from that moment on no materials be sent to Town B unless they reach her first. Dear god. (Research journal, May 19 2009)

Juliana’s experience of taking part in ACDP was marked by her discovery of action research, which offered her a novel perspective from which to view her professional life. Her enthusiasm was also fuelled by the readings I assigned, possibly due to the fact that in her context, access to the relevant TESOL literature had been somewhat restricted prior to ACDP, which is not surprising in the light of authoritarian behaviours such as that in the extract above. Her enthusiasm peaked in the first iteration and decreased slightly after the introduction of the blend, as she felt the technological aspects of the programme were at times too challenging for her. Notwithstanding her limited enthusiasm for the blended aspects of the programme, she worked unfailingly on the virtual spaces in collaboration with Soledad and other colleagues, always viewing her practice from an action research perspective.

7.2.1. 2008: Renaming experiences

As soon as Juliana first learned about the term during ACDP, she realised she had instinctively conducted action research at other times during her career without being aware of its existence as a research tradition. In the e-mail conversation below, from May 2008, she was attempting to theorise one particular action research project which she felt had been a major milestone in her career.
After reading about Action Research and reflecting about it I have come to the conclusion that I have done something similar...

I was worried. I noticed that in my class it didn’t work as I had expected. So while talking during breaks with my colleague ideas arose...

We talked to the headmistress and explained what was happening; we explained our project and asked for permission first. We had to put our ideas into paper...

In my first attempt and to “start small” I talked to “four problematic students. I explained them what the idea was and asked them if they were ready to receive help from a classmate.

In the lengthy e-mail from which the extracts above were drawn, she described an action research experience in her local state secondary school in which she had collaborated with a colleague to improve their learners’ motivation. In the second part of the extract (‘I was worried…’), although the content is social in terms of Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) analysis framework, it could also be described as a cognitive act in that it was reconstructing a past experience in the light of a new framework. She intended to use this newly-reconstructed experience as a basis for her assignment, and was invoking my teaching presence by asking for feedback.

Well, Magdalena as you can see from above this was the result of my work and homework from your first session. I beg your pardon if I had made grammar or spelling mistakes but I want to learn, this is the reason that I’m showing you this. I hope it is useful for my assignment but I would be delighted if it can help you with your research because I think you are doing a great job and what you are doing is not to “start small”; I admire people like you always trying to improve themselves, I would like to have the courage and the capacity you have. Meanwhile, I am so happy with the course and with you. Thanks

Her motivation and interest in becoming a better professional were evident in the extract above (‘...I want to learn, this is the reason that I’m showing you this’), in which she was invoking my teaching presence once again. The highly affective content of her discourse was also clear in statements such as ‘I would be delighted if it can help you with your research’; ‘I admire people like you always trying to
improve themselves’; ‘I am so happy with the course and with you’. In terms of the Community of Inquiry framework, these expressions of support and encouragement could only be coded as ‘cohesive’, but it should be noted that the label does not exactly capture Juliana’s intention, given the one-to-one nature of the exchange. Motivated by Juliana’s enthusiasm, I offered the feedback and encouragement she was requesting by clarifying what I expected from her for the assignment.

Juliana, I think you’ve done a great job, and it’s not starting small at all! Are you thinking of using this as a basis for your assignment?
Here are the assignment guidelines as I gave them to you at the beginning:

**Assignment 1 (August)**: A 1500 to 2500-word assignment describing an action research plan focusing on classroom management. Assignments must include:
- An analysis of the context
- Identification of an appropriate focus
- An outline of the research plan
- Possible problems and expected outcomes

**Assignment 2 (December)**: A 2000 to 4000-word assignment focusing on one of the following areas: writing, speaking, classroom management, motivation. Assignments must be based on an action research project and must include:
- Principles informing the area.
- A report on action research plan and findings.
- A statement of what has been learnt (i.e., a theorisation)
- A practical outline of how to use the relevant findings/conclusions.

I think your work is great and it would make a fantastic assignment. To make it fit one of the topics, you could say it is related to motivation. However, I was thinking, since you’re such a keen action researcher 😊, why not try to do something new? Let me know how you feel about this...

In terms of the style, you would need to structure it a bit more formally, but the important concepts and reflections are already there, so it’s just a matter of making it more ‘narrative’ without bullet points.

In my reply, I tried to motivate her to continue experimenting with action research (‘since you’re such a keen action researcher’), always offering my support, and
highlighting the importance of feelings (‘Let me know how you feel about this’). In terms of the Community of Inquiry teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters, although the extract can only be coded as teaching presence, the social aspects of my teaching discourse are evident in phrases such as the above-mentioned ones.

As regards teaching presence, the message evidences a combination of different moves. I started by reassuring and encouraging Juliana (‘I think you’ve done a great job...’) and then went on to provide explicit guidelines on content construction by displaying the assignment rubric. I continued by reassuring her again (‘I think your work is great and it would make a fantastic assignment’) and encouraged her to experiment with new possibilities (‘...why not try to do something new?’). Towards the end of the message, I offered more of the technical tools she needed in order to submit her work (‘In terms of the style,...’).

The realisation that she was ‘a keen action researcher’ constituted a meaningful source of encouragement for Juliana, as it implied a positive reconstruction of her professional identity. As a result of it, she was motivated to devise a new action research plan to improve the quality of her work with a particular group of children she liked very much. Through her e-mail teaching conversations with me, she designed and fine-tuned this new action research plan, a process which occurred over an extended period of three months during the first ACDP iteration in 2008. In the e-mail extracts below, drawn from our online teaching conversations, Juliana was describing the initial implementation stages of her action research, and was successfully relating her experience to what she had read in the literature I had provided about action research.
My CH2 students (seven children) are lovely kids between 8 and 11 years old. They are very receptive and manageable. I told them they would have to learn a poem by heart and I was going to film them. They reacted as I had expected. They loved the idea of being filmed and then watched themselves on TV.

Today (28th May) after having read a bit about action research I realise that the context is important (I think I have always known that but I believe that now it has become conscious? Could it be? and we as teachers have to pay special attention on the learners and also their needs; this activity could have never been done or be so successful in other classes.

This extract clearly shows two different cognitive presence moves. In the first one, Juliana was describing the process, operating at the basic level of information exchange. The second part of the message shows higher-level cognitive activity (‘Today...after having read a bit about action research I realise that...’), evidencing the fact that in this, like in many other instances, she was able to relate the ideas in the literature to her own professional reality. She also displayed a reflective ability to metacomment as she wrote (‘I think I have always known that but I believe that now it has become conscious’), which to me was quite rare in this setting in which participants were mostly interested in single-loop learning and ready-made solutions rather than critical reflection. In fact, throughout our e-mail teaching conversations she was able to articulate her thoughts and elaborate on new ideas, realising the need for action research to be an integral part of her professional life, often evidencing her ability to reflect on her action research experience.

it is curious Magdalena, it is a feeling that I can’t stop, it’s a circle, the AR cycle, isn’t it?, a feeling that I will never finish...

In the extract above, Juliana’s social presence is evident in Community of Inquiry terms. However, her discourse is showing a cognitive move, in that she was connecting her experience to the ideas about action research with which she was now familiar. As was shown in the extracts above, Juliana’s movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking often revolved around the reading she was doing in parallel with the design of her action research plan. Such movement
towards higher levels of cognitive processing was clearly evident in all of our teaching conversations, in some of which she related the ideas in different TESOL articles to her own professional experience, as seen below.

*After reading this material I identified myself with what Paul Wadden and Sean Mc Govern mention in general remarks: "...if negative class participation appears to be more prevalent in one particular class, this could signal that the teacher or the administrators is largely at fault.*

*I totally agree with the writer's comments: "...when students doing a sentence-combining exercise argue about whether a sentence sounds better with ALTHOUGH or HOWEVER, that probably teaches them more about sentence structure and sentence variety than any number of mechanical exercises or explanations from the teacher."

In an equally confident fashion, she was able to react critically towards some of the ideas she encountered in her readings, articulating her criticism in the light of her *particular* professional reality, emphasising the fundamental role of the practical.

*I don't think our students can increase the responsibility they feel toward each other by sharing their homework in some way and correct each other's assignments.*

This critical engagement with the literature, supported by her experience, allowed her to plan solutions and reflect on their implementation, as she did in the message extract shown below.

*My senior 5 students had already worked on descriptions of persons. What most of them did (unfortunately) was what Ann Raimes claims so I decided to try something different for them so as to see if they could improve their writing. I prepared a kind of classmate profile with general questions (I will enclose it in the appendix). I thought of an interview because they convey to others genuine information transmitted to them by other students and I hoped they find it motivating.*
In terms of the Community of Inquiry framework, the analysis allowed me to see how these e-mail exchanges facilitated Juliana’s movement towards the kind of higher-order thinking that was necessary for her to theorise her practice and become more confident. During these e-mail exchanges, I was able to see that in Juliana’s case, the development experience was very much linked to the affective support provided by the tutor. This seems to confirm the need for further exploration of the social (affective) nature of the teaching presence construct, as I have argued throughout the data analysis chapters (4, 5, 6). This exploration is beyond the scope of this study, in which I intended to explore the roles played by each of the ‘presences’, as defined in Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s work (2000), in this particular setting.

7.2.1.1. The role of affect in Juliana’s discourse

At times Juliana would resort to Spanish in her e-mails, which I interpreted as a social move to strengthen our bonds. Alternatively, the more interpersonal, even intimate content of these messages may have prompted her to resort to her first language, as can be seen in the extract below from July 2008.
It also seemed meaningful that whenever the content of Juliana’s e-mails seemed more interpersonal than transactional to me, this would coincide with her leaving sentences unfinished. It is difficult to ascertain what the function of what I considered an over-use of unfinished sentences was for her exactly, although one such possibility might be to increase the tentativeness of the message. Alternatively, it could be meant to highlight the informality or the confidential quality of the message, or either to signal thoughtful pausing. Despite not being sure of the intended use of this move, with e-mails such as the above in which the social elements were so marked, I was often worried that Juliana perceived our relationship as one of friendship, while I was intent on it being ‘appropriate’ in research terms. This was an issue I explored in different Cooperative Development (e-mail) sessions with my supervisor.

What I mean is that I am not uncomfortable with their telling me about their personal lives, it’s just that I want to be careful. I also think that maybe it’s just me worrying too much... Maybe deep down I still have some positivist ideas about the detached researcher that I’m not aware of...  (EMCD exchange, February 26 2009)
The EMCD session from which the extract above was taken allowed me to elaborate on what was worrying me at the time. As the course progressed, I was able to articulate and 'order' my thoughts further, which I continued to explore in another EMCD session later on in the year.

**In terms of my research, this seems an important step. I can now see that my relationship with Soledad and Juliana is more complex than I thought. This complexity has been worrying for me on different levels. Firstly, the superficial or easily seen methodological level, and now this personal level which affects my beliefs (I don’t know what to call it). I believe this is a clear example, in reflexivity terms, of how the research is affecting me and how it’s making me learn more about myself as an individual, not just as a researcher.** (EMCD exchange, November 23 2009)

By reflecting on my relationship with Juliana and Soledad, I was also able to analyse my relationship with other participants and learned to solve certain issues. For example, in the transition between the 2009 and 2010 iterations, most participants wanted to continue using the VLE, yet I had to make it clear that this was only possible if they continued taking part in ACDP. I was seriously worried about this, as I did not want to halt their development, yet I did not think it was logical or fair to allow them to use the site without paying fees. By the time the EMCD session had come to an end, I had planned and implemented a solution to deal with the problem and ‘establish boundaries’ for participants not to misunderstand my role.

**Last week I went on with my plan to establish boundaries, so I emailed all participants and clarified the 2010 situation. I explained that there would be an ACDP 2010 course, open to all provinces, and they were all very welcome to join again if they wanted to continue using the site. This felt good!!** (EMCD exchange, December 23, 2009)

Having dealt with the issue as best as I could, I realised that another possible explanation for Juliana’s ‘intimate’ discourse was that it was one of her tools to make the ACDP experience a more fulfilling and meaningful one. That is, her professional insecurity, determined at least partly by her lack of formal training and local context, determined a need in her to establish a close relationship with me. In the same way as having access to literature and discovering action research were novel, empowering experiences for her, the same might be the case with the building of a ‘friendship’ with a capital-city expert.
7.2.2. 2009: Technological challenges

The blended version of ACDP was stressful for Juliana at times, something which had not occurred during the first iteration. However, it represented an opportunity to collaborate with her colleagues during which she was forced to move beyond her comfort zone. Her initial reactions towards the technological aspects of ACDP showed a certain degree of apprehension, as can be seen in the e-mail extracts below from February 2009. Interestingly for me, as in other e-mails she sent which I have discussed earlier, her discourse was full of unfinished sentences. It is also worth noting that she reverted to Spanish once again, a (probably unconscious) decision which may have been caused by her apprehension towards technology and lack of ICT confidence. In March of 2009, when she sent me the e-mail below, she was trying to collaborate with other colleagues in the co-design of the VLE I attempted in early 2009 (described in Chapter 5).

*Sí inútil me siento... quiero entrar para ver nuestro sitio y no puedo y como Soledad no está te consulto a vos... no me acepta el username and password... o estoy muy confundida o ahí tengo que poner mis datos... mi correo y mi contraseña es eso o le estoy errando? me lo invalida... si se te ocurre que puedo estar haciendo mal decime y perdoná la molestia como siempre...*

Yes, I feel useless... I want to log in to see our site and I can’t and as Soledad is away I’m asking you... It won’t accept my username and password... or am I very confused about having to enter my personal information there... my e-mail and password or am I wrong? It is invalidated... if you can think of what I could be doing wrong please tell me and I’m sorry to bother as usual...

With regard to the Community of Inquiry framework, it is important to note that the ‘open communication> asking questions’ code does not fully capture the nuances of the participant’s discourse. This is in the first place because she was using one-to-one communication, as has been discussed before, but also because she was not simply asking a question but was clearly invoking my teaching presence. Her limited ICT competence made her feel ‘useless’, making all her confidence as an action researcher disappear, at least momentarily. In a manner...
which clearly invoked my presence, she expressed she was overwhelmed by my request to co-design the VLE, manifesting this clearly in another e-mail sent a few days later.

I haven’t written so as not to bother you... you are working so hard and here I am, not sure about how I can contribute... we got together on Saturday to explore our site.... We saw as much as we could... we loved the site with the songs... the biographies... everything actually... I am still a little overwhelmed about all this... thinking about how to make the most of it.... I suppose you will help us, right? In any case, I promise to have a look from a different angle, as you say, to see if I can come up with something...

Despite her apparent interest in making good use of this tool, she was open about being ‘overwhelmed about all this’. Again she invoked my teaching presence, asking for reassurance (‘I suppose you will help us, right?’).

Juliana was the clearest example that you cannot ask participants to describe what is practical for them until they themselves have developed the skills needed to do so, as was discussed in Chapter 5 (p.135). That is to say, I was asking them to act as independent, confident professionals whilst in the process of facilitating the kind of professional empowerment that would eventually help them reach such a state. Notwithstanding these feelings of insecurity, her assignment entitled ‘From traditional to blended learning: an action research plan’ showed the discovery of an area which, prior to ACDP, she had believed to be beyond her possibilities.
From my reflections on my experience and the principles outlined before, I have come to the conclusion that both motivation and ICT are essential in helping students improve their language skills... My aim is to introduce a VLE to support the traditional lessons, wishing to improve my students’ performances.

Also, as part of her explorations of the VLE she had continued her collaboration with Soledad, which had in fact been decisive in the final product that was her assignment.

Again in 2009, Juliana’s e-mails contained very personal information about her family life, an aspect of our relationship which I continued to find uncomfortable. There was one e-mail in particular which I have refrained from showing given its very sensitive and personal content, in which she told me details of how her family life was being affected by her divorce. I was able to empathise with Juliana’s story, which made me feel sorry for her and admire her at the same time. Nevertheless, I was not sure about how to react and how far to involve myself in her story, as she clearly intended me to act as her confidante, something which at the time, I considered unnecessary and to some extent inappropriate in research terms. I tried to involve myself as little as possible, and it was only after the research period was over that I was able to re-signify the vulnerability of my position and the importance of making the most of my emotional involvement with the participants and the data (Behar 1996:6).

7.2.2.1. Juliana in the VLE

Despite the fact that she was not overly confident about her ICT skills, Juliana made a considerable effort to express herself publicly in the VLE. At times, she would attempt to have the same kind of conversation with her colleagues which she had had with me via e-mail, showing her critical engagement with the literature and her passion for action research.
I would like to share with you my experience with my Senior 5 students. As part of my assignment on Action Research I decided to work with them on writing. What most of them did (unfortunately) was Ann Raimes claims: "...while writing students are copying, substituting, transforming, and manipulating prose written by someone else. They are not composing. But we like to think they are." Taking this into consideration I tried to do something different for them so as to see if they could improve their writing.

I gave them a sheet of paper with this title: Your English teacher is organizing a story-competition. She is looking for the student who writes the most incredible story. The story must begin with these words: "It was a beautiful spring day. I had left my house early in the morning to go to the PE class when..." The prize will be a big bar of chocolate.

Juliana was keen to share her experience openly ('I would like to share with you...'), and showed evidence of having connected ideas to experiment with solutions ('...I tried to do something different for them so as to see...'). This kind of move, which is coded as cognitive presence, also contains a subtle teaching element, once again evidencing the embedded nature of the presences. This kind of posting did not often stimulate her peers to respond, except for the case of Luis, who appeared to have a similar ability to reflect to that displayed by Juliana.

hi, nice to see we are trying similar things and with similar results. I worked with a group of S4 with the title A holiday where something went wrong. I tried almost the same ideas, but asking them to write the introduction, then exchange notebooks and write the first part of the development, and so on until the conclusion.

But I have to say the results were not so rewarding, maybe because we did not discussed ideas before writing - or maybe because I didn’t offer them a bar of chocolate. Anyway, on Thursday I asked them to write about The first time... on word and send me the piece of writing by e-mail and then post it on a blog. I have already received two.

Luis was displaying his social presence by acknowledging and being supportive of Juliana’s contribution. The second part of the message ('But I have to say the results...') shows cognitive presence, in that Luis was reflecting on his own experience and connecting it to Juliana’s in order to make sense of it. This kind of
exchange in which the participants’ cognitive presence was sparked through discussion was what I had expected to see more of in the VLE. Still, I was witnessing similar exchanges during the face-to-face meetings, and I interpreted this as further support for the idea that in this blended setting the presences could be distributed over the teaching and learning spaces.

In terms of social moves, Juliana also attempted to socialise with her colleagues through the ACDP pub.

_I have been teaching at Anglo since 1990. I can't imagine myself doing anything else. I love working with children and especially teenagers. I believe I have a good relationship with them._

_I would like to be remembered not only for the things they learnt but for a person to whom they could trust._

_I consider we are living in a complicated world and if I can help them in any sense I feel I had fulfilled something, I was able to help them in their lives._

_It's a nice feeling when former students come to your house only to tell you what they have been doing or just to give you a kiss._

_I also worked at Town B highschool for 18 years but I gave up teaching two years ago, because I was short of time and I have two little boys aged 11 and 9._

_Well, that's all for now. Hoping to hear from you too!!_

In the posting above, the fundamental role played by the humanistic aspects of her profession was once again evident to me, in statements such as ‘I would like to be remembered not only for the things they learnt but for a person whom they could trust’, which I believe provides an apt description of Juliana’s view of her role as a teacher of English.

**7.2.3. Conclusion**

Juliana’s discovery of the _possible_ was clearly evident in her first iteration discourse, when she discovered action research, gained access to meaningful literature and engaged in thought-provoking teaching conversations with me. Although the second and third ACDP iterations represented a challenge for Juliana in terms of her ICT skills, she engaged in collaborative work with her colleagues and was able to explore new, technology-related areas of her profession which she
might not have been confident enough to engage in otherwise. These newly-found areas of her profession constituted a source of professional empowerment and thus opened up new possibilities for her, providing a new starting point for another Postmethod cycle of empowerment.

By analysing her discourse I was also able to confirm the usefulness of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) Community of Inquiry framework to describe the participants’ behaviour. In her e-mail and VLE data, the embedded nature of the teaching, social and cognitive presence constructs was once again evident. Although Juliana was one of the participants whose discourse showed more cognitive presence, by analysing her data I was able to confirm that some of her cognitive activity was evidenced as presence in other arenas such as her assignments.

7.3. Soledad: Becoming an agent of change

‘To be honest, I have been growing as a teacher since this course started because I have learned a lot of theory I had no idea and many practical activities to do with my students. In addition to this, I was taught how to work with an action research plan which I am sure is the best tool a teacher could learn how to use, since it can be applied to any case in any context. This new experience has taught me a lot because it has given me not only the possibility to work individually but also the possibility to work in collaboration with my colleagues...’ (Extract from Soledad’s 2009 assignment)

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Soledad’s journey of empowerment occurred differently from Juliana’s. In fact, her enthusiasm increased markedly as soon as the programme became blended, with technological innovation being the backbone of her identity reconstruction. As she and I agreed in our conversations about the research report, in the 2008 to 2010 time period she evolved from being a shy, sensitive and somewhat insecure professional to a confident, competent and creative leader.
7.3.1. 2008: Breaking the ice

Very much like Juliana, from the initial stages of ACDP in 2008 Soledad showed great interest in the course and in establishing a close relationship with me as a tutor and friend. During that first meeting in April 2008 in her town, she had already made an impression on me, as can be seen in the following extract from my journal.

*Soledad – outside said how she felt about competitiveness, how some colleagues took offence when students changed teachers, and how collaboration is difficult because of that. She said she worked very well in collaboration with Ema and Juliana, but made faces when referring to ‘the others’ in general. So I might be asking them to do something [collaboration] which is a bit of a utopia maybe?*  
(Research journal, May 16 2008)

During this first meeting, Soledad introduced me to the difficult relationships and problems inherent in the ‘Centre’ arrangement, which I have discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis. Aside from the two colleagues with whom she felt at ease, collegial relationships had a connotation of strain and competitiveness for her. This could partly be due to the competitiveness inherent in the Centre arrangement and certain attitudes on the part of the local director, or alternatively it might have to do with the fact that Soledad was initially quite insecure about her teaching skills and language proficiency.

In a similar fashion to that of Juliana, Soledad initiated her e-mail communication with me in order to fine-tune and develop an action research plan. These e-mail teaching conversations constituted a fundamental element in our collaboration, especially during the first ACDP iteration in 2008. In the next section I describe and interpret some data from such e-mail exchanges.

7.3.1.1. 2008: The teaching conversations

For the duration of the 2008 version of the programme, Soledad and I frequently engaged in the kind of e-mail teaching conversations described in Chapter 4 about the action research project she was trying to implement. In the example below, Soledad was attempting to define her action research project in the light of the
parameters I had provided during the face-to-face meeting. My comments can be seen in block capitals, embedded in her message.

My purpose for this project is to solve a problem which is to look for techniques in order to help my intermediate-level students to be more creative writers.

FANTASTIC. THE PROBLEM IS THE LACK OF IDEAS THEN? AND THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT IS TO ENHANCE SS' CREATIVITY. AM I GETTING IT RIGHT?

The topic: I am going to investigate a specific aspect of writing as it is: creativity.

Focus: How can I narrow down my issue so that the investigation is manageable? I haven’t found the answer to the previous question because I don’t understand it. sorry if it sounds silly. YOU MEAN YOU DON’T KNOW HOW TO NARROW DOWN? WELL FOR EXAMPLE, THINK OF STHG MORE SPECIFIC. IT COULD BE WHICH KINDS OF ACTIVITIES ARE MORE EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING CREATIVITY FOR EXAMPLE, OR HOW FAR STUDENTS’ COMPOSITIONS IMPROVE AFTER YOU DO THESE ‘CREATIVE TASKS’? SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

Time: Should I specify how many classes does each activity take? (eg. showing films) Or is it the whole action research?

I THINK THIS REFERS TO THE WHOLE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT. IT’S NOT SO IMPORTANT, JUST AN ESTIMATE WOULD BE OK.

During the exchange, Soledad repeatedly invoked my teaching presence by asking questions, a move which Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) describe as social. Throughout the message, I provided the information she requested, trying to engage her further by ensuring I was understanding her intentions (‘Am I getting it right?’; ‘Something like that?’).
In the following series of e-mails we exchanged, she was again immersed in the process of refining her action research plan by attempting to articulate her ideas based on my comments.
Identify the problem: my main concern is about writing, specially those students who are in an intermediate level and they insist on writing as if they wouldn’t be creative enough, due to the lack of ideas.

SO YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CREATIVE ASPECTS OF WRITING, IS THAT RIGHT? YOU FEEL THEY LACK IDEAS

Possible causes: one possible cause it could be the lack of motivation due to I have always had difficulties in writing. Another possible cause, which I belive it could be the most influential is the lack of reading either in english or spanish.

I THINK MOTIVATION IS NOT ONLY RELATED TO THE TEACHER, BUT ALSO TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, AND TO PREVIOUS LEARNING EXPERIENCES AS WELL.

My purpose for this project is to enhance students’ creativity in order to solve the following problem: “the students’ lack of ideas”.
Topic: I am going to investigate a specific aspect of writing as it is: CREATIVITY. GOOD AGAIN. MAYBE MAKE IT MORE SPECIFIC BY PHRASING IT SOMETHING LIKE ‘PROMOTING CREATIVITY IN NARRATIVES’? JUST AN IDEA.

Focus: In order to narrow down my issue so that the investigation is manageable, I have thought in a specific task, which could help students to promote ideas. For example: students are asked to close their eyes while they are listening to a CD which has a series of recorded sounds by the teacher. Those sounds could be in the following order:
1. Rain and thunders.
2. Someone running in the rain.
4. A door opens.
5. A door closes.
6. The answer machine is saying: “ Hi Megan…” And in that precise moment the recorded sounds stop and students have to open their eyes to write in first place what the situation is and in second place write what will happen in the story.

What do you think Magda, is it ok?

YES, IT’S A LOVELY IDEA BUT I THINK IT WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ENOUGH. MAYBE YOU COULD THINK OF OTHER WAYS TO PROMOTE CREATIVITY AS WELL. I’M JUST THINKING OUT LOUD, BUT HOW ABOUT ASKING THEM TO WORK WITH RANDOM PICTURES TO CREATE STORIES? OR GIVING THEM UNFINISHED STORIES FOR THEM TO CREATE AN INTERESTING ENDING? THE SAME COULD BE DONE THE OTHER WAY ROUND, MAKING THEM THINK OF BEGINNINGS. SO IN THAT WAY, YOUR ACTION WILL CONSIST OF INTRODUCING A SERIES OF ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE CREATIVITY, NOT JUST ONE

Time: I suppose that the whole action research project could take a month approximately. Product: My expectation is that students become more creative writers according to their level.

EXACTLY. YOU WANT TO SEE HOW FAR THESE ACTIVITIES HELP THEM BECOME MORE CREATIVE, AND THEN IF THEY DON’T NO PROBLEM, YOU WOULD JUST REPORT THAT AND REFLECT ON WHY THESE THINGS WORKED OR THEY DIDN’T.
Unlike the previous exchange, in which Soledad was mostly invoking my teaching presence through the social, in this one she was clearly exploring and exchanging ideas, which Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) would describe as cognitive moves. Through my comments I provided a combination of direct instruction and encouragement, trying to encourage her to continue refining her thoughts. I intended to help Soledad to move in the directions I considered best for her (‘Yes, it’s a lovely idea but I think it will probably not be enough’) and did not refrain from making suggestions, such as ‘How about asking them to work with random pictures to create stories?’ However, my discourse was always marked by the tentativeness which I considered necessary to allow her the space to make her own decisions (‘Just an idea’; ‘I’m just thinking out loud’), so that the agency was clearly positioned in her.

Through teaching conversations such as the above, Soledad was able to refine her first action research plan, implement it and reflect on its outcomes. In her second assignment, she showed how she had exercised her higher-order thinking skills, as can be seen in the following extract.

Because I know them very well, and because of my experience, I can try to find some additional explanations for this. For example, I think this can be due to their dependence on me as a teacher. As they have not opportunities to speak in English outside the classroom, they lack practice, consequently they cannot do well on their own unless I guide them.

As shown in this section, the teaching conversations proved to be a very motivating and empowering tool for Soledad, as she was given the opportunity to do a guided discovery of her ability to work within an action research framework, which later on she was to apply extensively in other work environments (see Figure 7.1.). However, in the next section I will show how it was the introduction of the virtual space which empowered her most.

7.3.2. 2009: From novice to expert

As soon as the 2009 iteration of ACDP began, Soledad expressed a keen interest in the use of VLEs for language teaching. Like her fellow ACDP participants, she was
mostly interested in the VLE as a teaching opportunity, so she was involved in the
creation of the Student Centre and became the teacher with the greatest degree of
expertise on it.

On the main site, she was the most actively involved participant, often trying to
engage her colleagues in collaboration and discussion, as was shown in Chapter 6.
During the 2010 face-to-face meetings, when a slot in the sessions was devoted to
experimenting with the VLE, she often assisted me in monitoring what the rest of
the participants were doing, given her expertise on the subject.

Soon after the Student Centre was created, Soledad shared her excitement about it
with a colleague from the local state secondary school, Martina, who had not been
allowed to participate in ACDP given that she was not working for Anglo at the
time. Both of them immediately visualised the implementation of a Student Centre
for their students in state education, and enthusiastically began to explore the
possibilities around this idea, which I will refer to as the MSS (Moodle for State
Secondary School) project.

What I arranged with Martina and Soledad is this. I gave them a space
(www.secondaryschool.acdponline.net), which they will be using with their
high school students. Martina will be having guest access to our Anglo site too.
Then the three of them will work together and do action research with a sort
of different angle, comparing the impact of the online site on each of the
institutions in terms of student motivation. Anyway, the meeting was good,
what we basically did was clear doubts about the online space, how to enter
students, grade them, etc etc. I have to say that I couldn’t answer all their
questions – quite a steep learning curve for me too. (Research journal, May 22
2009)

What should have been celebrated and encouraged by all employers was in fact
very difficult to implement, since the local Anglo director believed the Moodle
Student Centre idea was her property as part of ACDP and should therefore not be
‘copied’ by the local state secondary school. After many difficult conversations with
her and my own employers, trying to make them understand that it was the ACDP
participants and I that owned the Student Centre, Soledad and her colleague were
finally able to design and implement a Moodle space for their students at the local
state secondary school (MSS), although it was agreed that the domain name would
be changed to www.(townb)secondaryschool.com. Already at the initial stages of
MSS, the idea of the *possible* as envisioned by Kumaravadivelu (2006b) became apparent to me. Soledad, who had found her own affordances in the learning opportunities I was offering, had involved her colleague Martina in an exploration of the *possibilities* offered by the use of a VLE with their students. From an action research perspective, this process of emancipation from oppressive forces had already become apparent in the incident described above.

In a completely bottom-up effort, to the extent that even the financial costs were borne by them, Soledad and Martina presented the MSS project to their employer at the state school. In the presentation below it can be seen how Soledad had integrated the action research principles and procedures she had been introduced to in ACDP.

![Slide 1](image1.png)

**What is action research?**
- Procedures teachers engage in to:
  - Improve their teaching
  - Evaluate success/appropriacy of activities and procedures
  - Identify a problem and try to solve it

![Slide 2](image2.png)

**CONCLUSIONS**
- Patience and hard work are needed: *Nothing good happens fast.*
- We obtained positive results using it as an extension of the work done in class.
- Most students, especially those from lower classes, got really involved in the project.
- Collaborative work is essential.
- You never stop working.

**Figure 7.1. Slides from MSS presentation at Town B state secondary school, August 2009**
Action research had served as a framework for the design and implementation of the MSS project, as a result of which Soledad and Martina had been able to explore the possible and realise the importance of collaborative work. These and other important conclusions seen in Figure 7.1 were disseminated among their colleagues as should be done by action researchers (McNiff & Whitehead 2002; Sommer 2009; Somekh 2010), when Soledad and Martina involved the rest of the staff at the local secondary school in what became a cross-disciplinary effort to integrate Moodle into secondary education. Below is an extract from an enthusiastic e-mail which Soledad sent me in August 2009, after the first formal presentation of MSS.

Estoy re contenta porque ayer a la coordinadora le ENCANTÓ la página web, la idea, absolutamente todo. La verdad que MUCHISIMAS GRACIAS por todo. No tuvimos mucho tiempo pero lo ella vio fue: entramos a la página, luego le mostramos tipos de ejercicios y le dijimos que areas los chicos iban a mejorar con cada ejercicio y muchas cosas mas.

I’m really pleased because the coordinator LOVED the web page, the idea, absolutely everything. THANK YOU so much for everything, really. We didn’t have much time but what she did see was: we entered the site, then we showed her types of exercises and we told her which areas the students were going to improve with each exercise and many other things.

Soon after this, the local Coordinator involved the national Inspectors, and the project progressed much faster than any of us could have predicted.

Just back from Manchester, only to hear the most exciting news. It seems Soledad’s and Martina’s project (www.(townb)secondaryschool.com) was presented to the local inspector, who then encouraged them to present their work in other provinces/areas. Today they went to Town M and tomorrow they are presenting in Town T. I had a look at their ppt and it is great, very much mirroring the written project they had been working on under my supervision. Apparently, they have been told the project could become huge in many ways. They might be asked to go round the country training teachers to use it, or they might be asked to develop online materials for others to use. I am so glad, this is definitely teacher empowerment. (Research journal, September 22, 2009)

During 2010, Soledad and Martina visited various neighbouring towns and cities, showing their work to colleagues in other state schools who were interested in
implementing ICT as an aid to language learning. They were even invited to present at a larger meeting for provincial coordinators held in Montevideo. Motivated by this success, they went on to contact the head coordinator of the English curriculum for state education in Uruguay, and met her for an interview in October 2009 to which I was invited as well. Paradoxically, it was difficult for them to be listened to by the authorities, although Moodle was just beginning to be explored and its implementation for state education was still being ‘considered’. In fact, the MSS project was the first project of its kind in Uruguay. Despite this disappointment, they persisted in their bottom-up effort and in April 2011, the three of us presented the MSS project at the most important Uruguayan convention for TESOL teachers (URUTESOL, De Stefani et al. 2011). As I write this chapter in September 2011, the project has continued to evolve and at the moment all the teachers in the secondary school in Town B are working under their guidance to design blended versions of the different subjects.

7.3.3. Conclusions

Soledad’s journey of empowerment occurred in different ways. During the initial stages, I was able to see how the virtual teaching conversations were an effective tool for her to enhance her problem solving skills and regain her somewhat fragile confidence. As the VLE was introduced, Soledad’s exploration of the dimension of possibility took centre stage, as she applied the action research framework to the introduction of educational technologies. She not only became an expert user of Moodle, but also developed the habit of working collaboratively with different colleagues. Last but not least, she became a major agent of change in her local town and played a major role in the introduction of educational technologies at a national level.

7.4. Conclusion: Exploring our roles in this research

‘Lo que pasa es que me pasaron tantas cosas lindas durante esta experiencia de 3 años en mi caso, que es imposible resumirla en unas pocas lineas. Por supuesto que lo mas importante de todo es que encontré en ti un ser muy especial e iluminado que ojala me permita seguir siendo parte de tu vida.’
‘The thing is that so many lovely things happened to me during this 3-year experience, that it is impossible to summarise them in a few lines. Of course the most important thing of all is that I found in you a special and enlightened person that I hope will allow me to continue being part of her life.’

(Extract from Soledad’s e-mail, September 2011)

Both Juliana and Soledad explored what was possible for them, reconstructing their professional identities and empowering themselves through the tools available to them in the ACDP experience. At a professional level, this empowerment was manifested as an increased confidence and sense of achievement and fulfilment. They were able to rename and reconstruct previous experiences and theorise their current practices, also becoming agents of change and disseminating their knowledge among their colleagues in different contexts.

Through the ACDP experience, we built a close relationship that often went beyond what was strictly professional. For them, I was more than simply a teacher educator, something which can be clearly seen throughout the data sets. Unsettling though this was for me at times, it allowed me to learn about myself as a TESOL practitioner and researcher. Without Soledad and Juliana, this experience may not have prompted me to analyse my role in the research experience as deeply as I did.

In terms of how this story fits into the thesis and the whole of the action research experience, to some extent I believe it counterbalances the disappointment in my discourse of the 2010 iteration, by providing evidence of the extent to which ACDP had a transformative and emancipatory effect on the lives of some participants, such as Juliana and Soledad.
CHAPTER 8: THE NARRATIVE AND REFLEXIVE DIMENSIONS

‘...how we reflect on our experience and how we make sense of our experience are often achieved in the stories we tell.’ (Johnson and Golombek 2002:4)

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will show how the narrative and reflexive dimensions of my research provided alternative means of triangulating the findings from the inductive and deductive analyses and helped me to reconstruct my identity as a researcher, course designer and teacher educator. Moreover, this additional methodological dimension allowed me to shed light on the complexity of the action researcher’s role.

To define more explicitly the purpose of this chapter in the thesis as a whole, I see it as my response to the call made by McNiff & Whitehead (2002: 108):

‘I would say the process of validating claims to knowledge is moving beyond autocratic activities such as checking whether traditional elements of report writing are accurately executed, towards new dialogical forms of engaging with the report as an authentic interpretation of a life lived in an educational way.’

From the initial stages of my research, I purposefully tried to engage in reflexive thinking, and although my understanding of what this entailed and how best to achieve it evolved as the research experience progressed, my research journal and e-mail Cooperative Development (EMCD) exchanges with my supervisor became aids towards engaging in such reflexivity. My research journal accompanied me throughout the ACDP process, providing a space to articulate my thoughts on the various events occurring throughout the design and implementation of the programme. The EMCD exchanges were initially considered as a tool for examining my thoughts on certain issues of my concern, yet after a while they became a fundamental cog in the action research wheel, providing space for articulation and discovery of ideas and, equally importantly, the planning of actions.
Demonstrating all this for the reader is a very ambitious endeavour in which the complex interplay between action research, narrative, reflexivity and identity needs to be acknowledged. It should be noted that although I have used some of the data from these sources in previous chapters, in the present chapter I will focus on these journal and EMCD data sources exclusively, in order to highlight their potential and value.

The present chapter is organised as follows. I first present some background to position my approach to the role of narratives and reflexivity in research. I then draw on data from my journal and EMCD exchanges in order to reconstruct the action research cycles and explore the different roles I had in the present study. I conclude by reflecting on the role of reflexivity and narratives in this experience, and their potential for enhancing rigour and transparency in action research.

8.2. The reflexive-narrative co-text

Before turning to the exploration of the data, I refer to some key concepts which have informed my decision to focus on this narrative-reflexive aspect of my research. My role as an action researcher is a very complex one. Being immersed in the field, I have a relationship with participants as a teacher educator, course designer and researcher which affects not only the professional but also the personal dimension. To ensure the trustworthiness of my study, I must not only be aware of such complexity but also engage in reflexive thinking to ‘be acutely aware of the ways in which ‘... selectivity, perception, background and inductive processes and paradigms shape the research.’ (Cohen et al. 2000:141). According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003:415) ‘while there is recognition that reflexivity is important in data analysis, in practice few researchers give reflexive accounts of data analysis or discuss how reflexivity can be operationalized’. In this study, I have attempted to foreground this dimension by presenting examples of how I engaged in reflexive thinking during the action research cycles, acknowledging the two-way process in which the researcher affects and is affected by the study.

In a related fashion, another aspect of action research which deserves to be acknowledged and systematically explored is its ‘messy’ nature, which, like the
The researcher’s voice, is often absent from research reports. In Cook’s (2009:289) words, ‘The ‘messy area’ and the subsequent ‘messy turn’ should be recognised as part of the action research approach and celebrated as part of a process that encourages and legitimises exploration and development’. Moreover, the fact that action research is, as described by Crookes (1993:131) ‘explicitly value-laden’ is an aspect that needs to be not only acknowledged but also highlighted, as I intend to do in this chapter.

As regards the role of narrative in research, throughout the present study and after reading the work of authors in various fields such as Canagarajah (1996), Johnson and Golombek (2002), Heikkinen et al. (2007), De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008), Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), Fay (2008), Norton and Early (2011) and Williams (2011), I have come to understand the potential of narrative as a tool to explore one’s identity, or in my case, multiple identities as an action researcher, teacher educator and course designer. According to Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008:2), narratives ‘are aspects of situated language use, employed by speakers/narrators to position a display of situated, contextualized identities’. In this chapter, I intend to show how an exploration of the narratives in my journal and EMCD discourse can offer a window on the reflexive processes which influence the action research experience. In particular, the exploration of how the research and researcher narrative is constructed and how this impacts on the reflexive dimension of the research (Fay 2008) constitutes a very effective tool for the researcher to conduct a self-audit of the quality of the audit trail provided.

Moreover, as explained by Heikkinen et al. (2007:5) ‘Action research reports are often narratives, located in the context of the evolving experiences of those involved’, hence the need for researchers to produce ‘authentic narratives of their research work’. According to Heikkinen et al., the principles of historical continuity, reflexivity, dialectics, workability and evocativeness need to be fulfilled for the trustworthiness of the action research narrative to be enhanced. In the first place, respecting historical continuity involves retaining the chronological order of events, while reflexivity is described as being linked to transparency in terms of relationships and the explicit articulation of ontological assumptions. The principle of dialectics, on the other hand, involves representing different voices and showing
how the researcher’s insight has developed as a result of dialectical relationships. Finally, workability refers to the pragmatic outcomes of the narrative, while evocativeness is linked to the images, thoughts and feelings the narrative can invoke in the reader. I return to these principles at the final point in this chapter in order to reflect on their significance for the narratives in this study.

Another relevant concept I have drawn on is Georgakopoulou’s (2006:123) notion of ‘small stories’, a term which the author describes as covering ‘a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell.’ I believe the concept of small stories has allowed me to acknowledge the importance of the narratives contained in my researcher journal and EMCD sessions, which may otherwise have been overlooked given the fact that they were not intended for narrative inquiry and therefore were not meant to fulfil any specific criteria (as distinct from life histories, for example).

In the next sections I will draw on data from the 2008 and 2009 programme iterations to show how the reflexive and narrative discourses in my research:

a) served as a means for methodological triangulation, allowing me to trace some of the themes that were salient through the programme.

b) illuminated the action researcher’s reflexive journey of identity re-construction, thus enhancing both the transparency and rigour of the research study.

8.3. The first action research cycle in 2008

8.3.1. Tracing the themes: the state of professional need and aspiration in the provinces

As explained in Chapter 1, despite being Uruguayan and living in Uruguay, the distance between my life as a teacher in the capital city and the realities of the participants I was working with was substantial. Throughout the action research cycles and by way of my interactions with the participants, I gained a clearer
understanding of the research setting. My research journal was of paramount importance in the documenting of these interactions, and these ‘small stories’ would later on serve as a means of triangulating my findings about the participants’ state of need and aspiration. In addition, the 2008 EMCD sessions also provided an outlet for me to articulate and reflect on the events in that first iteration.

Although I was aware of the existence of a considerable gap between the Montevidean and provincial teacher profiles in terms of qualifications, as I interacted with participants I realised the extent and significance of this difference.

*I arrived early and spent a long time talking to Luciana, she’s just turned 20 and started teaching last year. She said ‘I haven’t yet got my teaching degree, I will sit for Cambridge CPE next year’. Typical Uruguay, thinking Cambridge CPE is equivalent to pre-service training! Still, she wouldn’t have many chances to do a training course in Montevideo, would she? So yes, I think I get it now. In the provinces, the only requirement to start teaching is Cambridge CPE, but even this is just paid lip-service I think. I know many teachers who haven’t sat for it…* (Research journal, 16 May 2008)

I became aware of the misconceptions (‘Typical Uruguay, thinking Cambridge CPE is equivalent to pre-service training!) and the limited possibilities determined by geographical position (‘Still, she wouldn’t have many chances to do a training course in Montevideo, would she?’). The process of gaining new understandings was evident in my discourse (‘So yes, I think I get it now. In the provinces…’), and this awareness allowed me to make decisions as a researcher, course designer and teacher educator. As I strove to implement the type of teacher education programme I believed to be most useful for them, I continued to learn about the complexity of the setting and participants’ feelings about it.

*… I have stressed the fact that it (collaboration) has to be done with people you feel comfortable with. Anyway, apart from the language problem, the lack of training, we add yet another problem or ‘affordance’, the fact that they are constantly competing against each other! Difficult to see this as an affordance, I so hate competitiveness, reminds me of some people I’d rather not remember. On a happier note, she mentioned how fantastic it was to have me there, as they always want to improve their practice and make an effort to travel but sometimes it’s impossible because of costs. Ah and she also said that she didn’t*
have a computer nor internet access but she used cybercafes and emailed homework and activities to her students from there. She said she was saving to get a PC and might be able to buy one next year. In the meantime, she felt she could manage ok with cybercafes. (Research journal, 16 May 2008)

I reflected on the particularities of the provincial context as I learned about them, some of which in fact I perceived as negative despite my deliberate choice of the neutral term ‘affordances’ (‘Difficult to see this as an affordance...’). I also learned about individual participants and their expectations, and the fact that my professional reality was so different offered a source of motivation to pursue this attempt at facilitating their empowerment and emancipation.

The reflective process exemplified above serves a two-fold purpose. In the first place, it provides a tool to triangulate some of the themes arising from the 2008 data, such as the participants’ state of need and aspiration. However, it also offers a window on my thought processes at the time, highlighting the complexity of the researcher role in this type of study. I will explore this complexity in greater depth in the next section, where I intend to show how issues of researcher identity surfaced in my discourse, and how I dealt with these.

8.3.2. Re-constrcuting my identity as researcher, course designer and teacher educator in 2008

During 2008 I often struggled to reconcile my roles as an action researcher, teacher educator and course designer. The EMCD sessions offered a non-judgemental space for me to clarify my ideas and design appropriate courses of action which were true to the identities I was trying to forge. In the extract below, I was striving to make sense of an event involving one of the provincial directors, which had upset me deeply.

I think that there are many people at the place where I work who are very insecure. She is not the only one. And how they treat you very much depends on how you position yourself. In Spanish there is an expression that says someone is ‘hijo del rigor’, which means they ‘like’ to be treated badly/with superiority. That is, if I had positioned myself as the expert whose every word should be noted, this (problem) wouldn’t have happened. And that is, traditionally, what teacher educators tend to do here. So from the very start,
you place yourself in a different, higher position, and these people act like you are the boss... (EMCD exchange, August 2008)

I compared my practices with those of other professionals in my workplace (‘if I had positioned myself as the expert...And that is, traditionally, what teacher educators tend to do here’). This comparison led me to articulate my pedagogical beliefs and practices, in order to emphasise how they differed from those of some of my colleagues involved in teacher education.

Obviously, that is very much against everything I believe in - in terms of teacher development and life itself. From day one, I have tried hard to make them see me as a peer, so instead of saying things like ‘this is the way to teach writing’, I would say ‘this is what authors say, this is what has worked for me, now let’s see what works for you’. Some participants have responded exactly the way I expected, we have built this sort of trust, and the whole thing is more relaxed than their previous in-service experiences, or so they say. Others, like the director and company, I feel have taken it as ‘ok, if you’re not someone big, then we’re not really that interested in working with you.’ (EMCD exchange, August 2008)

I straightforwardly outlined my pedagogical practices (‘so instead of saying things like ‘this is the way to teach writing’, I would say ‘this is what authors say, this is what has worked for me, now let’s see what works for you’). The fact that I had acted in accordance with my beliefs had led to the disappointing realisation that some participants might not be interested in working with me (‘ok if you’re not someone big, then we’re not really interested in working with you’). At the same time, I identified other sources of resistance, as seen in the extract below, from the same EMCD exchange in 2008.

There is also the fact that they feel threatened by me... I think it is partly, as you said, because I represent change and things are fine the way they are, and also because I am young (or at least younger than them), and the competitive side of women can be sparked by that. I also come from the capital, and people from the provinces often find that a threatening feature in itself. So basically, I think these issues do exist, but the problem has come up as a result of my trying to be different from other tutors... they are in contact with. In professional terms, my first reaction was to think I have to give myself the place I deserve, because this is the only kind of behaviour they have been exposed to. That would mean placing myself in the position of someone who
I identified several factors that might be fuelling this insecurity on their part, articulating these as dichotomies (change versus tradition, capital versus provinces, young versus old). In terms of actions, although I had first considered the need to ‘give myself the place I deserve, because this is the only kind of behaviour they have been exposed to’, I knew surrendering to the effects of the wider sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts (Johnson and Golombek 2002:5) was not the best way to solve the problem. Analysing the issue in greater depth had allowed me to discern what I considered a more satisfactory course of action. Aided by the Understander’s non-judgemental voice, I made an informed decision not to change my approach (‘I’m not changing who I am because I would have to be born again!’). Later on in the same EMCD exchange, I re-articulated my decision to avoid emphasising any hierarchical relationships, which I considered sound from the perspective of a teacher educator, despite the fact that I knew it could be a risky move from a researcher perspective.

Through the layers of understanding, I had reached the level of identity (‘that would affect not only my research but also my integrity’) and reaffirmed my decision to respect my egalitarian ideas (‘So I think this is the best I can do’). After seeing my words reflected back to me, I was able to see this was not only related to my work but it involved my personality and ultimately my identity as a teacher and researcher.

... I think you have put it very clearly. I was thinking in terms of work only but now I see that it’s a wider issue. I always react against people who feel they have to flag their superiority in terms of qualifications, knowledge, money, or anything else for that matter. (EMCD exchange, August 2008)
Despite my ambitious attempts to offer participants the opportunity to be in charge of their professional realities, halfway through the first programme iteration I became aware of the fact that however much I intended this teacher development programme to be a collaborative venture between myself and the participants, there were still power relations deeply rooted in the local cultural and historical contexts that worked against my intentions.

*Research journal, September 9, 2008*

As seen in the journal extract, as a teacher educator I struggled to find a pedagogical balance between my understanding of the context and their needs, and the potentially negative effects of assessment. This created tensions between my different roles, forcing me to reconcile my ideas as a teacher educator with the design of the course, without losing sight of the potential impact of these decisions on the research itself and ultimately on my doctoral studies. As I continued to learn about the participants and the setting, I became aware of how strongly I felt towards the Montevideo-provinces dichotomy and the existing professional inequalities it fuelled.

*Research journal, November 2008*

Similarly to what had happened at other times, I renamed the experience by drawing on the concepts in the literature which appeared relevant, in this case
resorting to Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) terminology. This process of acknowledging my sense of political justice occurred hand in hand with the realisation that my role in this action research process needed to be examined more deeply to enhance the transparency and rigour of the research.

\[\text{I was also thinking, could I make this CD work with you part of my PhD or would I be going off track? Not as a way of working with the teachers, but as a way of developing my ideas as a researcher and human being? I am getting carried away and I like it so much... (E-mail documented in my research journal, November 24, 2008)}\]

Empowered and somewhat daunted by the realisation that my role in this study needed to come under scrutiny for the research report to do justice to the experience, I continued to observe, plan, act and analyse, and soon the time came to launch the second ACDP iteration.

8.4. The introduction of the blend in 2009

As was the case for the first programme iteration, during the introduction of the technological dimension in 2009 my research journal and EMCD exchanges offered another methodological dimension to confirm the occurrence of some themes (the distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity; traditional views of teaching and learning) and explore my identity as a researcher, teacher educator and course designer.

8.4.1. Tracing themes: The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity

The fact that the teaching, social and cognitive presences were occurring in both the face-to-face and online arenas was clearly evidenced in my journal discourse in the early stages of the 2009 iteration.

\[\text{During the break we went out to buy snacks and had a nice chat in the sunshine. We talked about families, babies (because Carolina is due in August) and also about how overworked we are. Sara, who had seemed a bit distant last year was very nice and talkative. I love these breaks because it gives them}\]
the chance to get to know each other better, and I can also learn more about what their local realities are like. (Research journal, May 2009)

In this ‘small story’ I was unconsciously exemplifying how social presence was manifested during the face-to-face meetings, as well as reflecting on how these events contributed to my understanding of their particular professional realities. In another journal extract a few weeks later, I articulated my understanding of the relationship between the particularities I had learned about and how these affected what these teachers perceived as practical.

I have tried to take into account their preferences when I design the F2F meetings. I have been trying to integrate experiential bits, demonstrate techniques rather than just talk about them, have lots of direct instruction but balance it with tasks. Last year there were maybe too many tasks, and they wanted more input from me. I think this is clearly evidenced in the data I have from the post-session reflections.

As regards the design of the online space, I try to balance tasks with input but the tasks are not really completed by all of them – maybe because they involve reflection and they don’t consider them so ‘practical’. I try to have the online as an extension of the F2F so that there is input, opportunities for teacher talk and opportunities for social interaction. However, there is little visible action and lots of lurking or vicarious learning (to put it nicely). (Research journal, July 2009)

I was reflecting-on-action, drawing on what I had learned from the 2008 iteration in terms of course design (‘Last year there were maybe too many tasks, and they wanted input from me’). Applying my evolving understanding of the practical dimension, I justified my course design decisions (‘I try to balance the tasks with input’; ‘I try to have the online as an extension of the F2F so that there is input, opportunities for teacher talk and opportunities for social interaction’). From the initial stages of the 2009 iteration, my perception of the participants’ interest in single-loop learning was evident in my discourse, as can be seen above (‘maybe because they involve reflection and they don’t consider them so ‘practical’). In the next section, I will explore this theme in greater depth.
8.4.2. Tracing themes: The participants’ interest in single-loop learning

As said above, the discourse in my journal and the EMCD sessions at the time also surfaced one of the two main themes arising from the analysis of the 2009 data, that of the participants’ interest in single-loop learning. In the extract below from an EMCD exchange, in which I was using Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) framework to explain the behaviour of different groups of participants, the theme could be readily identified.

So if I had to analyse each group I have identified with reference to the presences, I would say that the members of the first group, whose engagement is restricted to attending the face-to-face sessions (and a few assignments), rely mostly on face-to-face teaching presence. I also see them as relying on the most superficial aspects of the course, to put it one way. So for example, if I show them a new game I found for practising X, they will say ‘This is what we need. We don’t need theory or reflection; we need new games and activities.’ With this type of participant, all the work is done by me and I really feel under pressure. The second group also rely on teaching presence, but in this case it is face-to-face and online too. The online element, I think, is necessarily linked to social presence as well. I have to look for specific evidence of this in my data, but I am quite sure that there is a strong link between the online teaching and social presences, in that one cannot really exist without the other one. (EMCD exchange, March 2009)

The idea that participants were interested in the kind of learning which could be translated directly into teaching acts was clear in my discourse (‘they will say...’We don’t need theory or reflection; we need new games and activities’). At the time, I was able to voice my feelings on this issue (‘all the work is done by me and I feel really under pressure’). The extract also evidences my ongoing thinking in terms of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) framework and its relevance to explain the online and face-to-face behaviours of participants. But even more importantly in terms of the action research cycles, the EMCD sessions allowed a space for me to explore ideas and devise new action plans.

Specifically, I would like to see how I can

a) Best facilitate engagement through Kuma’s 3Parameters
b) Understand what these 3Parameters really mean in this context
I am wondering whether b should precede a, or if both will take place at the same time.

To find out about a and b, I want to encourage teachers to participate as actively as possible in course design. I am already involving them in the creation of the online space, both the one for themselves and the Student Centre. Within acdponline, I have included surveys, forums and a wiki for them to articulate what it is they want and need. However, I am well aware of the fact that such articulation might not happen online, so I need to find opportunities to prompt this face-to-face too. I hope this action research cycle helps me to see more clearly what is particular, practical and possible.

(EMCD exchange, April 2009)

My reflection-in-action was also evident in my EMCD discourse (‘I am already involving them in the creation of the online space). From the early stages, I was aware that some processes might be distributed over the face-to-face and online spaces (‘I am well aware of the fact that such articulation might not happen online’). In parallel, my reflections-on-action were often found in my journal extracts, such as the one below.

The VLE has worked well on the whole, although there is lots of vicarious learning and little interaction. In fact, they have been using it but not in the way I intended. They mostly see it as a) a source of materials and b) a tool for teaching. Very few of them actually see it as a learning tool, or as an extension of the monthly meetings. I see this as being consistent with the development stage these teachers are in, which is in turn a result of their context and past PD experiences. Since they have never had any formal training or many opportunities for continuous PD they tend to rely heavily on the tutor figure and the ‘practical ideas’ which are often a feature of initial training. The collaborative aspect is not easily implemented either because of a) time demands and b) work arrangements. Although working collaboratively might save them time, they are really overworked – very often teaching as many as 7 lessons a day, sometimes six days a week. This situation means the time they can devote to their PD is not much, so they go down the easiest path – getting ready-made practical ideas. (Research journal, July 2009)

I was seeing that the path towards empowerment I had envisaged for participants was not necessarily the one they had chosen (‘In fact, they have been using it but not in the way I intended’), yet they had managed to find affordances in the learning opportunities I was offering them: ‘They mostly see it as a) a source of materials and b) a tool for teaching’. I related this to the wider historical and socio-
cultural contexts (‘Since they have never had any formal training...they tend to rely heavily on...’), and was thus able to understand and adapt my pedagogical practices to what I believed would be best for participants.

As seen so far in this section, apart from allowing me to trace the main themes, the 2009 data from my research journal and EMCD sessions provided a window on my thinking as well as on the complex nature of my roles in the action research process, which I will explore further in the next section.

8.4.3. Re-constructing my roles as researcher, course designer and teacher educator in 2009

As was done in section 8.3.2, in the present section I will show how in 2009, the EMCD sessions and research journal again provided an opportunity for me to construct a reflexive understanding of the action research process.

8.4.3.1. Towards reflexive action research

In the initial stages of the 2009 iteration, I used my journal to reconstruct my understanding of an event that had marked very negatively the end of the first run of ACDP. After receiving very positive feedback from all the participants, the director of one provincial branch had phoned me to say her teachers were not satisfied because ACDP was not ‘practical’ enough (see p.127-128).

After having a look at the forms I asked them to complete and after reflecting on what has been happening in these past months, a few things have occurred to me. That phone call from Rosario at the end of the year really got to me. In a way, I felt as if everything I had built during 2008 had been wiped out in an instant. I felt betrayed, and no, it’s not too strong a word. Betrayed because I had been open and caring, and they had been dishonest when they had filled out those questionnaires at the end of the course. I couldn’t understand why they would praise the course so much, and then a month later say it had been useless. I felt angry and disappointed – after all, in 2008 (Town A) had been the group I’d enjoyed the most and felt most at ease with – and they had smiled and cheered only to stab me on the back when I turned around. This affected my self-confidence as a teacher educator. (Research journal, March 2009)
In retrospect, I was able to re-create my feelings openly by articulating them in my journal, distancing myself from the event without losing sight of its affective significance (‘I felt betrayed, and no, it’s not too strong a word’) and its effect on my teacher educator role (‘This affected my self-confidence as a teacher educator’).

As another move in my attempt to engage in reflexive thinking, in 2009 I continued to explore the role of the EMCD sessions in my research, highlighting the ‘messy’ nature of the action research process and the extent to which I constantly had to reconcile the many roles I was playing in this experience. In the extract below, I was focusing on my role as researcher and realising the wide scope of action research studies and the many possible foci this particular study could have.

> For the panel I presented CD as an aid to reflexivity, but as we work, I am realising that it is not only helping in terms of reflexivity, but also at a more fundamental level, that of focusing my work. There are times when I feel I am being flooded with data (I’m sure some people would say ‘I told you so!’ 😊). I am not afraid of the data flooding, what I fear is not knowing where I am heading... I have all these data and there is so much to do, so many possibilities. Just to mention one, I could go on focusing on the group process, or I could focus on the ‘progressive’ participants more deeply. I also keep going back to your idea of the ‘portfolio’. For example, all the work I am doing for Anglo initial teacher training with Moodle; that is an institutional impact of ACDP that I think cannot be overlooked. What I feel I need to do at this point is get a clearer sense of where I am going – what is my thesis going to look like? Or maybe I am being over-anxious? (EMCD exchange, April 2009)

Once again, the EMCD space was asserted as an arena to reflect and plan new courses of action, be it in my role as a teacher educator, course designer or researcher, as was the case for the extract above (‘What I feel I need to do at this point is get a clearer sense of where I am going – what is my thesis going to look like?’).

8.4.3.2. Understanding my role as a teacher educator

From the initial stages of the second iteration, I attempted to deconstruct the relationships I established with the different participants in order to understand
them better and act in accordance with what I considered would be facilitative of their empowerment.

As I see it, as a result of this programme I have established different relationships with the different participants. With the vast majority, I have a ‘close but distant’ relationship, and let me explain the apparent contradiction. What I mean is that I know they trust me and feel at ease with me (from what they have said), and are not embarrassed to ask questions, or at least not as embarrassed as they would be if they were dealing with one of the typical JI-JO experts they are used to. I give myself credit for this, but I am aware it is also to do with the continuity of the programme. As far as the principles behind the programme go, I think these people go along with everything but deep down, they don’t really see the value of it. They still expect a more transmissive approach.

With some other participants, the fact that we have been in touch beyond the face-to-face meetings has resulted in a closer relationship. I honestly feel that being in touch via email can help build relationships, contrary to what many authors say about technology ... These participants and I know each other better, let’s say, thanks to our e-mail contact, even though this contact is mostly based on teaching presence, not social presence. I feel these people see the value of my empowering approach, even if it is to a limited extent. (EMCD exchange, 24 February 2009)

I described my relationships with the teachers and acknowledged the effect of my role on them and the setting (‘they trust me and feel at ease...I give myself credit for this’). Once again, I drew on the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000), making reference to the e-mail teaching conversations which had been such a powerful tool for some participants (‘These participants and I know each other better, let’s say, thanks to our e-mail contact’). As my research progressed, I continued to explore the types of relationships I established with the different participants and reflecting on how these might be affecting the programme.

I have realised that these teachers’ relationships with me could be one of the elements affecting their engagement (or not) with the course. However, the course itself and their ideas on teacher development are also defining this engagement. Secondly, during EMCD 4 I divided participants into groups, which I called traditional, transitional and progressive, according to their thinking in terms of teacher development. This seemed a bit rash at the time,
but I have to admit I haven’t been able to find a better way to categorise them. 
Now I am thinking that what may be rash is the attempt to categorise, not the 
categories themselves. Still, it has proved useful so far, at least as a means of 
organising my thoughts. (EMCD exchange, April 2009)

During the EMCD session I re-considered previous categorisations and their 
pragmatic use as a means of ‘organising my thoughts’. I moved forward in my 
understanding of my own beliefs and attitudes as a teacher educator (‘Now I am 
thinking that what may be rash is the attempt to categorise, not the categories 
themselves’).

8.4.3.3. Exploring effective course design

As I strove to find my way around the ‘messy’ action research experience and tried 
to seamlessly introduce the technological dimension, I explored my concerns 
through my journal.

Now more than ever, I am convinced that ACDP is too progressive for Uruguay 
and for Anglo. I am trying to do something that involves radical change and 
innovations we are in a way not ready for as a country, as a culture ... and as 
an institution. I am trying to get these teachers in the provinces to work with 
Moodle, when 99% of the teachers in the capital don’t know what Moodle is. 
So I have two ways of seeing this:

1. This may be lousy course design – moving forward too fast and 
skipping crucial steps. Back to the poverty metaphor: do you give 
hungry children the food or the education first? I would say the food, 
yet in many ways I feel I’m giving them the education first.

2. Why am I making this difference? Doesn’t my suggestion that there are 
different ‘levels’ of teachers, that those in provinces need something 
less sophisticated than those in Montevideo fuel these inequalities? 
(Research journal, March 2009)

I acknowledged the effect of the wider sociocultural and historical contexts on my 
research (‘I am trying to do something that involves radical change and 
innovations we are in a way not ready for as a country, as a culture...and as an 
institution’). I reflected on the meaning of my course design decisions and 
questioned them, using a poverty metaphor I had drawn on before (‘I would say
the food, yet in many ways I feel I'm giving them the education first\'). This led me to question my identity and beliefs and the effect of these on the participants and the research setting (‘Doesn’t my suggestion that...fuel these inequalities?’).

Repeatedly during the year, as ACDP progressed, my journal discourse made reference to decisions pertaining course design and pedagogy which were part of the ongoing action research cycles.

_That this year I'm quite pleased with the course. Some days ago I was looking through my 2008 materials and I had a strange feeling. On the one hand I felt the 2008 materials were much better quality (thinking in terms of what I believe to be good PD). For example, there was much more reflection, case-studies, and the emphasis was not on techniques. 2009 on the other hand has been marked by a clear emphasis being laid on giving them ‘practical ideas’. I still believe reflection, collaboration and action research are the basis, and I believe in broad terms the whole project is based on these. However, I have stopped insisting they work like this, and have instead opened up the possibilities so that they all find a suitable starting point for what they believe is effective PD. In hindsight, after 2008 I felt I was somehow doing and condemning the same thing: the expert who comes and dictates what should be done and how. I was hammering my ideas into them, so I think it was good that they managed to show me what they wanted and I was flexible enough to compromise._ (Research journal, July 2009)

Entries such the above one clearly evidenced how my thinking as a course designer and teacher educator had changed as a result of the action research cycles and my evolving understanding of the particular, practical and possible dimensions in this setting. In pragmatic terms, I had ‘stopped insisting they work like this, and have instead opened up the possibilities so that they all find a suitable starting point for what they believe is effective PD’. I was also able to evaluate my own change process and the impact it had on the research and the participants (‘so I think it was good that they managed to show me what they wanted and I was flexible enough to compromise’).

8.5. Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to show the importance of the narrative and reflexive dimensions of my research as seen in my research journal and the e-mail
Cooperative Development (EMCD) exchanges conducted with my supervisor. I have tried to present another perspective in order to enhance the rigour and transparency of the present report by foregrounding the role of the researcher in the research experience.

I am well aware of the fact that this deliberate attempt to highlight the role of the researcher's reflexivity could be regarded by researchers with different ontological and epistemological assumptions as unnecessary and even self-indulgent. However, having been through the action research experience, I believe this research account would be incomplete if my musings, anger, disappointments, hopes and fears were not made available to the reader and acknowledged as legitimate pieces of the action research puzzle, representing the complexity and richness of the experience and leaving it ‘open-ended for creative theorisation’ (Canagarajah 1996:327).

As explained in the opening section of this chapter, the principles of historical continuity, reflexivity, dialectics, workability and evocativeness need to be fulfilled for the trustworthiness of the action research narrative to be enhanced. I believe that throughout this chapter, I have shown how my research journal and the EMCD sessions I conducted with my supervisor enhanced the historical continuity of my research, respecting its chronology, and foregrounded my attempt to examine my action research journal reflexively. Although the only voice presented is my own, the principle of dialectics was also present in the story, as the EMCD sessions were dialectical in nature. Finally, the pragmatic outcomes of my reflections were evidenced in the action research story, and I hope I have honoured the principle of evocativeness, although I leave that for the reader to decide. All in all, I believe this chapter has allowed me to tap into the action researcher's journey and shed some light on its complexity. Personally, it has motivated me to explore further this reflexive-narrative dimension of my role as an action researcher and teacher educator.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

9.1. Introduction

By this point in the thesis I have provided a reflexive account of my research experience by exploring both whole-group and individual processes, and I have highlighted the richness and complexity of my role as an action researcher in this setting. It is now time to conclude by discussing the findings of this study and the various ways in which it has contributed to what we know about blended professional development in Uruguay.

The aim of this action research study was to explore the most appropriate ways to offer opportunities for professional empowerment to TESOL teachers in provincial areas of Uruguay through a blended teacher development programme. As I prepared for my PhD progression panel in January 2009, my research proposal promised several contributions. In terms of conceptual (academic) knowledge, I proposed a theorisation of professional development based on an exploration of the following research questions:

- Can blended learning become a tool for professional development within a framework of particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b)?

- What roles do face-to-face and online cognitive, social and teaching ‘presences’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) play in the process of such development?

As regards research methodology, I intended to explore the role of reflexivity in research, particularly its potential to enhance the trustworthiness and rigour of the action research process. Professionally, I set out to contribute to the field of teacher development in TESOL by presenting a set of course design guidelines or principles for the implementation of blended learning as a tool for the professional
development of language teachers. In terms of situated contributions, I expressed an intention to contribute by ‘affecting the lives of those who have agreed to take part in the research process by raising their professional awareness and empowering them to become independent, reflective practitioners’ (PhD progression panel proposal, January 2009).

Throughout the research process I have gradually come to realise how, within an action research experience, it is difficult to separate the situated from the professional, the methodological and the conceptual. Due to this, my attempt to label the findings seemed counter-intuitive at times, although I believe this categorisation still provides a useful tool for description and enhances the reader-friendliness of the report. Therefore, I will discuss these four types of contribution (conceptual, methodological, professional and situated) as well as others which have arisen unpredictably as is often the case in action research projects (Baskerville & Pries-Heje 1999; Avison & Baskerville 2001; Phelps & Hase 2002; Santoro Franco 2005).

The chapter is organised as follows. I start by discussing the answers to my two research questions and then explore the different types of contribution this study has made. I end by discussing the need for further research on various issues to which this study has – expectedly or unexpectedly – drawn my attention.

9.2. Conceptual contributions

Throughout the study, the exploration of Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) and Kumaravadivelu's (2006b) frameworks occurred not only at the data analysis level, but also influenced my course design decisions. Although I have answered the research questions throughout the data analysis chapters, in this section I focus on the conceptual findings that have arisen from my explorations, which I believe other researchers in similar settings might find relevant. It should be noted that, given the action research nature of this study, all the conceptual findings are pragmatic in nature and therefore closely linked to what constitutes locally-relevant course design and pedagogy for teacher development.
9.2.1. Can blended learning become a tool for professional development within a framework of partularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu 2006b)?

Over the three-year period (2008 to 2010), the themes I identified inductively allowed me to observe the participants’ process of professional development in this blended learning context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Umbrella themes</th>
<th>2008 themes</th>
<th>2009 themes</th>
<th>2010 themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
<td>Conflicting views of assessment</td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the technological dimension</td>
<td>Technology-related insecurity</td>
<td>The practicality of Moodle in this setting</td>
<td>ICT as a tool for professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards the professional development experience</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
<td>Awareness of the need for professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to please the tutor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Future professional development</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of empowerment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen above, participants’ discourses throughout the three-year ACDP experience have been shown to relate to three main areas, which I identified as their beliefs about teaching and learning, the role of the technological dimension, and their attitudes towards the teacher development experience.

At one level, I observed that the participants’ discourses of effective teaching and learning remained constant throughout the years, as can be seen in the ‘Traditional
views on teaching and learning’ theme that appears in 2008 and resurfaces in 2010. As explained in Chapter 1, I have used the term ‘traditional’ in view of the fact that their ideas were in line with transmissive approaches in which the role of the tutor as main knowledge source is a very prominent one, as opposed to more constructivist views of the teaching and learning process. This label is not meant to be pejorative but is what I believe constitutes the most effective way to describe what I observed as regards the participants’ views. In 2009, moreover, the theme I identified as ‘Conflicting views of assessment’ was also related to their traditional ideas on effective teaching and learning, more specifically to the role played by assessment in their own learning experiences.

One might conclude that their views on the teaching and learning processes were simply unchanged by the end of the ACDP process, simply because such deeply-held views are difficult to modify even after sustained teacher development. However, this 3-year analytical process showed me that, at another level, much more had been going on. First, in terms of principle, their views had been challenged and tested, which will have had its own effect. While still pervasive in the teachers’ discourses, these views could not simply be what they had been before. Second, even though it was my intention at the start of the study to guide these teachers towards my own beliefs regarding a locally-appropriate approach to teaching and learning, as the study progressed I became aware of the need to respect participants’ views of the learning experience even while trying to modify them. While their beliefs about teaching and learning surfaced both in 2008 and 2010 as a theme, this theme changed its nature in terms of functionality. In fact, while those views were an obstacle to my teaching in 2008, by 2010, when I had learned to respond more directly to their perceived preferences, these views enabled participants to move ahead in the directions they themselves had established.

This is where technological dimension comes in. Through the identification of themes in the three iterations I was able to see how participants’ attitudes towards this aspect evolved. From seeing technology as a source of insecurity in the first iteration, in the second iteration they began to experiment with it and explore its relevance to their practice. In the final run, they referred to technology as an
important tool for their professional development. We can see here that participants, having exercised their own agency by seizing technological options as teachers, rather than as learners, and then having been taught in the traditional way that better suited them, did indeed go on to shape their own development.

In terms of their attitude towards the professional development experience in general, their discourses in the first two iterations made constant reference to their lack of time and very heavy workloads, which affected their engagement with the course. These arguments justifying their lack of engagement were somehow counterbalanced by their preoccupation with pleasing the tutor figure, which may in turn be related to the prominence of the tutor in the learning experience, and therefore their beliefs about teaching and learning. However, in the third iteration their discourses evolved to evidence an awareness of the need for professional development, together with a feeling of professional empowerment and the enthusiasm to make professional plans for the future. What we see here, therefore, is that for as long as there was an underlying mismatch between preferred modes of working, no matter how much goodwill may have been created, participants continued to find themselves for the most part ‘too busy’ to respond fully to the affordances available. However, once a meaningful initiative had been identified and taken up, the ‘culture of heavy workloads’ faded away as a dominant theme, to be replaced by one of empowerment and commitment.

This bottom-up exploration of the participants’ discourses of professional development contributed to my understanding of the Postmethod dimensions of particularity, practicality and possibility in this context. I was able to understand that in this blended setting, the particular was partly embodied in participants’ deeply-held views of the teaching and learning experience, determined in turn by local socio-cultural, political and historical factors. These particularities affected what they regarded as practical, which in turn had a direct effect on their professional empowerment. This practicality was often represented in their discourses by the technological dimension of the experience, which evolved from being seen as a menace to being perceived as a useful tool. The fact that they were able to open up to this new tool for professional development constituted a means
of empowerment, and therefore affected what became possible, potentially opening up a new cycle.

The question that then arises is whether it is reasonable to see this documented instrumental breakthrough at the level of useful tool, plus the consequent attitudinal change regarding professional development, as being likely to affect, in time, the participants' fundamental beliefs regarding approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This, however, will require further research.

In conclusion, this action research project has shown that in a setting where there are technical and geographical barriers to teacher development, blended learning can in fact become a tool for the professional development of teachers of English outside the capital. This development, embodied in the participants' movement towards higher order thinking, can be evidenced in a variety of ways. For some participants, it will be manifested as an increased sense of professional self-awareness (Kondrat 1999; Day & Leicht 2001), which in this setting was evidenced as one of the main themes in 2010 (‘awareness of the need for professional development’). For others, it will translate into new pedagogical practices, such as the design of online materials and the transition from traditional to blended teaching, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. For any of these developmental processes to occur in an effective fashion, a local understanding of Kumaravadivelu’s (2006b) postmethod parameters is fundamental. Knowledge of the local socio-historical, socio-political and socio-cultural contexts is of major importance in order to understand fully what is particular about this context and why, which in turn affects what becomes practical for participants as well as what they regard as possible.

From the action researcher's perspective, this gradual understanding of the particular and practical parameters is empowering in that it sheds light on what constitutes locally-appropriate course design and pedagogy. Only if the teacher educator understands these parameters non-judgementally will she/he be able to re-plan and act in order to facilitate the participants' empowerment and thus the dimension of possibility, using the situated understanding of the practical as a starting point for development.
I have commented somewhat ironically on two occasions during my narrative (see p.135, 207) that I seemed at times to be requiring autonomous behaviour from course participants in order to carry out activities that were designed to help them achieve autonomy. Here we see a related phenomenon. In order to support participants’ self-empowerment, I needed to move away from my own preferred vision of co-constructed learning, to trust participants’ re-designation of Moodle as a teaching tool, and to support their learning in traditional ways. This analysis brings out clearly what I had to learn experientially and intuitively.

The analysis also allows us to return with new insight and increased confidence to the type of diagrammatic representation of process first presented in Figure 2.1 (p.35). I have come to call this process the **Postmethod cycle of empowerment**.

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**Figure 9.1. The Postmethod cycle of empowerment**
From a cyclical perspective, as can be seen in the diagram, effective professional development needs to be framed in the Postmethod parameters. Within the action research teacher development experience, both the researcher and participants will develop an understanding of the particular, which will determine the practical and ultimately facilitate the participants' professional empowerment, allowing them to shape what is possible. This reshaping of the possible will in turn affect the particular dimension, providing a starting point for a new cycle. Given the dynamic nature of the processes, local sensitivity, intuition and trust are central to success.

I believe this is linked to Stevick's idea (1980:33), which I have previously referred to (p. 22, 135) about the need for faith and understanding: '...the student’s place is at the center of a space which the teacher has structured, with room left for him to grow into. In this kind of relationship, there are two essentials for the teacher: faith that the student will in fact grow into that space, and understanding of where the student is in that space at any given moment. When both these ingredients are present, there is the possibility of true “humanism” in teaching.'

Stevick's (1980:33) words seem especially meaningful in this setting, in which I strove to be as humanistic a teacher educator as possible, and consequently had to adjust my thinking about what effective professional development consisted of, in order to allow the necessary room for the participants to grow into and become involved in their own particular cycles of empowerment. This concept of the Postmethod cycle of empowerment can be further enriched in a blended setting if integrated with Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters, which I discuss next as part of section 9.2.2.

9.2.2. What roles do face-to-face and online cognitive, social and teaching 'presences' (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) play in the process of blended teacher development?

The Community of Inquiry teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) play a variety of roles within the educational processes in a blended learning setting.
In the first place, the framework offers a language to describe the blended educational experience, albeit with some caveats that need to be acknowledged and examined (see section 9.2.2.1 below). Secondly, the teaching, social and cognitive presence parameters are distributed over the different environments in the teacher development experience, allowing the researcher to visualise where exactly development is taking place. Thirdly, the Community of Inquiry provides a tool for understanding what is *particular, practical* and *possible* in a particular setting in terms of professional empowerment, and is therefore closely linked to effective course design. In the next three sections I expand on each of these concepts.

### 9.2.2.1. A language to describe the teacher development experience

The Community of Inquiry’s social, teaching and cognitive presence dimensions provided me with a language to describe the interactions in this blended teacher development programme. In this way, I was able to gain an insight into what was happening in this blended setting, and therefore understand what was *practical*, which had a direct impact on course design.

Given the fact that Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) originally defined their framework for a purely online setting, there are some issues regarding the application of the framework to a blended setting, even though the authors themselves have recently moved into this arena. The first caveat is the fact that Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) defined the social presence parameter as being exclusively a function of public exchanges, thus constraining its application in settings such as this one, where the educational context determined that participants often chose private one-to-one interactions with the tutor. Rather than considering this unduly constraining or problematic, I was interested in the question that arose as a result of my analysis, as to how these one-to-one interactions could be accounted for. Moreover, the inherently cognitive element in some of these exchanges made its categorisation as ‘social’ debatable at times. I referred to these private interactions as ‘teaching conversations’, which participants perceived as a safer mode of communication than the kind of public postings analysed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). These teaching
conversations were seen to operate as a valuable tool to promote the participants’
movement towards higher levels of cognitive thinking, becoming an essential tool
for professional empowerment, especially in the initial stages of the programme
experience. In short, the strict application of the Community of Inquiry framework
evidenced the need to re-think the social and cognitive presence dimensions so
that private one-to-one interactions can also be understood and explored
effectively in settings such as this one.

Despite these differences in how the framework was used and others which I
expand on in section 9.2.2.3, it is important to see the value of the Community of
Inquiry framework in providing a language to articulate how the interactions in
this type of blended programme evolve, offering a window on how the process of
teacher development occurs for different participants, and the role played by the
tutor in this process. As shown in the data analysis chapters, the virtual
interactions initially showed participants’ high reliance on the tutor in the initial
stages, gradually decreasing in frequency as they began to work in collaboration on
their own virtual spaces (see p.185). Throughout the programme, the in-service
learning and teaching experiences of the participants were closely connected,
which implied that developmental processes could at times be more clearly
visualised in the participants’ teaching rather than in their learning spaces, an
issue which I expand on in the next section.

9.2.2.2. The distributed nature of the presences

Throughout the analysis process I discovered the complexity of visualising the
presences in a blended teacher development experience. While some processes
occur across both the online and face-to-face media, others are mostly found in
one. It is therefore feasible to refer to the ‘distributed’ nature of the Community of
Inquiry elements in this type of setting. Moreover, in a blended setting, the
presence or ‘absence’ of teaching, social and cognitive activity in the participants’
virtual discourse indicates there are processes happening elsewhere. In this study,
cognitive presence was not predominantly visible in the virtual learning space, but
the participants’ movement towards higher-order thinking levels was evidenced in
other environments such as the participants’ assignments or the virtual materials
they produced during the programme. Conversely, social presence was not always
as prominent as I expected in the virtual spaces, due to the fact that much of the social interaction was occurring face-to-face. In short, it is the ‘absence’ of the presences in the virtual environment which is in fact indexing other parameters where such presences are operating. This is an important conclusion arising from the analysis which impacts on course design, as the awareness of such distribution allows the teacher educator to check that development is happening and visualise where it is happening, in order to decide on the suitability of the environments for the different kinds of tasks.

Another important contribution related to the distributed nature of the presences concerns the critical assessment of the available terminology to describe blended teacher development processes. At several points during the study, I found that, as I attempted to describe the blended educational experience, the face-to-face versus online distinction was not entirely useful, given the fact that the boundaries between the media often become blurred with the ever-increasing ‘normalisation’ of the virtual world (Wray et al. 2008). As the action research process progressed, I began to refer to the distinction between teaching and learning spaces. In this study, the participants worked across both of these spaces, and it was often in the teaching ones that the evidence of development was seen more clearly, as discussed in Chapter 6. Therefore, in the present setting there was a need to expand on the available language to describe blended teacher development, with a view to using more relevant, locally appropriate terminology. This is an area that deserves to be explored in greater depth.

9.2.2.3. Affordances of the Community of Inquiry framework in this setting

As explained earlier in this thesis, Garrison et al. originally operationalised teaching, social and cognitive presences within a Community of Inquiry framework in order to explore an exclusively online setting. With its blend of face-to-face and online blended opportunities, this research sought to explore firstly, how far that framework could contribute to an understanding of the blended teacher development experience. Therefore, my study fits within the trend that Garrison et al. have recently followed, i.e., to explore the synergies between the exclusively online and other components that make for a blended mix (e.g. Garrison &
 Vaughan 2008). For these explorations, I therefore used the original teaching, cognitive and social presence parameters to analyse the virtual interactions in this blended setting, and I integrated the framework into the Postmethod cycle of empowerment model.

Within an online setting, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) assumed that participants would formulate questions openly in the public spaces, which is why they labelled questions asked by participants as instances of social presence, even if these questions are related to course content, in which case it might seem more logical to consider them cognitive events. In this study, it was often the case that participants chose to make their inquiries private, which is why the social presence descriptors ‘open communication> asking questions’ did not seem to capture exactly what was happening, especially in the teaching conversations during the earlier stages of the study. This affordance constitutes an opportunity for conducting further research specifically on the role of the questions formulated by participants, and on whether content-related questions need to be considered part of the cognitive presence parameter.

Another affordance for further research concerns the fact that in this study, in response to some of the participants’ social discourse, the teaching presence dimension was shown to contain some social elements that were not fully captured by the ‘facilitating discourse’ descriptor in the Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2000) original framework. The nature of the social dimension within the teaching presence parameter is also a potential area for further exploration.

A final affordance concerns the embedded nature of the presences, an issue which was highlighted in the methodology and data analysis chapters. Whilst Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) categorised the three presence parameters as independent dimensions, in this study the cognitive and teaching dimensions were embedded in the social, which made the coding process seem somewhat artificial at times. This inherent multi-functionality of discourse may present a problem regarding the coding of data, so researchers need to be acutely aware of this issue and present it transparently so that the rigour of the analysis process is not
jeopardised but enhanced as a result of it. Undoubtedly, this is also an area which deserves to be explored in depth.

9.2.2.4. The Postmethod cycle of empowerment in a blended setting

As was explained in the previous section, tracing the Community of Inquiry parameters in the participants’ virtual discourse allows the action researcher to visualise effective course design and pedagogy, evidencing the arenas where development is occurring. By examining the participants’ and my own teaching, social and cognitive presence moves I was able to triangulate my understanding of what the particular, practical and possible dimensions entailed. In this sense, the idea of the Postmethod cycles of empowerment in a blended setting can be enhanced by the examination of how the Community of Inquiry parameters operate in it.

Figure 9.2. Blended teacher development as a Postmethod cycle of empowerment.
By the end of the three consecutive ACDP iterations I was able to confirm the idea that blended teacher development can occur as a cycle of empowerment if it is effectively framed by the parameters of *particularity, practicality* and *possibility*. In the first place, it is necessary for blended course design to be based on a locally-appropriate understanding of the distributed nature of the social, teaching and cognitive activity in blended settings. At the course design level, it is important to be aware of how cognitive activity is supported by the teaching and social presence parameters. This understanding of the *particular* will determine the *practical* and will in turn define new avenues for empowerment and emancipation to be materialised in the *possible*. The dynamic nature of the cycle will determine that with each new *possibility*, what is *particular* and *practical* will also evolve and thus the cycle will continue to enhance the participants’ professional empowerment. What the concepts and terminology of the Community of Inquiry make available to the teacher educator is a framework for calibrating, beyond intuition alone, the style and mixture of social, cognitive and teaching presences that will be most effective in supporting these processes.

### 9.3. **Methodological contributions**

I now discuss the methodological contributions of this study, which concern the use of Cooperative Development (Edge 2002) as a tool to enhance the trustworthiness of the research, as well as my own understanding of what the ‘messy’ nature of action research involves.

#### 9.3.1. **E-mail Cooperative Development**

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 8, the e-mail variant of Edge’s (2002) Cooperative Development framework proved its potential as a powerful tool for the researcher to engage in reflexive thinking. The rigorous and systematic application of the non-judgemental discourse framework can aid the researcher in several ways.

Firstly, it offers a space to examine certain issues in greater depth. Differently from the space for reflexivity offered by a research diary, the Understander moves such
as Reflecting, Relating and Thematising (Edge 2002) provide the dialectical nature that enriches the researcher's explorations and enhances their awareness. The articulation of these thought processes in writing and their documentation in turn shed light on the researcher's action research cycles. This transparency is fundamental for all researchers, as it allows the reader to build a complete story of the experience.

Apart from its potential as a tool to enhance reflexivity in research, the EMCD perspective offers researchers a further means of triangulating the findings from other more traditional data sources, becoming another methodological dimension. That is to say, the narratives and 'small stories' Georgakopoulou (2006) contained in the EMCD exchanges offer the reader another perspective from which to re-conconstruct the action research process, as was demonstrated in Chapter 8.

As regards the multiplicity of roles enacted by action researchers in educational interventions of this kind, the application of the Cooperative Development framework can foreground the complexity of fulfilling various roles in any one study, allowing the researcher to re-construct their own, often manifold identity. Once again, this foregrounding of the researcher's journey, so often silenced in research reports (McKay & Marshall 2001:49), is fundamental in enhancing the transparency and rigour of the study.

9.4. Deconstructing the ‘messy’ nature of action research

Many authors have discussed the fact that the complexities and challenges involved in the action research experience are rarely foregrounded in research reports (e.g. McKay & Marshall 2001; Phelps & Hase 2002; Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire 2003). Although I did not originally set out to explore the complex nature of the action research experience, I was struck by its significance and therefore decided to contribute with my understanding of what this ‘messiness’ entailed for me. By purposefully attempting to add a reflexive dimension to my action research, I was able to identify the complexities more clearly and to act on these.
The first complexity I identified was the integration of the narrative with the research report itself in a manner that was both trustworthy and transparent. I tried to frame the analysis of the various data types in the narrative of the action research experience, foregrounding my own involvement as a researcher rather than merely reporting on chronological events. It was extremely challenging to integrate these two aspects of my research effectively to offer the reader as rich a picture of the experience as possible.

In a related manner, another one of the complexities I identified was related to the data I generated and how these were analysed. Even though I was perfectly aware of the dangers of data flooding, I decided to immerse myself fully in the setting and run the risk of collecting too many data, rather than artificially impose restrictions that might affect the quality of the study. I was convinced that, this being an action research experience whose ultimate aim was the empowerment of teachers, it would be unreasonable to make a fixed, a-priori decision on the data types - and thus the experiences and events - I was interested in. Therefore, the action research cycles involved extensive systematicity, awareness and reflexivity during the data generation and analysis, in order to aid the decision-making that is essential in this type of research defined by its evolving, dynamic nature.

A further layer of complexity was added by the need to integrate the inductive and deductive analyses effectively to build a complete picture of the experience. I needed to integrate the two as effectively as possible so that the report was reader-friendly enough for me to present my conclusions and findings convincingly. This integration involved risk, not only in terms of the quality of the analysis itself, but also as regards the relationship of trust I needed to establish with my reader, an aspect in which I hope I have succeeded.

The experience was also made more complex and demanding by the very nature of action research, with its ‘action’ and ‘research’ angles. The fact that I was working with participants rather than conducting research on them implied that I needed to be especially careful about the pedagogical decisions I made – that is, about the actions that came about as a result of the cycles. Very often, I had to deal with competing imperatives and was pressed to make decisions which might have been
wise, risky or plainly negative for the participants, my research, or even my career as a teacher educator. And once these decisions have been made, there is no way of undoing them, and one has to live with the consequences. As an action researcher, dealing with such competing imperatives while one is deeply immersed in the field involves a degree of vulnerability that needs to be examined reflexively.

In this section I have attempted to deconstruct what I believe constituted the ‘messy nature’ of action research in this setting, in the hope that this articulation might help other researchers who are interested in what we can learn about ourselves in the interaction with our action research experience.

9.5. Professional contributions: Blended course design for teacher development in Uruguay

As a result of this experience I was able to define situated principles for effective blended course design in TESOL professional development. Although I outline these principles as part of my action research study in Uruguay, I expect them to be useful for other researchers in similar settings, who I hope can discover their own affordances in my findings.

* Facilitating teacher development does not mean directing it

Some participants were not interested in teacher development in the reflective, collaborative sense I was promoting it, yet they managed to find affordances for themselves in the learning opportunities they were being offered. In fact, the technological affordances were seized by most participants as teaching opportunities, in line with what is reported by Guskey (2002: 382), who maintains that for many practitioners, ‘becoming a better teacher means enhancing student learning outcomes’. In this case, as is aptly explained by Scribner (1999:247) ‘teachers focused primarily on acquiring procedural knowledge directly applicable to practice’, concentrating ‘much of their learning on acquiring “tricks of the trade” or “nuggets of knowledge” that were immediately applicable to their classroom contexts.’ Therefore, Fullan’s (1993) dictum that ‘you can’t mandate what matters’
becomes relevant and meaningful to this context, as does Edge’s (2010a:4) idea that 'If you want to support development, you can’t predict the outcomes.’

The implications of this understanding are very clear. It is necessary for teacher educators to put aside their presuppositions regarding how development should occur, so as to allow the participants to define their unique paths towards professional empowerment. This re-conceptualisation of the teacher development experience implies relinquishing some of the power traditionally invested in the tutor, thus allowing participants to exercise their agency in their own professional lives.

* Allow teachers to learn by teaching

In contexts such as the present one, defined by the wider socio-cultural, historical and educational contexts in which teachers have had few opportunities for any pre-or in-service training and are new to virtual forms of learning, the introduction of new technologies may be best understood by participants if they are able to see their pragmatic power first. It is important to allow participants to define how they want to seek empowerment, which in this case and for the vast majority of the participants was not represented by the possibility of enhancing their own professional awareness through reflection, but rather by the potential teaching innovations and wider access to teaching resources that came with the introduction of the technological dimension.

In this study, the participants regarded the VLE as a valid learning space for the students but not necessarily for themselves. That is, they were keen to use the online environment to set up virtual extensions of their classrooms, yet they showed limited interest in using it as a space for their own learning, as identified in an analysis of the distribution of the presences. This could be a result of several factors related to their learning schema, such as the fact that reflection had not previously played a relevant role in their professional development. Also, it could be a consequence of inhibition resulting from their lack of online learning experiences.
Whatever the reasons, the teacher educator should be aware of the fact that teachers expect 'specific, concrete, and practical ideas that directly relate to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms' (Fullan & Miles, 1992 in Guskey 2002:382), which is why it is important to allow them to experiment with educational technologies that can provide concrete teaching outcomes. As expressed by Johnson (2006:243), it is a major challenge for teacher educators to ‘redraw the boundaries that have typically defined professional development’ and embrace the notion that ‘teacher learning is social, situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, tools, and activities.’

* Allow what is technologically practical to emerge

In contexts such as the present one, where educational technologies are still flapping their wings, it is necessary to allow participants to define what uses of technology are relevant to them, in order to begin the process of bridging the existing educational divide between the capital city and the provinces. Some of these uses of educational technologies may not make the most of such tools, yet this relative under-use should be allowed and respected insofar as it helps participants move forward in their cycles of empowerment. For instance, as was described in Chapter 6, the fact that the VLE was not used to its greatest potential should not be regarded as a problematic or criticisable aspect of course design, but rather as an informed decision which prioritised a localised understanding of what was practical in this setting. In fact, it may be the case that in the future, as participants become more used to such blended opportunities, engagement in the VLE may increase. However, this thesis provides a snapshot of the practical at this stage of the process.

* Teacher-centredness is the core of effective development

Given the fact that teachers’ attitudes towards professional development are at least partly defined by their beliefs and prior learning experiences, apart from an understanding of the postmethod parameters as discussed above, the concept of flexibility is of paramount importance. As a teacher educator, I had mixed feelings about the idea of accommodating the programme to the teachers’ espoused needs,
as this made me doubt whether I was stretching their boundaries. However, aided by my in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the setting, I had to compromise and define the participants’ state of need and aspiration as the starting point for their professional development.

In the next section I will describe the situated contributions this study has made and the different actors who have been affected by them.

### 9.6. Situated contributions

This study has had several effects on the research setting, the participants and stakeholders which need to be examined at different levels. In this section I discuss the situated contributions and how these have affected the participants and the institution, as well as the field of TESOL in Uruguay.

#### 9.6.1. The participant level

The participants in this action research project were able to benefit from it in different ways. Firstly, they were offered the chance to engage in continuous professional development over a three-year period, something which had not previously been made available to teachers outside the capital city. Secondly, they were offered the opportunity to engage in the use of educational technologies, both as teachers and as participant learners in the ACDP programme. The use of educational technologies led to processes of empowerment and emancipation, allowing them to access new resources and experiment with new pedagogies, often liberating them from constraints inherent in the existing work arrangements as well as the links between the capital city institution and its provincial branches. Collaboration and reflection were fostered and some participants discovered their potential as tools to enrich their professional lives.

For other participants, the benefits went beyond those described above. These teachers seized some of the tools available to them, using these to reconstruct their identities as empowered, confident and competent professionals. Two such cases
have been described in Chapter 7, but there are many others whose trajectories would have deserved the same level of discussion.

9.6.2. The institutional level

At the institutional level, this research has contributed to bridging the gap between the capital and the provinces in terms of educational opportunities for the teachers and ultimately for the students. The technological dimension has allowed not only the participants but also their colleagues in the provinces to have wider access to a variety of materials and resources, and to be able to experiment with new teaching spaces and pedagogies. Contrary to what has traditionally been the case, the introduction of technologies did not happen first in the capital city, but was for a while exclusively a feature of the institutional branches taking part in ACDP.

9.6.3. The national level

At the national level, the ACDP intervention led to the first attempt at introducing educational technologies for TESOL teacher education in various provincial areas outside the capital city of Uruguay. This outcome, which has been reported elsewhere (De Stefani, García & Delgado 2011) has been a major one in a country where educational technologies are still under-developed and under-used. It has also contributed by theorising what constitutes appropriate course design and pedagogy for professional development in the Uruguayan TESOL context. Such theorisation has provided the starting point for a new type of professional development programme to be continued.

9.7. Unexpected contributions

All the aforementioned contributions were, to a certain extent, purposefully sought. However, there were other contributions resulting from the ACDP intervention which I had not foreseen.
9.7.1. Institutionalisation of Moodle

At an institutional level, an important unintended result of this action research project was the institutionalisation of Moodle at Anglo, which occurred in early 2009 and is by now a central aspect of an institution that is constantly trying to improve the quality of the education it offers. Despite the fact that this implementation of educational technologies at the institutional level might have occurred sooner or later, it is worth highlighting that this development came about as a direct result of the introduction of a VLE in ACDP. At the time of writing this chapter in 2011, the institutional use of Moodle has evolved from it being restricted to teacher training to being used with students of English at different levels.

9.7.2. The Student Centre for Provinces

As part of the process of professional empowerment in which participants resisted certain learning opportunities I was offering yet succeeded in finding affordances for themselves in them, the Student Centre for Provinces was created. The Student Centre (www.students.acdponline.net), described in Chapter 5, is a sub-domain of the main teacher development site, where each of the ACDP participants has a virtual space to use with their own students as a way of extending the classroom experience. This space has had an impact on the teaching and learning experiences of the participants and their students, providing the possibility of having wider access to resources and extending the learning experience beyond the few face-to-face contact hours. It has also helped to build a sense of community, being the main virtual learning site for all participating provinces and their students.

This has resulted in a surge of technology adoption all over the provincial branches of Anglo. In 2011, most centres and institutes are planning to buy their own domains or embed the Moodle space in their existing ones. In that sense, the upcoming months will no longer see all the different provincial areas brought together in one space, yet the sense of community will be fostered in each centre or institute, with teachers working together to design a common Moodle space.
9.7.3. Moodle in state secondary school

Another unexpected outcome discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 was the introduction of Moodle in state secondary education, which occurred as a consequence of ACDP. This bottom-up effort has had a major impact on state secondary education, making a local secondary school in a small town of eight thousand inhabitants the first in state education in Uruguay to use a VLE as a teaching space.

9.8. Final reflections

9.8.1. Areas for further research

In this particular setting, more interventions of this kind are necessary to continue to improve the professional realities of teachers of English outside the capital city of Montevideo. It is fundamental to persist in the effort of de-centralising educational opportunities by continuing to observe, plan, experiment and reflect on what effective blended course design is, as was done throughout the ACDP programme.

Given the scarcity of research into blended teacher development in South American settings, and especially in the River Plate area, it would be useful to design similar action research interventions in order to expand the available knowledge on the common threads defining the nature of teacher development processes in this area of the world. This knowledge will aid educational authorities in both planning and policy-making.

As this study progressed, I became more aware of the powers of narrative in defining an individual’s reality as well as their identity. In this fashion, I believe it would be interesting to conduct an in-depth study of teacher identity in the provinces, to better understand the teachers’ professional realities and afterwards decide – together with the teachers themselves – on what kind of intervention might be more beneficial for them.
I would also like to emphasise the need for further research into the researcher’s thought processes and identity-forming mechanisms. As was seen in this study, the role of the researcher needs to be closely examined to enhance the rigour and transparency of the action research process. In particular, I believe the role of Cooperative Development (Edge 2002) as a tool for engaging in reflexive research is one that needs to be studied in greater depth.

9.8.2. What next?

Having been through this action research process, I am now more firmly convinced than ever of the power of action research to transform lives, emancipate and empower those who are part of it. As a researcher, I have certainly not gone out ‘the same way I came in’ (Edge 2001b:1), and this empowerment is evident on many levels.

Firstly, my identity has been shaped in the intensity of the action research experience, and I have discovered the strength of my epistemological and ontological convictions. I have a newly-acquired sense of ‘political activism’ in TESOL, as well as an enhanced awareness of the value of reflexivity in research.

As a Uruguayan TESOL teacher, I have become aware of the unfairness inherent in the differences between being a teacher in the capital and in the provinces, an inequality which is determined by geographical position. Knowing that this implies a need to re-think many socio-political aspects of the current reality, I believe I have become an agent of change.

As a teacher educator, I have learned that what is practical cannot always be predicted by the course leader, and will not necessarily follow the principles she/he wishes to promote. This realisation has made me aware of the fact that it is all too easy to fall into the trap of doing exactly what you criticise in others. In this study, I was dangerously close to becoming the outside expert who tries to indoctrinate teachers with certain ideas that are meaningful to her – in this case, the principles of collaboration, reflection and action research. As Fullan (2007:40) cleverly states ‘Too many reformers have failed because they “knew” the right
answer. Successful change agents learn to become humble. Success is not about being right; it is about engaging diverse individuals and groups who likely have many different versions of what is right and wrong.’ In this sense, I believe I have tried to engage participants, using their perceptions of what is right or wrong as a starting point for development.

To end, I would like to go back to that statement in the opening chapter of this thesis, written in 2008, in which I expressed my desire to intervene and attempt to improve the participants’ professional realities:

‘But now I know. I know I can do something to help these people change their professional realities. Not as some disguised form of neo-colonialism, but because I am certain that this situation is unfair and I cannot let it happen in front of my face. This is probably beyond what anybody would expect from a PhD, but I have to say if I can help these teachers become more autonomous and confident, if I see them move forward at least an inch, that will be my real contribution to knowledge. Not in the academic sense, but in the sense of developing an awareness (the participants and I) of who we are and who we want to be.’

I am convinced that this action research experience has allowed the participants and I to become more aware of our professional realities and more importantly, of the fact that we have the power to construct our own stories. For me, and I hope for the participants too, this awareness constitutes the beginning of a new Postmethod cycle of empowerment.
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Appendix 1: Needs analysis questionnaire and results

1.1. Questionnaire

ANGLO CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (ACDP)

Dear colleagues,

Based on an analysis of the questionnaires you completed earlier on this year, we have decided to design a methodology course for teachers which is tailored to your needs and interests. The programme consists of two 7-month blocks, ACDP 1 and ACDP 2, and certification will be issued independently on completion of each block. Monthly sessions will take place in four provincial areas, each of which will be visited by the ACDP tutor one Friday per month.

In the future, a blended version of the course (consisting of online learning combined with face-to-face sessions) will also become available.

In order to make the course as relevant to your needs and interests as possible, I do urge you, personally, to **complete the questionnaire below by November 16th at the latest**. Completed questionnaires can be e-mailed, posted or handed in to the visiting examiners.

With best wishes,

Magdalena De Stefani

magdalenadestefani@gmail.com
A. Beliefs about teaching and teacher development.

**Rate** the following statements on a scale from 1 to 3. (1=true 2=partly true 3=totally false)

- Teacher development courses should include a balance of theory and practice.
- I can become a better teacher by discussing ideas and reflecting with colleagues.
- Only I know what my students need, no book or lecturer can tell me how to teach.
- I find it useful to attend talks on different subjects – there is always something to learn.
- Reflecting on my teaching is an important part of my job.
- My teaching takes up all my time – I can rarely devote time to reflection.
- A teacher development course would be useful as a career move.
- A teacher development course would be interesting in terms of personal growth.

Additional comments:
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B. Needs and interests regarding teaching methodology.

Circle the areas you would like to focus on and add any which are not mentioned in the list.

- reading
- writing
- listening
- speaking
- grammar
- pronunciation
- vocabulary
- classroom management
- computers in the classroom
- using the internet
- using video
- teaching children
- teaching teenagers/motivation
- teaching adults
- assessment
- Cambridge ESOL exams
- .............................................
- .............................................
- .............................................

Additional comments:
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........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
C. Beliefs about computer-based teaching and learning.

1. Would you be interested in a blended version of ACDP (integrating online and face-to-face learning)? Why? Why not?

Now answer the following questions by ticking the statements that are true for you.

1. I can access the internet
   - from home using a dial-up connection.
   - from home using broadband.
   - from the Anglo.
   - from cyber cafés.

2. I can
   - read and write emails.
   - surf the internet.
   - use search engines like Google.
   - use word processing software such as Microsoft Word.
   - prepare presentations on Power Point.
   - use ‘chat’ tools such as MSN or Yahoo Messenger.
   - use Skype in its chat and/or phone mode.
   - take part in online discussion forums.
3. I think

- adults cannot learn to use computers as confidently as youngsters.
- computers can be an asset for teaching if you know how to use them properly.
- computers have a detrimental effect on learning and learners.
- online courses can never be as good as face-to-face courses.
- online courses are a threat to our jobs.

Additional comments:

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........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
D. Preferences regarding ACDP course design and assessment.

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1 to 3 (1=yes 2=not sure 3=definitely not)

1. I would be willing to do non-evaluative peer observation with a partner of my choice.
2. Apart from attending the monthly sessions, I would be willing to read relevant materials provided by the tutor.
3. I would like to take part in online discussion forums to exchange ideas with teachers from different provincial areas.
4. It would be interesting to keep a journal as a record of my reflections (on a non-assessed basis).
5. I would like to be assessed through written assignments.
6. I would like my assessment to include a demo lesson.

Additional comments:

...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!
1.2. ACDP needs analysis December 2007: results

1. Needs and interests
   - teenagers/motivation 77%
   - speaking 70%
   - writing 58%
   - computers 50%
   - internet 46%
   - management 45%
   - vocabulary 42%
   - listening 38%
   - assessment 38%
   - children 35%
   - Cambridge ESOL 35%
   - reading 34%
   - video 33%
   - adults 29%
   - learning styles 1%
   - evaluating different knowledge areas 1%
   - Cambridge ESOL main suite 1%
   - latest pedagogical trends 1%
   - project work 1%
   - games 1%
   - songs 1%
   - independent T development 1%
   - ADD 1%
   - conversation 1%
   - planning 1%
   - whole language learning 1%

2. YES to blended ACDP 67%

3. Internet access
   - home dial-up 43%
   - home broadband 43%
   - cyber cafes 27%
   - Anglo 19%

IT skills
   - email 92%
   - word processing 83%
   - surfing web 80%
   - search engines 77%
   - chat tools 54%
   - ppoint 36%
   - forums 28%
   - Skype 20%
4. ACDP preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>YES %</th>
<th>NOT SURE %</th>
<th>NO %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer observation</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly reading</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Total number of questionnaire returns: 101
   - Artigas 2
   - Rivera 7
   - San José 18
   - Mercedes 4
   - Tacuarembó 9
   - San Carlos 1
   - Carmelo 4
   - Pando 1
   - Sdí Grande 5
   - Las Piedras 7
   - Bella Unión 6
   - Florida 8
   - Nva Palmira 4
   - Canelones 4
   - Salto 7
   - Minas 3
   - Young 5
   - Lascano 1
   - Durazno 3
   - Cardona 2
Appendix 2: Sample data types

2.1. Emails

Hi! Merry Christmas and happy new year!!! I’ve got my assignment almost finished but I’ve got some doubts. My last subtitle was "Carrying out my plan and its outcomes". There I explained what I did to help a pupil to overcome her shyness at speaking. But how should I finish it? Should I write about my failures and devise a new plan or not? Thank you!

xxx

Hi Ceci
Merry Xmas to you too!
I think it would be a good idea to include in your conclusion some reflections on what you learned from the process. First, in terms of the specific problem you were dealing with (i.e. what you have learned about the best ways to help your student overcome her problems, what worked/didn’t and why, etc). And secondly, you reflections about being an action researcher, how it has helped you in your professional life, if at all, etc.
Let me know if you want me to read it before handing in.
M

2.2. VLE activity

2.3. Questionnaires (see appendices 5.4. and 5.5.)
2.4. Assignments (extract)

For several years I have worked at a language institute in the provinces teaching teenagers and I have routinely observed students’ reluctance to speak English in class. Surprisingly, this happens at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, as they approach the FCE course, where they will be expected to speak with native-like fluency.

Case in point, a senior 5 group of 19 students (aged 15 and 16). Half the class are highly motivated and observe classroom rules accordingly, the remaining 50% constantly show an uncooperative attitude which undermines not only the Teacher’s aim for the lesson but also the whole class chances of leaving the classroom having learnt something.

The kind of behaviour which characterises these students ranges from arriving late on a regular basis and refusing to speak English to not doing any homework or addressing the Teacher in inappropriate ways (e.g. no joda). Some of them speak Spanish throughout the lessons, setting a bad example for other students who feel they do not need to develop their speaking skills. Denial to use the target language is at times quite irrational, like when they refuse to use the most basic commands of the language such as asking the meaning of a word. I shall remark that 18 of them passed the mini-test done in May.

Over time I have come to realise that unless something is done the problem will not go away, hence I have resolved to find out why students do not speak English in class. As well as that, it is a good opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of speaking, and listen to the students’ suggestions towards negotiating a solution. I am sure that my enquiry addresses issues of concern not only to myself but also to many of my colleagues.

My concern: It is my belief that as Teachers we must attempt to be holistic. For the learning process to take place an integration of the different skills should occur. However, if students deliberately refuse to speak the target language, not only will they not improve that skill in particular, but they will indirectly slow down and jeopardise their whole learning. Frustration caused by the inability to speak may lead them to lose their motivation, and eventually to give up studying English altogether.

Why am I concerned? When 2 students speak Spanish in class, they cannot possibly understand what the Teacher is trying to explain in the target language. Apart from that, when they chat about things they have in common - like high school- other students engage in the conversation. This makes the lesson both counterproductive and unmanageable, the ones who are paying attention find it hard to focus when there is so much noise around, and when asked to participate
and speak English, the disruptive students openly refuse, thus taking the problem to a whole new level, the behavioural.

What can I do? In order to understand these issues more fully I need to evaluate the key aspects of the context in which this situation takes place. For that I have designed two questionnaires, one about speaking consisting of 12 true or false sentences and 4 multiple choice questions, the other about learning with 10 multiple choice questions. Both are to be done in class, the Teacher reading aloud, assisting and explaining where necessary. The first on 25 June, before the mid-course test (a good turnout is expected, as well as a more receptive attitude). The second on 14 July (next class after winter holidays, before test correction).

Once the data is gathered and examined it will be presented to the students, to discuss and listen to their suggestions (then I will invite parents to show them the research results and exchange ideas – this activity is optional). To record the students development, and my own reflection on my learning I will keep a diary for the duration of this project. All the critical information describing my findings will be presented as a report to the Teaching Department and my colleagues. A copy of the questionnaires results will be emailed to the students.

Expectations: Firstly, I expect to learn about students feelings about speaking, listen to their suggestions and also to generate meaningful opportunities to practise it efficiently. Besides that, I hope to shed some light over the intrinsic and extrinsic factors behind the students motivation and to discover the reasons for their attitudes towards the Teacher and the classroom.

Anticipated problems: The questionnaires and suggestions are to be carried out in English so it is possible that some complaints will arise. I am aware it will be time consuming both in class time and in Teacher’s time. Also, some students might not like the idea of being part of a research (for that reason I will include the institute’s logo on the questionnaires papers so that they can relate to it). Another problem is they may regard it as intrusive, and therefore not answer some questions honestly.
2.5. **Post-session reflections**

What kind of activities help you become a better professional? August 2008

- Personally, I think seminars and courses are good for improving my teaching. I always get sth. new to put into practice. Also, working with a tutor is very useful because it gives me guidance and feedback on my work.
- One of the best ways of learning is sharing knowledges and doubts with colleagues but this is better if you have a tutor to lead the conversations and the ideas to a good ending.
- Well, as you already know I’m so happy doing this course, being able to work or discuss things with you; you are so sensitive and such a nice person that make me feel free to ask what I don’t know (such a lot of things!!!) and share lots of things too and good moments: in other words LIFE. I love reading and better with a purpose not such for pleasure. I loved the congress, being able to share things with colleagues, as I told you before, laugh, cry, feeling a part of something to reaffirm myself once more I wouldn’t be able to do anything that wasn’t teaching. Thank you for being my drummer teacher.
- Attending workshops, reading on my own, courses, downloading from internet, watching colleagues lessons and discussing.
- Try to be updated by: reading new material as much as possible, going to congress and seminars, attending courses which focus on teacher development.
- Coming to this course, exchanging ideas and materials with colleagues.
- Exchange ideas with other teachers, seminars.
- Courses, talking with colleagues.
- Attending to workshops, updating ourselves through the technology we can get, reading, being connected with colleagues.

2.6. **Memos and field notes**

Cardona 16/5 Soledad – outside said how she felt about competitiveness, how some colleagues took offence when students went with others. How collaboration is difficult because of that. Also how happy they were that I was there, they always want to improve their practice and make an effort to travel but stmes it’s impossible because of costs.

Juliana – action research Showed me pages and pages of reflections in her diary, she said she had even cried at one point, when she read an article about vulnerability of teachers. I felt so good...She had got carried away and did all the weekly activities in one week bcs she enjoyed it so much.
2.7. Researcher journal

June 26, 2009
Session on Edutainment.
I was really worried because this was going to be my first session after the problem, but fortunately it went well. Margarita and Carmen were very nice and keen, and so were the others of course. The director was there but she didn’t sit through – she just came for 5 minutes during the break. She was really nice and it almost felt as if nothing had happened, though I could sense some distance in that she was there but didn’t take part. Antonia had the flu so she was not there.
In terms of the session itself, they didn’t seem to be as impressed as the other two venues had been, though they enjoyed it and I was satisfied overall. We spent some minutes at the end of the session dealing with some practical problems they had – specifically they didn’t remember how to use Word 2003 to correct HW electronically.

July 18, 2009
Yesterday I had the fourth session in Town C. I was feeling sick so it was quite difficult to act my usual self, though they were very supportive. Miriam’s mum passed away last week, so she was looking really miserable – it was nice of her to attend. Carolina from Town V is also pregnant, but she missed yesterday’s session because she had a cold.
The session went well, though it was a really hard one for me to put together and I’m not entirely sure I like all of it. I might change some bits of the language part before next Friday in Florida. It has been really hard for me to concentrate after learning the news. I’m very excited and at the same time I feel sick and exhausted so my temper has shortened considerably and so has my concentration span.

2.8. EMCD sessions

Hi Julian, (S1)
First of all, I would like to explain how I have moved forward during (or as a result of) EMCD 4. I have realised that these teachers' relationships with me could be one of the elements affecting their engagement (or not) with the course. However, the course itself and their ideas on teacher development are also defining this engagement. Secondly, during EMCD 4 I divided participants into groups, which I called traditional, transitional and progressive, according to their thinking in terms of teacher development. This seemed a bit rash at the time, but I have to admit I haven’t been able to find a better way to categorise them. Now I am thinking that what may be rash is the attempt to categorise, not the categories themselves. Still, it has proved useful so far, at least as a means of organising my thoughts.
But now it's time for EMCD 5. At this point I feel a bit lost as to where to go in terms of reflexivity, and this is because there are too many issues which I think are ‘explorable’, though I wouldn’t like to lose my focus or waste our time. I think CD itself will help me refine my focus, or so I hope.
So far I have been worrying about relationships, but deep down what I want to understand and theorise is the issue of engagement with the course, and the
various factors shaping it. With my two research questions in mind, I will try to articulate my thoughts:

- I am intrigued by the different levels of engagement with the programme, and have so far attempted to explain these by categorising participants according to their ideas on effective teacher development. This now seems like faulty reasoning to me, mainly because such categorisation depends on whether their ideas on teacher development match my own. Is this clear thinking or am I making a mess?

- It may be the case that the course I am offering is not fulfilling the parameters of particularity, practicality or possibility for some participants. I try to keep these in mind, but the problem might be that I don’t have enough information on what is particular, practical and possible. If this is so, the idea of involving teachers in designing their site and the one for their students might help.

- I would really like to know what it is that has made the progressive group progressive. Is it relationships? The online interaction? I need to look at this in terms of the presences. From my data I would say the teaching and the social play fundamental roles. But it’s also true to say the boundaries between them are sometimes blurred.

I think I’d better stop now because I can go on and on. It already feels like I have moved forward, at least by articulating some of my ideas. I look forward to hearing what you understand.

Best,
Magdalena

9 April 2009 (U1)
Hi Magdalena,
You started by identifying two outcomes of EMCD4, or anyway of that time period. First, you realised that the teachers’ engagement with the course was being affected not only by the nature of the course itself and by their expectations of what teacher development should involve, but also by their relationship with you. Second, while you found your categorisation of the participants useful, and you still can’t think of a better way of grouping them, you are wondering whether categorisation is such a good idea. You go on to say that you may have been overemphasizing the question of relationships, when what you really want to understand is the participants’ engagement and the reasons for it. That’s to say, relationships are important, but you want to keep them under that more general heading.
You are now questioning your categorisation because such terms as ‘progressive’ depend for their validity on the participants sharing your views of where they should be heading.
You doubt that you are in a position to define Kumar’s 3Ps accurately and you see increasing participant involvement in course design as a way forward.

Back to your progressive group, you want to know why they have responded in this way. At the moment, you see teaching and social presences (Is this last the same thing as ‘relationships?’) as significant, but these are not easily separable in the data that you have.

Is that right?
Would it be correct to say that you have identified issues of categorisation, 3Parameters and 3Presences to work on? Is there any one of these that you would like to take further? Or would that be premature?

Best,
Julian
Appendix 3: Consent letter and participant forms

3.1. Consent letter

10th March, 2008

Dear Mr. Julian Edge

As requested, Instituto Cultural Anglo-Uruguayo has agreed to guarantee access to the necessary data to Mrs. Sofia De Stefani for her PhD research. We believe Mrs. De Stefani’s project is in the best interests of our institution and in accordance with relevant ethical considerations as outlined by the British Educational Research Association.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Gerardo Valazza, MEd ELT, RSA DELTA
Cambridge ESOL Local Secretary
Head of the Academic Department
Instituto Cultural Anglo Uruguayo
3.2. Participant Consent Form

Through the Anglo Continuous Development Programme (ACDP) I intend to learn more about the most appropriate ways to develop an effective blended professional development programme for teachers in provincial areas of Uruguay. To do this, I will be collecting different types of data during and after our meetings, and I will also draw on the assignments you submit during the programme.

If you agree to take part in this project:

- Data will be treated in the strictest confidence and only used for academic purposes.
- You will not be identified by name.
- Only the researcher and University of Manchester tutors will have access to the data that are collected.
- Data will be stored securely.
- You can withdraw from the research at any time.
- You are under no pressure to answer questions you may feel uneasy about.

If you agree to take part in the project, please sign below:

Signed.......................................................... Date..................................

Print name: ..........................................................
## Appendix 4: Inductive codes and themes in the first action research cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Importance of practical ideas  
Practice versus theory  
Tutor as main knowledge source  
Scepticism  
Tutor as resource  
Tutor as expert  
Difficulty in articulating needs | Traditional views on teaching and learning |
| Importance of social aspects of TD  
Positive views on reflection and collaboration  
Value of reflection  
Positive views of tutor and course  
Perception of having learned | Desire to please the tutor |
| Lack of time  
Assessment as pressure  
Request for practical ideas  
Request for general solution | Culture of heavy workloads |
| Dislike of computers  
Lack of ICT competence | Technology-related insecurity |
Appendix 5: Data generation prompts used in 2008

5.1. Assignment 1 (August): A 1500 to 2500-word assignment describing an action research plan focusing on classroom management. Assignments must include:

- An analysis of the context
- Identification of an appropriate focus
- An outline of the research plan
- Possible problems and expected outcomes

Assessment bands for Assignment 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAND 4 (excellent)</th>
<th>There is evidence of extensive reflection. Candidate shows an excellent understanding of the principles and procedures behind action research. The context has been thoughtfully and critically described in order to focus on, analyse and improve a certain classroom situation. The plan is thoughtfully devised, with clear stages and procedures. Potential problems and expected outcomes have been carefully identified and considered.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAND 3 (very good)</td>
<td>There is evidence of reflection. Candidate shows a good understanding of the principles and procedures behind action research. The context has been clearly described in order to focus on, analyse and improve a certain classroom situation. The plan is clearly devised, with appropriate stages and procedures. Potential problems and expected outcomes have been identified and considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAND 2 (good)</td>
<td>There is some evidence of reflection. Candidate shows sufficient understanding of the principles and procedures behind action research. The description of the context may be limited, affecting the analysis and desired improvement of a classroom situation. There is evidence of planning, although stages and procedures may not be detailed. Potential problems and expected outcomes may not be clearly identified, or their description may be limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAND 1 (in need of improvement)</td>
<td>There is little evidence of reflection. Candidate shows a limited understanding of the principles and procedures behind action research. Context description is insufficient, affecting the analysis and desired improvement of the classroom situation. Not enough evidence of planning, leading to unclear stages and procedures. Potential problems and expected outcomes not identified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2. Assignment 2 (December): A 2000 to 4000-word assignment focusing on one of the following areas: writing, speaking, classroom management, motivation. Assignments must be based on an action research project and must include:

- Principles informing the area.
- A report on action research plan and findings.
- A statement of what has been learnt (i.e., a theorisation)
- A practical outline of how to use the relevant findings/conclusions.

Assessment bands for Assignment 2:

| BAND 4 (excellent) | Candidate shows an excellent understanding of the principles informing the chosen methodological area. The action research process has been carefully described and documented, resulting in a clear and thoughtful theorisation of the problem. There is evidence of extensive reflection, leading to practical conclusions as to how the relevant findings can be used, as well as a heightened awareness of the participant's role in the process. |
| BAND 3 (very good) | Candidate shows a good understanding of the principles informing the chosen methodological area. The action research process has been appropriately described and documented, resulting in a clear theorisation of the problem. There is evidence of reflection, leading to practical conclusions as to how the findings can be used, as well as some awareness of the participant's role in the process. |
| BAND 2 (satisfactory) | Candidate shows sufficient understanding of the principles informing the chosen methodological area. The action research process has been described and/or documented, albeit to a limited extent, resulting in a sufficiently relevant theorisation of the problem. There is some evidence of reflection, leading to practical conclusions as to how the findings can be used. There might not be evidence of awareness of the participants’ role in the process. |
| BAND 1 (in need of improvement) | Candidate shows a limited understanding of the principles and procedures informing the chosen methodological area. The action research process has not been described nor documented sufficiently well, although there might still be evidence of an attempt at theorising. There is little evidence of reflection, with few practical conclusions as to how the findings can be used. There is no evidence of awareness of the participants’ role in the process. |
5.3. Post-session reflections 2008:

- Write a statement related to the main areas of discussion this afternoon (reflection and collaboration).
- Which of the following do you consider more useful in your development as a teacher: your own individual work/reflection (cognitive element), working with colleagues (social element) or working with a tutor (teaching element):
- How do you feel about interacting with me (or any tutor) via email?
- What kind of activities help you become a better professional?
- How do you want to be assessed in this course? Why?

5.4. Final questionnaire 2008:

- How useful were the sessions?
- Was the theory/practice balance appropriate?
- Did the course help you in your professional life? If so, how?
- Is there anything you would have liked to be different? Explain in as much detail as possible
- Did you find it useful to meet colleagues from other provincial areas? Why?
- Did you keep a diary? Why? Why not?
- Did you work in collaboration with colleagues to complete the weekly tasks? Why?
- Was it a good idea to be assessed through optional assignments?
- Did you keep in touch with the tutor via email? Why? If you did, was it useful?
- Have you learned anything about the kinds of activities which help you become a better professional?
- Which topics would you like to deal with during ACDP II in 2009?
- This course is part of a research project aimed at providing wider access to teacher development programmes. Are you happy to be part of this project? Is there anything else you would like to know?
- In the future, would you like to use email or other forms of technology to keep in touch with the tutor and your colleagues from different areas? Why?
- Use the space below to make any other comments you feel are relevant.

5.5. Sample processed responses (Town A)

Memo: I chose open ended questions because I feel they can tell you more about participants’ opinions than scales and the like. Still, now I realise that some participants misunderstood some of the questions, or at least they answered incoherently (only a few thank god). The fact that they had to ‘compose’ their answers could also be regarded as a disadvantage for those who feel insecure about their command of the language. All the same, I think anonymity very much
solves that. Language/spelling mistakes have been ‘carefully’ included, as it is a way for me to gather data on their language needs as well. I feel all the questionnaires were very positive, and I have to confess I have been able to tell who some of the respondents were 😊

1. **How useful were the sessions?**

- They were very useful in my case because I started teaching English few years ago.
- In my opinion they were very useful because I learned new things which I took them into practice with my students.
- I think they were really useful in different aspects. I’m going to take into account many of the examples and activities.
- I’ve found all the sessions very useful as they have given us plenty of food for thought, good ideas to put into practice in the classroom.
- In my opinion the sessions are very useful for me because they help me to exchange ideas with different colleagues.
- I found the sessions very useful since I am starting my teacher career and it has helped me to improve my lessons.
- Very useful. Sometimes we think we are only teaching and we forget the importance of learning.
- Very useful and clarifying.
- I find them really useful and I got a lot from them.
- Completely useful, they helped me a lot and they gave me a lot of ideas to be used with my students and to improve my work.
- They were to a certain point useful as they helped me to have a second thought on my teaching activity. In certain cases helping me to do something more interesting and profitable for my students.
- Very inspiring.
- Some of them were useful. Some of them were about topics that I had already seen when doing CEELT 1 and 2.
- They were very useful. We have been able to share experiences with other people and see that our problems are nearly the same as others’.
- Very useful, I felt I was always learning and thinking of using and implementing ideas in my everyday teaching.
- They were really useful. I got a lot from all of them, mainly from the ‘writing’ session.
- They were very useful, although there were some sessions in which I heard things I’d already learned about (I’ve been teaching at the Anglo for 14 years). I consider it’s always good to ‘refresh’ things up and of course learn some new ones.
2. Was the theory/practice balance appropriate?

- I think so! I believe we always found the time to see in the sessions how to implement things in our classrooms.
- I think it was.
- Yes, it was.
- Yes, I’m very satisfied with it.
- It was appropriate, although maybe more practice would be welcome.
- Yes.
- Yes, as we carried out some activities in class.
- Yes.
- I feel it was ok.
- Some of the ideas were easily put into practice according to the different contexts.
- I think so.
- Yes, of course, we can establish relationships between theory and practice.
- Yes, it is.
- Maybe, as we were pressed for time, there was more time devoted to theory. Nevertheless, we tried to put this into practice in the classroom.
- Yes, surely.
- Yes, sure.
- Yes, it was.

3. Did the course help you in your professional life? If so, how?

- Yes, a lot. I learnt how to encourage children in different activities and help them to improve their English.
- Yes, as I have already mentioned, providing us with new ideas.
- Yes. I’ve started to be in contact with students through the net and I can learn more about them in order to understand them better and to have an excellent rapport.
- It really did. It made me reflect on my teaching.
- Yes, it helps me to use a new idea in class.
- Yes, I could improve my lessons. Now I am able to find techniques to motivate my students, making the learning process more entertaining.
- Yes, in different ways, such as reassuring knowledge, finding time to study and doing some kind of research was like being a student again.
- It was very enriching: the materials and the tutor became a perfect combination.
- Yes, especially the assignment made me think a lot about teaching in general.
- Yes, it did. I said sthg in question 1, and they helped me to feel more confident as a teacher and I also find out that my problems were the same of other teachers.
• Yes, it did! The answer is written on point 1 ‘helped me to have a second thought’.
• It really did, I overcame a big problem thanx to ACDP.
• Yes, to reflect on certain aspects and topics.
• Yes, sure. I have been able to put into practice some of the ideas given in the course though I have to achieve more.
• Yes, it made me realise how important it was to ‘keep moving’ and reflecting with colleagues which is always enriching.
• Of course it did. It made me to bear in mind I have to be up to date or else...
• Of course! We always came up with great new ideas, maybe some of them were inadequate for our realities, but there was often something applicable.

4. **Is there anything you would have liked to be different? Explain in as much detail as possible**

• I think it was just fine, friendly atmosphere.
• No.
• -
• I think that the course is very well developed. Classes are very active and challenging. The material is varied and useful.
• Nothing.
• Nothing.
• Yes, I nearly froze during wintertime 😃
• We should have been more open minded, I mean, we paid attention to the teacher suggestions but didn’t carried out many of the activities (exchange experiences and read the materials before attending).
• No.
• No, I think next year we would work on other useful areas.
• More materials to read given as optional materials.
• Really I haven’t thought about.
• Really I haven’t thought that, perhaps sessions should be on Saturday’s morning but is a sugestion.
• -
• I cannot think of anything now.
• Just, I’d have liked to have done the assignment to feel me completed.
• No.
• -

5. **Did you find it useful to meet colleagues from other provincial areas? Why?**

• Yes, because you can exchange ideas and experiences with other people that you don’t know.
• Yes, because we can talk to each other and share things. We generally come to the conclusion that we have the same problems. What’s more it’s a good idea to meet new people.
• Absolutely yes. It’s a good way to share and compare experiences.
• Yes, very. Teachers working in different places have different experiences, or do things in different ways, and this is very enriching.
• Yes, it is very useful to meet them because we have the same problem with the students to improve English.
• Yes because I love exchange ideas with other people.
• Of course, most of them I’ve already known but it is always good to meet and share my experiences and achievements and cry over the same failures.
• Yes because we shared experiences and materials.
• Yes, absolutely useful so that we can share things and see their reality with students is similar to ours.
• Yes, I could share ideas and problems with them and we see problems from different points of view.
• I’m afraid not, we did not talk about our views or our experiences in deep, not even via e-mail!!
• Yes, to share worries and viewpoints.
• Yes, it’s good to share experiences and this was a good opportunity to do this. Otherwise we never get together.
• Yes, that would be nice, the wider it will be, the better.
• Yes, one of the most important things to take into account when the question of ‘interaction’ comes.
• Yes, we could share different experiences and ideas.
• Yes, it’s usually good to share experiences.

6. **Did you keep a diary? Why? Why not?**

• To be honest, I did try at the very beginning but I gave it up because of the time. Maybe it’d have been useful.
• NO, SORRY.
• At the beginning I did but then a matter of ‘time’ made it impossible for me.
• Not yet. Due to lack of time and maybe my own laziness.
• No, it was difficult for me to find the time or maybe it was just that I am a bit lazy and that’s why I didn’t try something which is new and I know would be time consuming.
• I did write some odds n’ ends, but I wouldn’t call it a diary.
• I’m sorry but I didn’t. Not enough time and not used to it, and I did not see the advantage of it.
• No, I don’t know exactly, maybe because a matter of time or maybe due to I’m not use to it.
• No, I don’t remember to have been asked/advised to do one. Sorry!
Yes I did. It was not complete but in fact I thought it was going to be more difficult to keep one.

Not really a diary, but each week while reading for the following section, I made some notes about something that was similar to my case or some kind of reflection on my reading. I felt very well!! It was like telling somebody about my teaching.

Not because it was impossible for me to make a diary with one group because I work with Graciela and I have different groups each time, but each week I made a general reflection about how the students and my lessons.

Yes, because year by year write the problem with the language and the students and try not to do it again.

I didn’t. Lack of time but I admit I didn’t do my best to find the time to do it.

No, it’s a pity. My colleagues said they are very useful. I’m going to try it, I promise!!

To be honest I didn’t because I have never found the time to do it.

Yes, because you can see your problems and the possible solutions you though for them and check your progress.

7. Did you work in collaboration with colleagues to complete the weekly tasks? Why?

No, because the time is a problem.

At home I worked alone, but during our journey to Florida we discussed what we have read.

No, but we corrected some tests, and started to talk more about our classes and students together.

Usually not. Although we work in the same building it’s really difficult to find the time to work together.

No, because I am the only teacher from Sdi. del Yi.

Yes, because we made ourselves more compromised with the course and we exchange ideas about our lessons.

Yes, almost with all of them. It is my habit to work and encourage cooperative work among the teachers and students. I can’t do thing on my own.

We didn’t work together because it was impossible but we managed to exchange some ideas at work.

No, I think it’s a question of time.

Yes, we read alone and then we share ideas during the trip to Florida. [sometimes it’s very difficult to meet during the week].

No!!! Why? I cannot answer that but we don’t work at the same building and it’s difficult to meet each other.

Not much, for time reasons.
• No. I completed them on my own.
• Sometimes. Again, due to lack of time.
• I didn’t. I did not have time to do it.
• No. Lack of time prevented me from doing it.
• Once or twice I got together with a colleague but then we did things separately, again, lack of time.

8. Was it a good idea to be assessed through optional assignments?

• Very good idea! It's the only way to be assessed and have an idea whether you are right, from my point of view.
• -
• Yes, it was. I had the intention to write them but I couldn’t, which does not mean I disregarded it, I think I would have really liked to do them.
• Yes, that's a good way to be seen and see if you are doing things right.
• I am sure it was. However, it was impossible for me to do it.
• Yes, to have an aim.
• Not able to do them.
• Yes, because you can choose the area where you have the problems and investigate about them. Or maybe you can choose the one which is easier for you.
• I think so. It's a good way to see if you are doing things well (as a teacher).
• Yes, definitely. It allows you to develop and improve your own interests or problematic areas.
• Very good idea.
• Yes, because nobody is obliged to make the assignment.
• Yes, it is useful for me you give your opinion about how to reach better day by day.
• It was. When assignments are compulsory you feel a very strong pressure in you and finally give up the course.
• I think it was great! It's a way of showing you take it seriously and to give a feedback of the pieces of homework is crucial not only for students but also for teachers.
• Yes, of course, I think it is the best way.
• Yes, because it a way you can check what your students learn in the course.

9. Did you keep in touch with the tutor via e-mail? Why? If you did, was it useful?

• No, I don’t know why, but I will try to keep in touch with you via e-mail.
• No, I didn’t.
- Yes, just in one case. To get a certificate, it was really useful. I’m going to write to you on holidays (hee, hee)!!
- No, I didn’t. But the colleagues who did felt they were being supported by the tutor.
- Yes, it is a good idea.
- Yes, it was very useful and I feel more comfortable with your e-mails.
- Yes, a few times, when it was necessary and I clarified my ideas.
- No, I didn’t have time for that but I think it would have been very useful.
- No, because I don’t like computers. However, after attending this session I’m not so sure about it. [M: the session was on ICT]
- Only during the preparation of the assignment, I’d like to go on doing it and sorry for not have done frequently.
- Only a couple of times. It might have been useful if I had finished the assignments. NO TIME!!
- Barely because of my lack of connection but every time I did it was very useful and practical.
- No, I didn’t.
- Not yet. But I think it would be useful. Personally I don’t use e-mail very much.
- Again lack of time.
- No, I didn’t do the assignment.
- No, as I am a complete computer illiterate but I’ll try, I do promise in our summer holidays.

10. Have you learned anything about the kinds of activities which help you become a better professional?

- I have. Indeed I’ve adapted some ideas.
- Yes, most of them were very good.
- Yes, I have. Research, ICT, etc. Most of the topics were really relevant.
- Yes, the techniques and activities proposed are very good.
- Yes, I think there is always something positive. I found the last session particularly useful. [M: session on ICT]
- Yes, loads of.
- Yes, definitely.
- Yes, especially action research and the last session.
- I found all the activities really interesting and useful.
- Yes, as I said it makes me feel updated and in touch with what is happening with our profession.
- Lot of things.
- Yes.
- Yes, the activities about speaking and writing they are very useful to motivate the students.
• I have learned a lot. When you are a very experienced teacher, you may sometimes think that what you know is enough, but when you take the time to stop and look back, you realize you can always improve.
• Yes, I’m going to put in practice most of them.
• Yes, a lot.
• Yes, a lot.

11. Which topics would you like to deal with during ACDP II in 2009?

• -
• -
• -
• Pronunciation/ encourage ss to read for pleasure.
• -
• Power-points, speaking.
• Maybe some listening.
• -
• Expand on the four skills we have already studied [M: we did only sp and wr]/ use of English/ lexical approach/ history and culture.
• Revise all the areas that we have worked and the use of films in the classroom.
• New technologies in the classroom.
• Teaching grammar, using songs and video material, and learning thru games.
• The use of computers in the classroom(practical suggestions and activities)/ pronunciation.
• I think we could deepen more in computer use, maybe a speaking again, I couldn’t be in the class of speaking this year.
• Revisiting: writing, reading, speaking and motivation. How to use films in class, ICT.
• Reinforce the skill we’ve already done/ motivation/ lexical approach
• I’m open. Whatever you consider will help us become better professionals would be welcome. Many thanks! We hope to see you next year again.xxx.

12. This course is part of a research project aimed at providing wider access to teacher development programmes. Are you happy to be part of this project? Is there anything else you would like to know?

• Very happy. I hope it can help you.
• Yes.
• I’m happy to be part of it. Maybe I’d like to know your views on our participation.
Yes, very happy to have decided to participate in it.
Yes, it’s nice to be part of the project.
Yes, it’s good to be on this side of the plan, you can recycle stuff, learn new things and add new perspectives.
Yes, very happy. For me investigation on real life is better than just theory. Can we help in any other way?
Yes, it’s great because it’s very difficult to go to Mdeo.
Yes.
- 
Yes, it makes me feel important and helpful in a way.
Yes, I feel very happy to be part of this investigation.
- 
I am happy to be part of it. I may have not been very supportive, though.
Yes, of course.
Yes.
Yes, I am really happy.

13. In the future, would you like to use e-mail or other forms of technology to keep in touch with the tutor and your colleagues from different areas? Why?

Yes, because by e-mail you can exchange ideas and ask for ideas and materials.
I’d like to, but first I have to learn how to use a computer.
Yes, I promise use it with you and some of my colleagues.
If I am more into computers in the future, which I hope, I would like to use technology.
- 
Yes, I would love it.
Yes, why not?
Yes, because it would complete this process.
I’d love to learn to use e-mails (computers).
Yes, to be always learning.
Yes!! Because, as I have said above, we didn’t exchange ideas.
Most def, it’s a great option to keep in touch.
It would be interesting as a way of clarifying doubts.
Yes, it would be nice to keep in touch with people from different parts of the country.
Yes, I would. It is an excellent way to keep in contact and learn.
Yes, because I see is the way to keep in touch.
It would be a nice idea, and of course it can help us to modernise a bit.
14. Use the space below to make any other comments you feel are relevant.

- Thank you for your patience.
- The course is great!
- I want to reassure the things written before. It’s a good opportunity to refresh and learn concepts. Our professional life has been enriched by these classes.
- Although I couldn’t attend all the sessions I think this programme has been useful and enjoyable. Despite having worked with these topics in other courses, I found it was fruitful to keep up with the latest information.
- Magdalena: you have been very nice and helpful – thank you – See you next year.
- Really looking forward to next year! Thank you again. Good luck in England!
- I think I know how, but I usually need more examples to do an activity. I need an example on ‘action research plan’. See you next year!!
- All the course was great and the tutor too. You make the course enjoyable and we feel very comfortable coming with you. Thanks!!
- Thanks for your patience and for sharing this year with us – especially your knowledge.
- Thank you very much! This kind of courses help teachers in the provinces to keep up-to-date and not feeling alone. Let’s go ahead together.
- Congratulations for being so hard working and reassuring. Thanks a lot for a wonderful year!!
- It was a pleasure to work with you. You make the classes funny and clear. I really feel at ease. Thank you!!
Appendix 6: Data generation prompts used in 2009

6.1. Assignment

Research plan:

- Aims
- Research question/s
- Methodology
- Predicted problems and possible solutions
- Expected outcomes

Research findings:

- Answers to research question/s
- Evaluation of methodology
- Strengths and limitations of the research
- Impact and practical outcomes
### ACDP 2009 ASSESSMENT BANDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAND 4 (excellent)</th>
<th>There is evidence of extensive reflection and critical thinking. Candidate shows an excellent understanding of the principles and techniques informing the chosen topic area. The context has been thoughtfully and critically described in order to focus on, analyse and improve a certain classroom situation. An action plan was thoughtfully devised, with clear stages and procedures. Clear conclusions and future courses of action have been thoughtfully described, evidencing the quality of the reflective process undergone.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAND 3 (very good)</td>
<td>There is evidence of reflection and critical thinking. Candidate shows a good understanding of the principles and techniques informing the chosen topic area. The context has been clearly described in order to focus on, analyse and improve a certain classroom situation. An action plan was clearly devised, with appropriate stages and procedures. Conclusions and future courses of action have been clearly described, evidencing the quality of the reflective process undergone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAND 2 (satisfactory)</td>
<td>There is some evidence of reflection and critical thinking. Candidate shows sufficient understanding of the principles and procedures informing the chosen topic area. The description of the context may be limited, affecting the analysis and desired improvement of a classroom situation. There is evidence of planning, although stages and procedures may not be detailed. Conclusions and future courses of action have been described, albeit to a limited extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAND 1 (in need of improvement)</td>
<td>There is limited evidence of reflection and critical thinking. Candidate shows a limited understanding of the principles and procedures informing the chosen topic area. Context description is insufficient, affecting the analysis and desired improvement of the classroom situation. There is not enough evidence of planning, leading to unclear stages and procedures. Conclusions and future courses of action have not been described or are unclear.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.2. Questionnaire (Reflecting on expectations for ACDP 2009)

| Name: | |
| Town/city: | |
| E-mail address: | |
| Telephone number: | |

1. What are your expectations for this course? What do you hope to achieve?
2. Are there any topics/areas within Language or Methodology that you are particularly interested in improving?

3. What kind of classroom tasks do you enjoy most (e.g. discussions, reading, exercises, etc)?

4. Is it possible for you to access our internet site? How often? What kind of internet facilities do you have (or not) at the moment?

5. Is there anything about yourself that you would like me to know?

6. Use the space below to add any comments/suggestions.

6.3. Final questionnaire in 2009

Dear ACDP participant,

As you know, our course is coming to an end, so I would be very grateful if you could fill in the questionnaire below. Your feedback is extremely important, as it will contribute to the design of future versions of ACDP. Thanks for taking part!

All the best,

Magdalena

1. In which ways was the course useful to you (2008 and 2009)? Why?

2. Which of the two blocks (2008 or 2009) seemed most useful/relevant to you? Why?

3. Would you say the course has led to any changes in your professional life, or your attitude to it? If so, please describe them.

4. How did you feel about the online aspect of the course?

5. How did you use the main language and methodology site, if at all (www.acdponline.net)? Tick as many as necessary

   a. As a source of materials
   b. To keep in touch with Magdalena
   c. To keep in touch with colleagues
   d. To engage in discussions
   e. To read what others said (without contributing much myself)
f. I didn’t use it at all

Comments:
6. How did you use the Student Centre, if at all (www.students.acdponline.net)?
   a. I designed and uploaded materials for my students
   b. I had a look at what others were doing but didn’t do anything myself
   c. I would like to give it a try in the future
   d. I don’t think it would work with my students

Comments:
7. Which of these aspects was more important/useful to you during the course?
   a. Being in contact with Magdalena
   b. Being in contact with colleagues

Comments:
8. What aspects of the course would you change?

9. Would you recommend the course to other teachers in provincial areas? Why/Why not?

10. Would it be useful for you to have other professional development courses in the future? What kind?

11. Please use the space below to add any other comments.

   Thank you for your contribution, for the time it took, and for caring!
## Appendix 7: Inductive codes and themes in the second action research cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as pressure</td>
<td>Conflicting views of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as a tool for TD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment as career step</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>Culture of heavy workloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice vs theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for communication</td>
<td>The <em>practicality</em> of Moodle in this setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for teacher development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings to share experiences, advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings as opportunity for problem-solving</td>
<td>The distributed nature of the social and cognitive activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Sample VLE spaces designed by participants in 2009

1. Margarita's space (Town B)

2. Soledad's space (Town B)
3. Sofia’s space (Town N)

4. Paula’s space (Town P)
### Appendix 9: Inductive codes and themes in the third (final) action research cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICT as tool for teaching and learning</td>
<td>ICT as a tool for professional development’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development through ICT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutor as main knowledge source</strong></td>
<td>Traditional views on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor as expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice vs theory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Awareness of the need for professional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional isolation</strong></td>
<td>development**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the latest trends</td>
<td><strong>Feelings of empowerment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change through ACDP</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change through ICT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Future professional development plans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional empowerment through action research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention to pursue TD</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention to disseminate knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking formal qualifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 10: Data generation prompts used in 2010

ANGLO CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (ACDP)

Dear colleagues,

As you may know, the first version of the Anglo Continuous Development Programme has just finished. We are proud to say that over 35 teachers from Florida, 25 de mayo, Sarandi del Yi, Durazno, Villa del Carmen, Blanquillo, Cardona, Miguelete, Nueva Helvecia, Paso de los Toros and Trinidad have attended the course. Congratulations to all of them!

Based on our experience and the feedback from 2008-2009 ACDP participants, we will be offering a new version of the course in 2010. Like in 2008-9, the course will be blended, which means it will consist of a mix of face-to-face meetings and online support. Since ACDP is based on your needs, the 2010 version will not replicate the 2008 nor 2009 ones, so all teachers in the provinces are welcome to join us, even those who have attended before.

In order to make the course as relevant to your needs and interests as possible, we urge all teachers to print and complete the questionnaire below by November 21, 2009 at the latest and hand it in to the visiting examiners.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT ACDP 2010

✔ ACDP 2010 will run from April to November 2010, and will consist of 4 face-to-face seminars and continuous access to the online resources and support site: www.acdponline.net

✔ The 4 full-day seminars in Montevideo (Fridays or Saturdays from 9 am to 6.30 pm) will be held in May, July, September and October, adding up to a total of 32 face-to-face contact hours.

✔ On the ACDP site, teachers can access different types of materials and lesson plans, engage in discussions with the tutor and other participants, and request support. Although online participation is not compulsory, it will be strongly encouraged.

✔ ACDP includes both a Language Improvement and a Methodology component, both of which are covered in the face-to-face seminars and internet site.

✔ ACDP gives participants free online space to use with their students (www.students.acdponline.net). Guided by the tutor, teachers are encouraged to design and implement online activities, although this is not compulsory.

✔ You do not need to be an expert IT user to take part in ACDP, as constant guidance and support are provided so that all teachers can use the sites profitably if they wish to.

✔ Participants can decide whether they want to be assessed or not. Those interested in assessment can choose to submit a research-based assignment or a portfolio of reflective tasks.

✔ The total cost of the course (seminars and online) for 2010 will be $U 3500 per teacher, to be paid in 5 instalments of $U 700 each.
ANGLO CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME - 2010 QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Needs and interests regarding Methodology.

Circle the areas you would like to focus on and add any which are not mentioned in the list.

- reading
- writing
- listening
- speaking
- grammar
- pronunciation
- vocabulary
- classroom management
- computers in the classroom
- using the internet
- using audio visual material
- teaching children
- teaching teenagers/motivation
- teaching adults
- assessment
- Cambridge ESOL exams
- ........................................
- ........................................

Additional comments:

...............................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................

B. Needs and interests regarding Language Improvement (for teachers)

Circle the areas you would like to focus on and add any which are not mentioned in the list.

- reading
- writing
- listening
- speaking
• grammar
• pronunciation
• vocabulary
• ........................................
• ........................................

Additional comments:
...........................................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................................

C. Now answer the following questions by ticking the statements that are true for you.

4. What kind of internet access do you have?
   • dial-up connection. ☐
   • broadband connection. ☐

5. How often do you go online?
   • once a week ☐
   • 2 or 3 times a week ☐
   • every day ☐

Additional comments:
...........................................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................................

1.1. Assignment types for 2010

• Design and implementation of online tasks for students in Moodle.

• Classroom Research Forms (implementation of and reflection on activities, following the principles of action research).

• Reflective tasks (Participants decided on an area of their profession to reflect on via journals).
Final questionnaire for 2010

- How many years did you attend?
- If you attended more than 1 year, how useful would you say each of them was?
- Did the programme help you to become a better professional? If so, how?
- Is there anything you would have liked to be different?
- How involved were you in the course? How actively did you participate?
- What have you learned that will be useful in the future?
- How will your professional development continue after this?